

**Exploring the communication difficulties, strategies,  
and pragmatic competence among the Sudanese  
learners of English and their peer English native  
speakers in the UK.**

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## **Abstract**

Difficulties obstructing communications between different interlocutors, the strategies to overcome them and the language learners' pragmatic competence have been investigated extensively in research, both in the classroom context and in other institutional settings. However, far less is known about the oral communication difficulties between native and non-native speakers of English in the informal context in the free social space.

For practical reasons, this project is designed to include two separate studies, both relevant to the same problem: oral communication difficulties (CDs) between Sudanese EFL speakers in the UK and their peer English native interlocutors in their daily conversations.

Firstly, in the first study, twenty Sudanese learners of English were interviewed to report the communication difficulties that they encounter during their daily conversations with English native speakers; and the communications strategies (CSs) they use to overcome these difficulties. Likewise, twenty English native speakers were also interviewed to report their communication difficulties they encounter and the strategies they adopt during their informal conversations with Sudanese participants as EFL speakers.

The results indicate that the common oral communication difficulties reported by the Sudanese participants are limited vocabulary size,

technical vocabulary, phrasal vocabulary, phonological variation of accent, regional dialects variations and perceived speech rate. Upon encountering these problems, the Sudanese learners reported that they employ communication strategies like appeal for assistance, asking for repetition, clarification request, asking for lengthening of words, body language, circumlocution, message abandonment, appeal for literal translation, preparatory strategies and guessing.

On the other hand, English native speakers reported that they encounter communication difficulties such as suprasegmental features, inappropriate vocabulary use, cross-cultural variations, etc. As a result, they reported that they employ various strategies to overcome communication problems with Sudanese interlocutors such as appeal for assistance, asking for repetition, body language, clarification request, circumlocution, guessing, message abandonment, appeal for paraphrasing in standard English, asking for confirmation and longer-term developing communication strategy.

Secondly, investigating the communication difficulties and strategies in the first study led to the emergence of specific themes such as the Sudanese learners' inability to use vocabulary within the appropriate context. Accordingly, this led to some new focused questions used to examine the Sudanese learners' pragmatic competence, that is to test their ability to use language forms to realise different communicative situations with different functions. In addition, these questions were

used to examine their knowledge of appropriate use of the linguistic forms in certain social contexts.

In this study, twenty Sudanese learners were individually asked to complete twelve Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) scenarios with variety of functions; and then their responses to these scenarios were double rated by eight English native speakers to find out whether they were acceptable or unacceptable, their justifications for these ratings and what communication difficulties they highlighted.

The results indicate that the pragmatic competence of the Sudanese learners is satisfactory when realising DCT situations. However, English native speakers highlighted various communication difficulties such as insufficient explanation, irrelevant response to the given situation, inappropriate explanation, absence of explanation, incomprehensive response, inconsistent content, irrelevant response to context, inappropriate lexical use and unfamiliar pronunciation.

Finally, the study considers the pedagogical implications of the findings for teaching and learning the second language, and syllabus design research and for non-native speakers everywhere. This may provide such learners with better opportunity to develop communication strategies practice and raise their socio-pragmatic awareness.

# Table of contents

## Contents

Abstract: .....	2
Table of contents: .....	5
List of tables: .....	12
List of figures: .....	14
Dedication: .....	15
Acknowledgement: .....	16
Author's declaration: .....	18
1 Chapter 1: Introduction .....	20
1.1 The significance of the study .....	29
1.2 The gap in research literature and the rationale for the study .....	31
1.3 Research context.....	39
1.4 The personal motivation of the study.....	43
1.5 Outlines of the thesis .....	51
2 Chapter 2: Review of literature: An overview .....	55
2.1 The communicative competence (CC) .....	56
2.2 The pragmatic competence .....	66
2.3. Background to the relationship between culture and language .....	72
2.3.1 The relationship between culture and language in ELF.....	78
2.3.2 Intercultural communication: An overview .....	83
2.3.2.2 Intercultural adjustment: an overview .....	87
2.3.2.3 Definition of inter-cultural adjustment.....	90

2.3.2.4	Byram’s model of intercultural communication .....	94
2.3.4	The transcultural communicative competence .....	99
2.4	The cross-cultural pragmatics .....	107
2.5	The speaking production.....	111
2.5.1	Speech comprehensibility .....	115
2.6	Factors influencing L2 learner’s communicative competence .....	126
2.7	The communication difficulty .....	132
2.8	Communication strategies: an overview .....	135
2.8.1	Definition of communication strategies .....	135
2.8.2	Communication strategies and learning strategies .....	137
2.8.3	Importance of communication strategies.....	139
2.8.4	Learner’s use of communication strategies.....	141
2.8.5	Proficiency of the learner.....	141
2.8.6	Taxonomies of communication strategies.....	144
2.8.7	Taxonomy of Cook’s (2012) .....	154
2.8.8	Proposing a taxonomy of CSs for this study.....	162
2.9	English as a second language and English as a foreign language .....	170
2.10	English as an international language .....	173
2.10.1	The future of English as an international language .....	180
2.11	Formal language learning and use .....	181
2.12	Informal language learning and use .....	183
2.13	Background to ESOL studies in the UK.....	184
2.14	Native and non-native speakers of English.....	189

2.15	Section summary .....	195
3	Chapter 3: Methodology: An overview.....	198
3.1	Research approach.....	209
3.2	Case study .....	211
3.3	Aims and research questions .....	213
3.4	Overview of methods.....	214
3.4.1	The sampling strategy .....	215
3.4.3	Instruments design: An overview .....	220
3.5	Data transcription .....	232
3.5.1	An overview of data analysis .....	233
3.5.2	Steps of thematic analysis.....	234
3.6	Ethical considerations .....	235
3.7	The trustworthiness: An overview.....	236
3.7.1	Credibility .....	237
3.7.2	Dependability .....	238
3.7.3	Transferability .....	238
3.7.4	Confirmability.....	239
3.8	Consideration of reflexivity.....	240
3.9	The contribution of the study .....	244
4	Chapter 4: Procedures of data analysis .....	246
4	Chapter 4: An overview of results.....	249
4.1	Communication difficulties reported by Sudanese learners .....	250
4.2	Communication difficulties reported by English native speakers .....	250

4.3	Communication strategies (CSs) reported by Sudanese learners.....	251
4.4	Communication strategies reported by English native speakers .....	253
5	Chapter 5: Discussion of the findings: An overview .....	254
5.1	Discussion of the communication difficulties reported by Sudanese learners: an overview 254	
5.2	Communication difficulty 1: Phonological variation of accent.....	255
5.3	Communication difficulty 2: Regional dialects variations.....	257
5.4	Communication difficulty 3: Perceived speech rate .....	260
5.5	Communication difficulty 4: Limited vocabulary size .....	261
5.6	Communication difficulty 5: Technical vocabulary .....	264
5.7	Communication difficulty 6: Phrasal vocabulary .....	265
5.7.1	Discussion of difficulties reported by English native speakers .....	267
5.7.2	Communication difficulty 1: Regional dialects variations.....	268
5.7.3	Communication difficulty 2: Limited vocabulary size .....	269
5.7.4	Communication difficulty 3: Phrasal vocabulary .....	270
5.7.5	Communication Difficulty 4: Suprasegmental features.....	273
5.7.6	Communication difficulty 5: Inappropriate vocabulary use .....	275
5.7.7	Communication difficulty 6: Cross-cultural variations.....	277
5.8	Discussion of CSs reported by Sudanese learners .....	282
5.8.1	Appeal for assistance .....	282
5.8.2	Asking for repetition .....	284
5.8.3	Clarification request.....	285
5.8.4	Asking for lengthening of words .....	285
5.8.5	Body language.....	286



5.8.6	Circumlocution .....	287
5.8.7	Message abandonment .....	288
5.8.8	Appeal for literal translation .....	289
5.8.9	Preparatory strategy .....	290
5.8.10	Guessing .....	292
5.9	Discussion of CSs reported by English native speakers .....	294
5.9.1	Appeal for assistance .....	294
5.9.2	Asking for repetition .....	296
5.9.3	Body language .....	297
5.9.4	Clarification request .....	298
5.9.5	Asking for lengthening of words .....	299
5.9.6	Circumlocution .....	300
5.9.7	Guessing .....	301
5.9.8	Message abandonment .....	303
5.9.9	Appeal for paraphrasing in standard English .....	304
5.9.10	Asking for confirmation .....	305
5.9.11	Longer-term developing communication strategy .....	306
6	Chapter 6: Conclusion .....	308
	The second Study .....	311
1	Introduction .....	311
2	An overview of DCT Situations .....	312
2.1	General background .....	313
2.1.1	A review of discourse completion tasks (DCTs) .....	314

2.1.2	Speech act theory .....	318
3	Methodology.....	319
3.1	Participants .....	320
3.1.1	The Sudanese Learners .....	320
3.1.2	Sampling strategy.....	321
3.2	English Native speakers .....	322
3.2.1	Sampling strategy.....	323
3.3	Ethical approval.....	324
3.4	Instruments design .....	324
3.4.1	The DCTs procedures .....	326
3.4.2	Rating .....	327
3.4.3	Rating scale .....	328
3.5	Data transcription .....	329
3.6	Data analysis .....	330
3.6.1	DCT situations analysis.....	331
3.7	Ratings procedures .....	332
3.7.1	Justification of ratings .....	333
3.7.2	Rater agreement .....	334
4	Results.....	334
4.1	Descriptive statistics .....	335
4.2	Findings and common communication difficulties .....	337
4.2.1	Difficulty 1: Insufficient explanation.....	341
4.2.2	Difficulty 2: Irrelevant response to the given situation .....	343

4.2.3	Difficulty 3: Inappropriate explanation.....	344
4.2.4	Difficulty 4: Absence of explanation.....	346
4.2.5	Difficulty 5: Incomprehensive response.....	348
4.2.6	Difficulty 6: Inconsistent content.....	351
4.2.7	Difficulty 7: Irrelevant response to context.....	353
4.2.8	Difficulty 8: Inappropriate lexical use.....	357
4.2.9	Difficulty 9: Unfamiliar pronunciation.....	360
4.3	Communication strategies.....	362
4.3.1	Comprehension check.....	363
4.3.2	Self-correction.....	364
4.3.3	Clarification request.....	364
4.3.4	Asking for confirmation.....	365
4.3.5	Asking for repetition.....	365
4.3.6	Lexicalised fillers.....	366
4.3.7	Non-lexicalised fillers.....	367
4.3.8	Silent pausing.....	368
4.3.9	Hesitation devices.....	368
5	Discussion.....	368
6	Overall conclusion.....	383
6.1	Summary of the study.....	383
6.2	Summary of the findings.....	386
6.2.1	Main communication difficulties.....	386
6.2.2	Main communication strategies.....	390

6.3	Limitations and future research:.....	393
6.4	Implications.....	398
6.5	Final remarks.....	402
Appendices .....		405
Appendix A. Summary of previous relevant empirical studies (2018-2008) in ascending chronological order .....		405
Appendix B. Summary of previous relevant empirical studies in main trends .....		410
Appendix C. Information sheet for Sudanese learners during interviews in the first study .....		412
Appendix D. Information sheet for English native speakers during interviews in the first study ....		415
Appendix E. Sample of agreement to participate in the survey by an English native speaker .....		418
Appendix F. Information sheet for Sudanese learners during DCT situations employment in the second study .....		420
Appendix G. Information sheet for English native speakers during DCT situations employment in the second study .....		423
Appendix H. Consent form to Sudanese learners during situations employment .....		426
Appendix I. Invitation to English native speaker to participate in the survey .....		428
Appendix J. Interview guide employed during the pilot study .....		429
Appendix K. A sample of initial codes for communication difficulties in this study .....		430
Appendix L. A sample of initial codes for communication strategies in this study .....		432
Appendix M. A sample of candidate themes generated from the dataset in this study .....		434
Glossary .....		436
References .....		437

## List of Tables

Table 1. A sample of local phrases used in Liverpool .....	49
Table 2. The model that manifests six dimensions of communicative competence .....	63
Table 3. Different definitions of communication strategies .....	136
Table 4. Taxonomies of communication strategies .....	145
Table 5. Taxonomy of Tarone (1977) for CSs .....	152
Table 6. Taxonomy of Cook (2012) with different approaches to L2 communication strategies .....	155
Table 7. A proposed taxonomy of communication strategies .....	164
Table 8. Sudanese participants' background information .....	217
Table 9. English native speakers' background information .....	219
Table 10. Themes of communication difficulties reported by Sudanese learners .....	250
Table 11. Themes of communication difficulties reported by English native speakers .....	251
Table 12. Communication strategies reported by Sudanese learners.....	252

Table 13. Communication strategies reported by English native speakers .....	253
Table 14. DCT situations and functions given to Sudanese participants .....	324
Table 15. Codes for DCT situations and the appropriate responses that match them .....	331
Table 16. Selected codes to match the Sudanese participants responses.....	332
Table 17. Communication strategies used by Sudanese participants when realising DCT situations .....	362

## List of figures

Figure 1. Statistical description displaying the frequency of ratings of English native speakers for each situation across the 20 Sudanese participants (a display of acceptable responses and their frequencies out of the total number of the ratings .....	335
Figure 2. Statistical description displaying the mean, minimum and maximum of all ratings across the Sudanese participants .....	336
Figure 3. Statistical display showing high and low proficiency ratings for Sudanese participants .....	336
Figure 4. Statistical display for the communication difficulties and their frequencies across each situation .....	339

## **Dedication**

To my family members and friends of years who supported me to find my way through the world out.



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## **Author's declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research since the official commencement of this degree programme. I confirm that where I have consulted the published work of others, it is always clearly attributed. This work has not, in whole or part, previously been published and has never been submitted for award at this, or any other university worldwide.

## **1 Chapter 1: Introduction**

Broadly speaking, people face several communication difficulties (the linguistic difficulties of communication that arise when interlocutors face hurdles obstructing their conversation) when they interact with each other because there are many factors that influence their communication. As a result, they may tend to use communication strategies (any systematic technique employed by a speaker to express meaning when faced with a difficulty) to overcome their communication difficulties to push forward their conversations. Also, research indicates that the people's communicative competence (the language ability to converse with other interlocutors) is sometimes influenced by the linguistic and non-linguistic context in which it takes place (Yufrizal, 2017).

The concept of context is somewhat controversial in research; and because of its multifaceted nature that characterises it, the scientific community has failed to agree upon a shared definition of context; and hence, only a limited aspect of context is described, analysed or formalised (Keeke, 2017). Therefore, there are many aspects of context such as linguistic context, social context, socio-cultural context, etc. Based on the purpose of this study (exploration of communication difficulties, strategies, and the appropriateness of language use within context) the focus is on the social context. It is a space of communicative exchange that comprises the co-participants,

the immediate physical surroundings including time and location and the contextual institutional and non-institutional domains (Keekes,2017; Fetzer & Akman, 2002).

Within the scope of communication difficulties and strategies in that social context, there are several previous empirical studies that have covered the use of communication in different social contexts, both in the formal and informal contexts of language learning and use. To find a gap in research for this study, I conducted a literature review about previous studies as a prelude to this project. This review has provided a large coverage of previous empirical studies on communication difficulties and strategies undertaken between 2008 and 2018 (See Section 1.2).

Within that review of previous empirical studies, the study has looked at the gap through both formal and informal contexts of Sudanese learners as an important population to be surveyed. The importance of studying them stems from the position that they moved from a culturally different background and settled in the UK, and hence, they are likely to have encountered communication difficulties in interaction with English native speakers in informal context in the UK (See Section 2.4).

Encountering communication difficulties has serious impact on migrants' contribution in the British society in various fields. For example, Roberts (2021) noted that when migrants like Sudanese

people apply for a job in the UK, they are usually exposed to interviews as a selection method to obtain a job. These job interviews are formulated on the basis of high competency-based framework that sometimes comprises linguistic obstacles entailed in them. As a result, the presence of these linguistic obstacles in job interviews may become a reason that leads to the exclusion of these migrants from the jobs. This exclusion from jobs for linguistic reasons is described by Roberts (2021) as a linguistic penalty which, in turn, leads to the production of discrimination and social inequality. Specifically, research indicates that job interviews stand as a gate-keeping for ethnic minorities like Sudanese cohort in the labour market to identify job winners and punish the losers (Roberts, 2021) in this way. For example, if a job candidate's language proficiency level or accent during the interview performance does not satisfy the level of expectation of the job interviewer, he will be excluded from the job and hence, he is linguistically penalised (Roberts, 2021; Roberts, 2012; Roberts, 2010). More specifically, this linguistic penalty applies more likely to applicants from overseas countries, including migrants like Sudanese people and international medical graduates, who mostly achieve less success in job opportunities than both white British and black and minority ethnic British (Roberts, 2021; Roberts, 2012) due to linguistic concerns. So, in their case, language and its power produce social inequality when language is used as an explanation for failure during a job interview that is ubiquitous in the labour market

in the UK (Roberts, 2021; Roberts, 2012; Roberts, 2010; See Section 1.2). Therefore, in relation to previous research, the participants (migrant Sudanese cohort) and the context (informal context like job interviews context) are different in this study. Hence, this is what makes answering the research questions of this study important in relation to previous research.

Therefore, to situate this project within the wider context of research literature, it is important to listen to the views of the participants, both the Sudanese ESOL learners and their peer English native speakers in their informal interaction setting. The reason is that Sudanese immigrant learners are mostly sent to ESOL classes upon their arrival in the United Kingdom to develop their communicative competence to contribute to and integrate into the British society as prospective British citizens (Han, Starkey, & Green, 2010). In research, this claim is clearly stated as “A number of countries in Europe, including the UK, have adopted language for citizenship tests or courses as a requirement for granting citizenship to migrants. To acquire citizenship, migrants to the UK must pass a test on the British society and culture or demonstrate progress in the English language. For those with an insufficient command of the language, there is the option in the UK of taking an English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) with citizenship courses. These citizenship and language tests and courses are seen by governments as a way of encouraging

migrants to develop the competence believed necessary for social integration. Equally, these are seen as a means for migrants to demonstrate their willingness to integrate” (Han et al., 2010, p. 65). This quotation shows clearly that the migrants are encouraged to integrate in British society through developing their linguistic competence and understanding British social life.

Moreover, the United Kingdom government’s policy represented and run by the city councils (they financially support refugees and asylum seekers upon their arrival in the United Kingdom in terms of living and housing benefits, health care and tuition fees) in coordination with the city colleges and other educational institutions all over the United Kingdom, send refugees and asylum seekers to enroll in ESOL classes upon their settlement in the United Kingdom (Roberts & Cooke, 2007). The purpose of this policy is to help ESOL learners develop their intercultural communicative competence (ICC) to contribute (to find jobs and participate effectively in all activities in the society) and integrate in the British society (Han et al., 2010). It is unknown to us as researchers whether this policy of ESOL classes is effective enough to help develop the communicative competence (CC) of those refugees and asylum seekers; and therefore, it is important to investigate this problem in the present study. Accordingly, conducting a survey on these participants is indispensable and will provide important insights into difficulties, strategies and learners’ needs of



informal conversations in the free social space which may help to fill in that gap in the research literature.

It is true, as this review shows, the research literature is full of investigations into communication problems in different classroom contexts within the boundaries of participants who belong to the same level of language proficiency, age, classroom instruction and may be with similar cultural backgrounds. Also, this review discovers that the communication problems and strategies reported by the participants in those classroom contexts seem relatively similar. However, the nature of the communication difficulties and strategies encountered in informal contexts among participants from different backgrounds is not known in research.

Therefore, it is time to understand their experiences based on research on pragmatic competence and intercultural communicative competence. Specifically, if pragmatic competence is concisely defined as the ability to use language effectively to achieve a communicative target and to use and understand language appropriately in each context (Li, Suleiman, & Sazalie, 2015; See Section 2.2), this study theoretically will highlight communication difficulties relevant to the Sudanese participants' ability to use language informally during conversations with their peer English native speakers in the informal context (See Table 10 and Figure 4). Likewise, if intercultural communicative competence is the ability to

interact with others and accept their perspectives and perceptions of the world, to mediate between different perspectives and be conscious of their evaluations of difference (Byram, 1997; See Section 2.3.2), this study will also highlight the intercultural communication difficulties and solutions adopted by Sudanese participants in that context (See Table 11). Regarding difficulties relevant to both pragmatic and intercultural communicative competence highlighted in this study, it is up to researchers, teachers, and educators to produce the best solutions to address these problems. In summary, regarding the features identified above about the Sudanese cohort which are different from the features of the other cohorts in previous studies, it is expected that exploring the Sudanese cohort experience may have a different impact on research about communication difficulties, strategies, and pragmatic competence.

Furthermore, it is important to note that selecting the Sudanese cohort for research in this study is important for specific reasons: firstly, this cohort is different from other cohorts where previous research has been conducted as these participants are of different ages, different level of education and level of English language proficiency, some of them are tutored, whereas others are untutored in classrooms, and some of them are known to one another, whereas others are unknown to each other. Secondly, the previous research mostly focused on international students studying temporarily for

undergraduate and graduate programmes under language instruction in classrooms with intentions of getting degrees and then going back to their home countries, whereas this study focuses on understanding the case of immigrant group experiencing a longer-term or permanent settlement, integration and gaining British citizenship at the end. Thirdly, regarding the context, previous studies just focused on problems of learning and practising English language in classrooms formal context among same or similar participants, whereas this study focuses on informal language practice outside classrooms in informal contexts in the free social space; and it attempts to understand communication problems among different participants interacting with a variety of English native speakers mostly without previous acquaintance with them.

To explore the communication difficulties and strategies, this study employed semi-structured interviews as a single research method in the first study. Therefore, limitations of employing this method may arise. However, to mitigate any flaws or limitations that may arise, the study triangulated the views of Sudanese learners on communication difficulties with those of English native speakers (Robson, 2016; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009; Hammersley, 2008) to address the credibility of its data through obtaining divergent views in the survey. The findings of this study hope to help stakeholders in the UK to create the best ways to help Sudanese learners and similar migrant members

to adopt the most effective language activities to develop their communicative competence inside and outside the classroom. Also, the understanding of these problems may help teachers and policymakers in the United Kingdom to evaluate current ESOL classes and make the most effective educational plans to support the ESOL learners in terms of teaching methods, language materials, and syllabus design and how to provide better support to Sudanese ESOL learners.

It is important to note that after the collection and analysis of interview data, English native speakers pointed to the difficulty of appropriateness of language use within context encountered by Sudanese learners. This finding of the study necessitated undertaking further investigation to examine the Sudanese learners' pragmatic competence. This examination of the pragmatic competence was undertaken in the second study through employment of discourse completion task (DCT) situations.

To design it, the thesis started with an overall introduction which includes significance of the study, the gap in research literature, research context, the personal motivation of the study and outlines of the thesis. Following these, a literature review of relevant linguistic concepts was presented. Then, the thesis presented the data analysis and ends with an overall conclusion for both studies. It is now timely to turn to the significance of the study.

## **1.1 The significance of the study**

Public and policy debate around diversity, community cohesion has taken center stage in Britain in recent years where integration has become a key policy objective. Theoretically, the significance of this study stems from the fact that language is an essential criterion for successful integration (Han et al., 2010; Roberts & Cooke, 2007). Hence, appears the importance and relevance of studying and understanding teaching ESOL courses to immigrant learners in the United Kingdom. Practically, the importance of the study stems from the process of enrollment of migrants like Sudanese on the ongoing policy of educating them English language in real world ESOL classes. Research indicates that “In the United Kingdom adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) policy is included under the government’s adult literacy and numeracy strategy. This has produced tensions in ESOL provisions, which have been politicised by wider debates on immigration and integration” (Roberts & Cooke, 2007, p. 18). Accordingly, ESOL is meant to develop immigrant’s communicative competence which will enable them to communicate in their newly adopted communities and alleviate the sense of isolation while helping to bridge social gaps and build confidence within themselves.

Sudanese immigrant language learners (the cohort under study) are supposed to develop their communicative competence through ESOL

classes as well as extracurricular language activities. Investigating the communication challenges and strategies used by Sudanese learners to overcome them, will help understanding in more depth the effectiveness of current learning methods and difficulties facing learners of English language among this cohort. It is hoped this study will provide evidence and produce data that inform academic community and policy makers (In this case, this includes the city councils that financially support refugees and city colleges in the same way with other similar education institutions all over the UK which design and run courses to help these immigrants) in the design and delivery of ESOL courses to immigrant communities (Roberts & Cooke, 2007). That will help in evaluating the current practice and aid in reflecting on the best ways of improving it.

Although this study is confined to a defined cohort of Sudanese learners and their peer English native interlocutors in a specific context, the results can be generalised to the wider immigrant community because there is an overlap in the situations of similar immigrants all over the world. Alternatively, based on this overlap, it is up to researchers and stakeholders to decide whether to extend the findings of this study to situations of other immigrants in the United Kingdom.

Moreover, the study is potentially significant in the way that it offers educators and pedagogical policy makers an insight into ESOL

learners' needs and the challenges facing them in learning English in UK educational institutions.

Most significantly, the study will highlight the voices of ESOL learners for the first time and explore the communication difficulties they face and the strategies they adopted to overcome them. Therefore, the findings of this study will provide important information to help the educational parties in the United Kingdom review policy, practice, methods and delivery of the ESOL teaching. As a result, it may be necessary for new syllabus design to be proposed for further improvement to the educational process. Finally, the study is hoping to pave the way for further studies to investigate and provide solutions to learning processes in different settings and help to fill in the gap in research literature.

## **1.2 The gap in research literature and the rationale for the study**

This section was written to show how a gap was identified in research literature through which this study is going to be directed. Also, I presented a rationale for the study. To find the gap, I conducted a narrative review providing a large coverage of previous relevant empirical studies on communication difficulties and strategies undertaken between 2008 and 2018. As a result, I identified 24 studies dealt with communication difficulties and strategies. By summarising their insights into trends, they were classified into five groups: (1) communication difficulties (Gan, 2012; Gan, 2013), (2) communication

difficulties and strategies (Sato, 2008; Morris-Adams, 2008; Zulkurnain & Kaur, 2014), (3) communication strategies and communicative competence (Park, Klieve, Tsurutani, & Harte, 2017), (4) communication strategies (Salahshoor & Asl, 2009; Kirkpatrick, 2010; Abdullah & Enim, 2011; Matsumoto, 2011; Zhao & Intraprasert, 2013; Razmjou & Ghazi, 2013; Wang, Lai, & Leslie, 2015; Toomnan & Intaraprasert, 2015; Yanagi & Baker, 2016; Bijani & Sedaghat, 2016; Demir, Mutlu & Sisman, 2018; Manzano, 2018;) and (5) communication strategies teaching and training (Lam, 2010; Rabab'ah, 2015; Saeidi & Farshchi, 2015; Kuen, Galea, & Heng, 2017; Doost, Hashemifardnya, & Panahi, 2017; See Appendices A & B).

Then, I followed these steps to identify the gap. Firstly, I searched literature and identified the different types of contexts of language learning and use. Secondly, I broadly classified contexts into formal and informal aspects. Thirdly, within each of the formal and informal context, I identified three different sub-contexts for each of them in which language is learnt and used (See Section 2.11; Section 2.12). In total, I have identified six settings in which people learn and use the language. Fourthly, taking into consideration the six settings identified above within the scope of formal and informal language learning and use, the review confirmed that there are several different studies from those 24 empirical previous studies in the narrative review have covered five directions of these different formal settings.



Therefore, unlike the participants in the previous studies, the Sudanese cohort interact informally with English native speakers in informal contexts in the free social space such as the labour market domains to obtain jobs where they likely encounter different interlocutors with different backgrounds. Hence, the communication difficulties of the participants within this context have never been investigated. Also, based on the findings of those previous studies, the communication difficulties reported by their participants were, exclusively, linguistic (Gan, 2012; Gan, 2013; Sato, 2008; Yang, 2016; Zulkurnain & Kaur, 2014). However, these linguistic difficulties reported in those studies may not be wholly attributed to the context, they may be attributed to the focus of those studies, that is, they focused exclusively on exploring linguistic difficulties during their surveys rather than focusing on exploring communication difficulties as a whole.

For the rationale of this study, the key reasons necessitating its conduction, were discussed in this section. But, before exploring these reasons, there are two important facts related to the Sudanese cohort must be highlighted to develop our comprehension of their communication difficulties with English native speakers in the UK. Firstly, they are of non-western culture background and hence, they lack familiarity with the social and cultural factors shaping and influencing the attitudes of their peer English native interlocutors

(Baker, 2016). Secondly, the cohort under study, as mentioned before, are in a situation of longer-term settlement with the intention of integration in the British society to obtain a British citizenship. Hence, they necessarily interact informally in daily conversations with English native speakers in institutionalised and non-institutionalised situations and social contexts. Therefore, the data about their communication difficulties might be different from that reported in the previous research based on the formal context and the interlocutors (students).

The primary rationale for this study is attributed to the following consideration. Firstly, it is widely accepted now that one of the ultimate goals of teaching and learning English for migrant people in the UK is to develop the EFL/ESL speakers' communicative competence, which will enable them to communicate effectively with native and non-native speakers of English in the target language (Han et al., 2010; Roberts & Cooke, 2007). Hence, it is important to highlight the nature of this effective communication.

A secondary rationale for this study is linked to the previous one, that is, since the Sudanese cohort in the UK interact with other English native interlocutors with diverse backgrounds (English native speakers speak different British dialects and have different experiences and may even have different accents) to achieve communicative goals in a variety of real-life situations, they are expected to potentially

encounter different types of communication difficulties: research in previous empirical studies indicates that speakers of ELF encounter various communication difficulties versus English native speakers (Baker, 2009; Baker, 2011; Yang, 2016; Sato, 2008; Zulkurnain & Kaur, 2014; See Section 2.3.1). As a result, their contribution as prospective citizens in the UK will be affected in terms of pursuing further education, finding jobs and integration in the society (Roberts, 2021; Roberts, 2012).

As mentioned before, encountering linguistic communication difficulties by migrants like Sudanese cohort has a serious impact on their ability to contribute and integrate in the British society, and harshly when applying for jobs in the labour market. Within the boundaries of application for jobs, migrants, as noted before, are exposed to 'linguistic penalties.' Roberts (2012) defines the 'linguistic penalty' as the failure to win a job which is experienced by linguistic minority group members like Sudanese cohort through the selection/evaluation process during their performance in the job interviews as a ubiquitous selection method in the labour market (Roberts, 2012). Specifically, Roberts (2021) noted that this linguistic penalty applies more likely to 'disadvantaged groups' in the labour market in the UK that include most migrants as well as many local Black and minority ethnic (BAME) groups.

Regarding migrant candidates in particular, Roberts (2021) noted that the linguistic penalties encountered during job interviews are clear from the outcomes of many cases in previous empirical research that both migrant candidates and British and minority ethnic (BAME) groups do much less well in obtaining jobs than local white British candidates. To support her claims, Roberts (2021) provided evidence from previous empirical cases. She used case studies of two candidates, Luis and Yohannes, who were excluded from jobs based on their incompetent performance during jobs interviews. Luis was a Filipino migrant in the UK, unsuccessful in the job interview and he manifested the following linguistic features in his utterances: pronoun use where he shifted between 'you' and 'I', making it hard to understand whether he was talking about personal action or about workers in general, grammatical mistakes, false starts and reformulations with no evidence whether that was a restart or a continuer, shift in tenses between past/ present and future, rapid shifting between volumes of speaker voices creating lack of clarity (Roberts, 2021).

Yohannes was an Ethiopian migrant in the UK, unsuccessful in the job interview and also displayed the following linguistic features during his performance: misuse of pronouns and other references creating ambiguity to understand him, and shifts in tenses between past, present and conditional. Hence, he raised issues of ambiguity and

incomprehensibility and vague stance and pronunciation issues (Roberts, 2021). It is worth noting that while these linguistic features were raised as individual cases during the performance of these two candidates, they can also appear in other candidates' talk most of the time. In the case of Sudanese cohort, this means that having true insufficient linguistic knowledge and ability influences their performance during job interviews and hence, this leads to their failure to win a job in the labour market.

Therefore, it is important to explore the communication difficulties for the Sudanese migrant candidates to see how educators can help them to develop their linguistic proficiency to improve their performance to win a job during job interviews. Also, this goes in line with the British government policy towards migrants that they should necessarily improve their language capacity through enrollment in language courses as a qualification for integration and obtaining a British citizenship (Han et al., 2010; Roberts & Cook, 2007).

On the other hand, Roberts (2021) importantly noted that although some of these job applicants are fluent English speakers, the indirectness of posing some questions during the job interview penalises them, even though some of them might be highly qualified, or overqualified for the job on offer (Roberts, 2012). For example, Roberts (2012) noted that job interviewers sometimes pose questions that need analytic skills (How does the organisation manage change?)

or some questions of philosophical nature (How do you know what you don't know?) to test candidates even in low-paid jobs that require no formal qualifications. This makes it difficult for some candidates and hence, they are penalised. Therefore, she noted that since you are what you talk, any aspects of language and interactional behaviour such as interruptions or hesitations may implicitly or explicitly be used to pass judgements on your personality and social competence to describe you as an unprofessional candidate or you are not able to take on responsibility (Roberts, 2021). Clearly, this indicates that language proficiency factor may sometimes be used as only a justification for excluding an applicant from a job during a job interview. For this reason, Roberts (2021) concluded that in some job interviews, as the key 'gatekeeping' in the labour market, aspects of language and interactional conduct are used for discrimination as several empirical case studies reported.

In line with this and relevant to the discussion of the relationship between culture and language in the scope of English as a lingua franca in which English is reshaped to suit the cultural contexts of its users (See Section 2.3.1), this indicates that language differences sometimes stand as a proxy for social judgement and social discrimination (Roberts, 2021). Hence, it is essential to conduct this study to explore the communication difficulties among migrants like

Sudanese people and their peer English native speakers in the UK to see how these difficulties can be addressed in education policy.

Based on the serious consequences of encountering communication difficulties indicated by Roberts (2021) and others in research, it is crucial to explore these difficulties within that informal context because there is little, or no research has investigated the communication difficulties and their impacts on migrant people in the UK.

Accordingly, it is important to remind there is still a gap that was not covered by the previous empirical studies which is the problems and strategies of the informal interaction between non-native and native speakers of English within the informal context in the free social space. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the filling of this gap by conducting an empirical investigation of communication problems and strategies between Sudanese learners and native speakers of English in the UK. It is hoped that this study, will add to the existing body of knowledge about NNS-NS interactions, particularly about non-institutional, natural occurring talk. It is now timely to turn to the context of this study.

### **1.3 Research context**

This study selected the Sudanese immigrant learners of English in the UK as a target group as they represent a considerable proportion of

the large body of immigrant people in the UK who speak English as a foreign language. It is not possible to decide that they are representative to immigrant people in the UK, but it can be said that there is an overlap between their situation and those of other immigrants in the UK: settled in the UK, speak English as a foreign language, interacting with English native speakers in daily conversations and they are likely potential British citizens. The situation of the immigrant people in the UK has drawn many researchers' attention to study their language proficiency in different contexts in recent years (Morris-Adams, 2008; Sato, 2008; Hann, 2010).

It is worth noting that the UK is one of the popular destinations for Sudanese immigrant people, so it was selected as the social context for the present case study. In this UK social context, the Sudanese participants use English as a foreign language to communicate with English native speakers and non-native speakers of English as well. By the necessity of their existence in the UK, the Sudanese people interact with English native speakers in different governmental and non-governmental locations or contexts.

Also, the Sudanese learners as part of the immigrants' groups in the UK are governed by the government policy in terms of their existence in the UK. It was stated clearly in the UK's official policy that "People who come into this country, who are part of our community, should



play by the rules ... I think learning English is part of that. I think that understanding British history is part of that ... I would insist on large numbers of people who have refused to learn our language that they must do so" (Roberts & Cooke, 2007, p. 20). Therefore, the Sudanese learners who arrived in the UK seeking better opportunities in terms of job, education, and settlement, must learn the English language as a basic requirement for their settlement and social integration in the UK.

As mentioned before, the people's communicative competence is influenced by the linguistic and non-linguistic context in which it takes place (See Section 1) and there are several empirical studies covered the use of communication in different contexts, both in the formal and informal contexts of language learning and use (Morris-Adams, 2008; Sato, 2008). Specifically, Benson (2011) has investigated the various contexts, both the formal and informal contexts, in which different interlocutors interact with each other (See Section 2.11; Section 2.12). As far as context is concerned, the present study focuses exclusively on the informal use of the English language in the UK by different people in the free social space under no instruction (Benson, 2011).

Research obviously confirmed that people's interaction never takes place in a vacuum; that is, they cannot communicate without a social and situational context. This means that people's communication is always shaped, to some degree, by the context in which it occurs

(Nelson, Carson, Batal, & El-Bakary, 2002). More precisely, it is emphasised that the main contribution of pragmatics is that it is impossible for a researcher to analyse language outside the context in which it is produced and interpreted. Hence, language meaning is not innate in a message, but it is always contextually shaped and produced (Nelson et al., 2002). According to research, the definition of the social context (that is mentioned besides other aspects of contexts such as linguistic context) that suits the nature of the present study is often considered to include the context of a communicative exchange which is constituted of, for instance, participants, the immediate concrete, physical surroundings like time and location (Keeskes, 2017).

Based on the definition above, the Sudanese participants are inevitably expected to interact with English native speakers and hence, they are expected to confront British culture and its social norms and rules of behavior to contribute to different aspects with others and integrate in the society. Moreover, since part of the present study is to examine the Sudanese participants' pragmatic competence, they will also encounter language variations according to the contexts in which they are used (Aydin, 2013). For example, a researcher indicates that actions such as asking someone to close the door or ordering coffee at a coffee shop, are closely related to the social environment (Aydin, 2013). Accordingly, the present study is conducted to explore the potential communication difficulties that

Sudanese participants are likely to meet in such contexts; and examine their pragmatic competence to communicate successfully during daily conversations with English native speakers in the informal context in the free social space.

Lastly but not least, since the conductor of this study is a member of the migrant Sudanese community (the cohort under study) in the UK, it is important to provide a background of the personal motivation of conducting this study.

#### **1.4 The personal motivation of the study**

My arrival in the UK was a watershed and a great change in my life. In this section, I presented the influence of this experience on the development of my linguistic and communicative competence during my existence in the UK. Also, I displayed the nature of the communication difficulties that I have encountered during this period and what I have done to overcome them to push forward my communicative competence during formal and informal conversations with English native speakers in the UK. Therefore, this study came into being because of my personal experience in the UK. I arrived in the UK in July 2011 to do a pre-sessional course in the English language at the English Language Unit, the University of Liverpool.

To begin with, I graduated with a bachelor's degree (Honours) in English language from the Faculty of Arts, the University of Khartoum in 1995. After graduation, I worked as a teaching assistant of English language at the Faculty of Education, the University of Khartoum from 1995 to 1999. In 1999, I went to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and worked for eight years as a teacher of English at the Ministry of Education, teaching general English, grammar, and English for specific purposes.

When I came to the UK in 2011, I thought that my English language proficiency was quite satisfactory to enable me to communicate with native speakers of English in the UK without difficulties. Nonetheless, I have met several difficulties in oral communication that many times led to a breakdown of communication with other English native speaker interlocutors. It is worth noting that When I talked to the professors, tutors, and the directors inside the university, I relatively faced few communication difficulties. But when going outside the university to talk to people on the streets, for example, I faced many difficulties and sometimes hardly understood some of them. Also, when talking to some native speakers of English in some governmental institutions like hospitals or banks, I regularly lost communication with some of them. Specifically, it was a tragedy and the most difficult events when I talked to some of them on the phone. It was more than once when some of them were forced to quit the

oral communication or look for interpreters over the phone. Once, I clearly remember the case when I went with one of the assistant directors from the University of Liverpool to open an account for me in the NatWest Bank, the university branch. They continued discussing my case for a long time while I was listening to them. When they ended the discussion, the director asked me if I had understood what the bank officer had said and I replied that, "I understood nothing". Then she explained everything slowly. Consequently, it was a shock to me at that time.

To facilitate oral communication with English native speakers, I depended on interpreters at the beginning for a period when I went, for instance, to the GP or the Job Centers in Liverpool. As a result, I was shocked and frustrated during my early days in the UK. But a tutor of mine from the University of Liverpool told me that what you have met was normal and even native speakers of English in the UK encounter communication difficulties; and sometimes they do not understand each other when they communicate. He advised me to continue English language practice to develop my communicative competence. Later, I met a friend from Zimbabwe who advised me to interact with native speakers of English as much as I could.

Gradually and because of interaction with other immigrants from Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, and Libya living in Liverpool, I discovered that most of them face the same oral communication difficulties with the

native speakers of English. To cope with that, they reported that they mostly depended on interpreters when they went to hospitals, schools, and other institutions.

Meanwhile, I started my campaign to improve my oral communication in English language. First, I started listening to the BBC News every day. Also, I started reading the newspapers of the Guardian and the Independent on papers and online regularly. When encountering some unfamiliar words, I checked their meanings in dictionaries and registered them on my list of the new vocabulary in a notebook to use them in my communication with the native speakers of English after that. Hence, I succeeded to gather a wide range of active vocabulary.

To better develop my communicative competence through direct interaction with English native speakers, I joined the Amnesty Group in Liverpool who regularly meets every month on a certain venue in the city centre to discuss human rights situations in various places in the world. Also, they made regular campaigns to support vulnerable people on different parts of the world and sometimes to fundraise to finance their voluntary activities. I occasionally went there with a group of Amnesty members to find an opportunity to interact with English native speakers. In addition, I joined the Reader Organisation society in Liverpool which was a free voluntary group of different people who used to meet for free reading in the public libraries in Liverpool. The policy of that group was to select a certain book every

month, meet in the library to read it and carry out a discussion about it.

Beside this, I used to go and sit in a certain pub in the city centre with an intention to meet native speakers of English to interact with them. Interestingly, I have noticed that some of the people who I met had been nice when they became drunk; and had been ready to discuss various topics. I met several of them and carried out rich discussions with them. Throughout all these meetings and interactions with the native speakers of English in Liverpool, I learnt many things from them. I used to observe how they pronounced words, made sentences, asked questions, answered questions, and provided their arguments. Through that I corrected the pronunciation of many previous words and learnt many new words from them as well. In addition, I asked and learnt many things about the history, customs, traditions, and social life in the UK.

The most amazing and fruitful experience of all that was my experience in the Philosophy in Pubs groups (PIP) in Liverpool. Also, they were free and voluntary groups in Liverpool and rest of the cities in the UK. The voluntary members of those groups used to meet weekly in different pubs to discuss several and different issues, most of them were of philosophical nature. The normal activity was that someone is selected to identify a topic in advance and come in the next time to present it among the group. Then the whole group carries

out a discussion about this topic expressing different views. They normally selected controversial topics with philosophical background like existence of God and religion without God. During those meetings, I discussed efficiently providing different views on various topics. Also, I had made many presentations on different issues like Euthanasia, abortion, and death. Overall, I learnt how to develop the listening skill and how to provide the argument and the counter argument in interactions with others.

Besides that, the Philosophy in Pubs groups carried out other activities: they organised a general conference every year for all Philosophy in Pubs groups in the UK. Occasionally, they invited different experts and university professors and gave presentations on different issues. Also, they organised academic courses for a week or more on different philosophical issues like Marxism and political philosophy. Furthermore, they regularly made trips and visits to different parts in the UK for the groups accompanied by presentations and discussions. Through Philosophy in Pubs activities, I have nearly facilitated many of communication difficulties with the native speakers of English in Liverpool and other cities in the UK. As evidence for this, when I went to do GCSE English language, I had been able to score the highest mark in listening and speaking part which was Grade 5.



At the end of this long interaction with the native speakers of English in Liverpool, I discovered that the causes of communication difficulties were mostly the Liverpool dialect (the Scouse) through which they used to speak very quickly, pronounced parts, not the full words, and used slang and colloquial words more than standard ones. As an instance of this, they say, “mornin” instead of “morning,” say “bizzy” for “police,” “pay a visit” for “go to the toilet” and “pass over” for “to die.”

To better develop my communicative competence within that area where Scouse dialect is prevailing, I generated my own list of local phrases to understand those speakers during conversations. Below, I included some of the local phrases I collected during daily conversations in different settings in the following table:

**Table 1. A sample of local phrases used in Liverpool.**

Scouse accent’s local phrases	Meaning of the local phrases
Bizzies	Police
Pay a visit	Go to the toilet
Pass over	Die
Scran	Food
Sound	Excellent
Nutt’n	Nothing
Damage	Cost

Brassic	Penniless
Shtum	Shut up
Shattered	Tired
Ace	Well done
Judy	Girl/Woman
Tottie	Girl/Woman
Tod	Alone
Ta	Thanks
Ozzy	Hospital
Ta-ra	Goodbye
Bru	Drink tea or coffee
Well away	Becoming drunk
Stash	Hide
Made up	Pleased
Bevy	Beer
Wrecked	Drink
Cozzie	Swimsuit
Boss	Marvelous
Ahh-Eh	Not fair
Jigger	Back Alley
Bender	Drinking session

Talent	Hot guy or girl
Wooly Back	Non-scouser

On the other hand, I discovered that the reasons of communication difficulties from the side of mine were that I mispronounced some of the vocabulary and used some old passive phrases. As a motivation to understand this problem, I decided to undertake this research to investigate these oral communication difficulties between Sudanese participants and English native speakers in the UK to answer the research questions of this study. Therefore, it is now timely to show how the structure of this study is designed.

### **1.5 Outlines of the thesis**

This thesis has been designed to be in two separate studies, each with separate sections. However, they are both relevant to each other within the topic dealt with, that is the communication difficulties that Sudanese participants encounter during interaction English native speakers, the strategies they use to overcome these difficulties and their ability to use language appropriately in context. Therefore, they were started with an overall introduction and ended with an overall conclusion for both.

The first study has been organised in six chapters. Chapter 1 has presented the background and statement of the problem for both

studies, introduced the significance of the study, discussed and identified the gap in research literature and the rationale of the study, discussed the research context, explained the personal motivation of the study and briefly overviewed the outlines of the thesis.

Chapter 2 reviewed and criticised the literature on communicative competence and its various aspects and the pragmatic competence and how it is achieved through various functions of speech act situations. To better understand the Sudanese learners' communication difficulties in a different cultural context in the UK, the study reviewed the research literature on the relationship between culture and language, both in the field of anthropology and in the field of English as a lingua franca (ELF). Then, the study reviewed the other different aspects of communicative competence such as the intercultural communication with its various aspects and models and the transcultural communication. Following that, the study reviewed literature on cross-cultural pragmatics. Also, within this section of communicative competence, the thesis discussed the production of speaking and reviewed some models of speaking production as well as the speech intelligibility or comprehensibility.

In addition, the study reviewed various relevant linguistic concepts such as the factors that influence learners' communicative competence, the definition of communication difficulty, communication strategies, the taxonomies of communication

strategies and a proposed taxonomy that was employed in this study. Since Sudanese learners do not speak English as a first language, the study reviewed relevant concepts such as English as a second language, English as a foreign language, English as an international language, background to ESOL classes in the UK and the debate about native and non-native speakers of English in research.

Chapter 3 introduced the methodology employed in this study in detail. It started with an overview of the research strategy explaining the reasons for designing this study into two-part research design as well as the benefits and drawbacks of employing both the interviews and DCTs instruments in this study. Then it presented the reasons for the adoption of the interpretivist approach, explained the case study of the thesis on Sudanese participants settled permanently in the UK. It discussed this study as a qualitative project applying semi-structured interviews as a method to collect the data. Following that, the aims and research questions, sampling strategy, population, participants, instruments, the pilot study, procedures of the study, data transcription, and the thematic (TA) analysis approach were also presented. Moreover, Chapter 3 discussed the ethical considerations, trustworthiness, consideration of reflexivity and the contribution of the study.

Chapter 4 presented an overview of the data analysis methods and the results of the data analysis using thematic analysis (TA), which

answered the research questions in this study. Chapter 5 provided a critical discussion of the study findings in relation to research literature, findings of previous relevant empirical studies and the research questions of the thesis. Chapter 6 is about the conclusion which summarised shortly the main findings of the study, reviewed its limitations and how they were mitigated in this study; and how some of the findings in the first study led to the conduction of the second study.

The second study was organised in seven chapters. Chapter 1 provided the background, the purpose and the rationale and the research questions of the study. Also, it briefly stated its relevance with the first study.

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature on discourse completion tasks (DCTs): it began with a general overview of DCTs and provided the reasons of employing them in this study. In addition, this chapter reviewed the speech act theory and provided variety of functions of DCT scenarios.

Chapter 3 presented the methodology and methods employed in this study in detail. It explained the design of the DCT situations with variety of functions. Also, it displayed the population and participants for both Sudanese learners and English native speakers who are likely to participate in the study. The DCT procedures, sampling strategy,

rating scale, rating process, data transcription and ethical approval were also set out.

Chapter 4 presented the procedures of the data analysis, the process of rating, the rater agreement, and the reasons for that. Chapter 5 presented results of the data analysis. Firstly, it presented the data quantitatively through providing statistical description for the following qualitative analysis.

Chapter 6 presented a critical discussion of the findings in relation to research literature and the research questions of the study. Chapter 7 is about the overall conclusion for both studies. It reminded with the purpose of the first and second study, summarised the main findings, reviewed the limitations and provided the pedagogical implications on further research and knowledge brought from the knowledge of communication difficulties and strategies encountered during interaction between Sudanese learners and their peer English native speakers in the UK. It ended with final remarks about the thesis. It is now timely to turn to the literature review chapter.

## **2 Chapter 2: Review of literature: An overview**

To explore the Sudanese learners' communication difficulties, strategies and pragmatic competence, the study provided background knowledge of the communicative competence (CC), pragmatic competence (PC), background to the relationship between culture and

language, intercultural communicative competence (ICC), transcultural communicative competence (TCC), cross-cultural pragmatics (CCP) and the strategic competence which is essential, not only to understand and negotiate meaning during a conversation or develop their communicative competence, but also to push forward the conversation to obtain more input and to learn more from conversations. These six linguistic concepts, in combination with other relevant concepts (speech production, speech intelligibility, factors influencing communicative competence, communication difficulty, English as a foreign language, English as a second language, English as international language, formal and informal language learning and use, native and non-native speakers of English and background to ESOL studies in the UK) will be the main sections within the review of literature in the first study to see how their meanings are dealt with in research. In the second study, I reviewed the discourse completion tasks (DCTs) and speech act theory.

## **2.1 The communicative competence (CC)**

As mentioned in the introduction, to investigate the communication difficulties encountered by the Sudanese immigrant learners during their daily conversations and their strategies used to overcome them, we need to know what the communicative competence is as well as its different aspects such as intercultural communicative competence, socio-linguistic competence, strategic competence, etc. This



knowledge of the communicative competence is important because we need to specify it to see how these learners can develop it to successfully achieve their communication goals in a variety of real-life situations in their daily activities. Therefore, in this section we start with the primary definition of the communicative competence and gradually engage in detail with its other aspects.

Generally, the term “competence” was used for the first time in the scope of linguistics by Chomsky in 1965, to mean the unconscious prior perception that speakers possess of the grammatical rules of their languages (Foster, 1990). So, competence within this definition is known in the field of linguistics as the “grammatical competence” and sometimes as “linguistic competence” (Murcia, 2007). This primary definition of competence focuses wholly on linguistic factors and excludes any considerations of social factors. This is a basic flaw in this definition as research now confirms that language use is context specific (Yufrizal, 2017). However, in subsequent discussions, some researchers elaborated the idea of “competence” to “communicative competence” to include not only grammatical competence, but also contextual or sociolinguistic competence which it means not only the knowledge of the rules of grammar, but also the knowledge of the rules of language use (Canale & Swain, 1980). Similarly, Savignon (1992) provided a very simple definition to the communicative competence: “Communicative competence may be defined as the

ability to function in a truly communicative setting, that is, in a dynamic exchange in which linguistic competence must adapt itself to the total informational input, both linguistic and paralinguistic, of one or more interlocutors” (p. 8). Likewise, this definition seems to be like that of the socio-linguistic competence (provided below) in which learners should possess the knowledge and ability to use the language appropriately in each context.

Specifically, the term ‘communicative competence’ came into being for the first time in the Anglophone world as a result of Hymes’ critique to the work of Chomsky. It was pointed that linguists who want to understand the acquisition of first language, need to consider both the grammatical competence and the use of the language appropriately (Byram, 1997). Therefore, research confirms the necessity of the sociolinguistic competence which has played an essential role in the development of communicative language teaching. But some researchers made a basic criticism to this work. They think that the process of transferring the same description of first language acquisition and communication among native speakers to the scope of foreign language teaching and learning objectives is misleading (Byram, 1997). This implicitly means that foreign language learners should model themselves on first language speakers’ characteristics. Accordingly, this transferring of description of the first language acquisition among native speakers to foreign language

learning neglects the importance of social identities and cultural competence of learners in any intercultural interaction (Byram, 1997).

Furthermore, the understanding that sees “prior knowledge,” which refers to “competence”, as independent of both the grammatical knowledge that speakers use for communication (this grammatical knowledge is normally learnt later by speakers and not instinctive or born with) and of what happens during the “performance” of the communication between speakers in real situations is to be considered (Foster, 1990). Therefore, Foster (1990) confirms that performance factors such as hesitations, sentences that overload the memory, mishearing, slurring of words, slips of the tongue and all other aspects of processing capability, only mask the competence that speakers have. As a result, he separates this prior knowledge from competence.

But there are also other researchers who challenged this view and refused to restrict the definition of competence only to grammar. Specifically, they pointed to sociological factors and context that affect language performance; and indicated that speakers are systematically aware of the pragmatic rules to use grammar to produce communication that is appropriate to a situation. Also, they indicated the reflection of sensitivity of the social status of both the speaker and the hearer, and therefore, they are bound by this social sensitivity to produce conversations that account for the politeness

required by the social situation. Likewise, they confirmed that the definition of “competence” should be extended to the border of these social situations which are independent of communicative competence as a linguistic concept (Foster, 1990).

In fact, the terms “competence” and “performance” were first introduced by other researchers in modern linguistics; and a fundamental distinction was made between the two terms: competence is the speaker’s knowledge of his language, while performance is the actual use of language in concrete situations (Canale & Swain, 1980). Similarly, these definitions seem to differentiate between knowledge and practice in the scope of language learning and use: while competence is about language knowledge, performance is about language practice in this concern.

To this point of the definition, it seems that there is an overlap between the two terms as the learner cannot practise a language without a prior knowledge of its rules. Moreover, competence itself can be developed through effective and continuous performance. Despite that, it is made clear to language learners that “competence” means knowledge of grammar and other aspects of the language, and “performance” means the actual use of the language. Furthermore, while competence is not observable to us, performance is clearly observable. In this sense, this distinction between competence and performance might be useful and important for both language

teachers and learners for the sake of how to use performance to develop competence and vice versa.

It is worth noting that the discussion continues on whether communicative competence includes grammatical competence as one of its components or communicative competence should be distinguished from performance or communicative performance. Despite that some later researchers clearly adopted the distinction between the communicative competence and communicative performance and hence, generated a new theoretical framework to distinguish three types of communicative competence: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). Based on their distinction, they defined grammatical competence as the knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar, semantics, and phonology, sociolinguistic competence as both socio-cultural rules of use and rules of discourse. It is important to note that knowledge of these rules indicates the knowledge of the rules of the language, ability to interpret them for social meaning and using them in an appropriate social context (Canale & Swain, 1980). And they defined the strategic competence as the ability to use verbal and non-verbal communication strategies like paraphrasing or mime to overcome limitations or difficulties in language knowledge (Oxford, 1990).

To elaborate the discussion, Yufrizal (2017) indicates that with respect to the theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing, some researchers distinguished four components of communicative competence: grammatical competence, socio-linguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. Based on this distinction, he provided a clear definition to each of the four components of the communicative competence. According to him, while grammatical competence includes knowledge of phonology, vocabulary, word formation and sentence structure, socio-linguistic competence includes knowledge of socio-cultural rules of using language in different socio-linguistic contexts. Also, while discourse competence refers to learners' ability to understand and produce cohesive and coherent texts in different types of texts, strategic competence refers to learners' ability to use compensatory strategies such as paraphrasing, repetition, clarification, and circumlocution to overcome discourse difficulties and push further a conversation (Yufrizal, 2017).

In comparison, Yufrizal (2017) adopted the same aspects and definitions of the communicative competence provided by Canale and Swain (1980) (grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence), but added the new aspect of discourse competence to mean the ability of the language learners to produce and understand cohesive and coherent linguistic texts.

As the discussion continues over the communicative competence, others elaborated the definition to go beyond the grammatical or linguistic considerations and sink deeply into other aspects of the communicative competence such as social competence and its other manifestations (Aguilar, 2007). They presented a model including six dimensions of communicative competence. This model was presented shortly in the Table 2 below; and discussed in detail afterwards.

**Table 2. The model that manifests six dimensions of communicative competence.**

Dimensions of CC	Short definitions
1.Linguistic competence	The ability to produce meaningful utterance.
2.Socio-linguistic competence	The ability to use language in appropriate social context.
3.Discourse competence	The ability to generate meaningful texts.
4.Strategic competence	The ability to use appropriate strategies in conversations.
5.Socio-cultural competence	The ability to use language in appropriate socio-cultural context.
6.Social competence	The ability to interact with others according to shared norms.

Conspicuously, researchers who created this model defined linguistic competence as the ability to produce and interpret meaningful utterances which are formed according to the rules of the language concerned and bear their conventional meaning which native speakers normally linked to an utterance when used in isolation (Aguilar, 2007).

Particularly, they defined socio-linguistic competence as the awareness of ways in which the choice of linguistic forms is determined by social conditions such as the setting (formal or informal), the relationship between interlocutors (tutors and their students), the communicative intention (to inform or interrogate about something), while they defined the discourse competence as the ability to use appropriate strategies in the construction and interpretation of texts (Aguilar, 2007).

To these researchers, the strategic competence is the ability to use communication strategies such as rephrasing and asking for clarification to continue the conversation when there is a difficulty of communication (Aguilar, 2007). Also, they defined socio-cultural competence to refer to the speaker's practical knowledge of how to express messages appropriately within the overall social and cultural context of communication (Murcia, 2007). Moreover, researchers indicated that the social competence involves both the will and skill to interact with others, involving motivation to talk to others, attitude



towards others, self-confidence, empathy, and the ability to handle issues with different social situations (Aguilar, 2007).

In comparison to previous communicative competence types, Aguilar (2007) indicated the importance of considering the relationship between language use and cultural context and hence, he pointed to the 'socio-cultural communicative competence' to mean the ability of the language learner to use language appropriately in socio-cultural context. As research recently indicates culture and language are strongly correlated in the field of English as a lingua franca (Baker, 2009); and communication cannot be conducted successfully between interlocutors of different cultural backgrounds without reference to their cultural sources.

As far as this debate over the meaning of communicative competence continues, it generates new types of communicative competence such "pragmatic competence". More specifically, it seems from the research that some researchers consider "pragmatic competence" as an essential component of communicative competence. These researchers argue that mastering of language grammar only is not adequate to acquire a second language but knowing how to use it in the appropriate way is of great significance, as the lack of pragmatic competence can cause both communicative problems and negative reactions on the side of the hearer (Campillo, 2007).

Clearly, they added that foreign language learners such as Sudanese learners may master vocabulary and grammar of the target language without having a comparable control over the pragmatic uses of the language in the real-world contexts. In line with that, a researcher indicates that these learners may know several ways of thinking, complaining, or requesting without being sure under what circumstances it is appropriate to use one form or another (Campillo, 2007). Therefore, to bridge this gap between linguistic knowledge and practice, they proposed instruction of pragmatic aspects to second/foreign language learners which may help to develop the pragmatic competence that is dealt with in the following sub-section.

In summary, we have seen that the communicative competence's concept has developed gradually over time and various researchers have provided various definitions to it based on the angle from which each researcher tackles it. Regarding all these definitions, the one that was adopted in this study to suit Sudanese learners is that communicative competence is the ability to use correct grammatical rules to maintain successful communication; and to use language appropriately in each social and cultural context because Sudanese learners and some of their interlocutors come from different cultural backgrounds.

## **2.2 The pragmatic competence**

Historically, the importance of pragmatics in general and the pragmatic competence in particular has increased gradually, but pragmatics has become one of the essential components of language ability only in the recent decades where researchers started to highlight its importance. Specifically, before the 1970s, research on language ability focused on learners' ability to produce grammatically correct words and forms (Li et al., 2015). Accurately, it was not until 1990, when a researcher brought into the research the model of language ability, the notion of pragmatic competence became an integral part of communicative language ability. Until the introduction of that researcher's model, the pragmatic competence is still independent from grammatical and discourse organisation, and it is concerned with the functional aspect of language that coordinates with the formal aspects of language use to ensure successful communication (Li et al., 2015). But this position of pragmatic competence within language studies has gradually changed overtime from 1980 after the emergence of essential developments in the definition of the communicative competence.

After several theoretical bases of communicative competence that were initiated earlier by the work of Canale and Swaine (1980) (See Section 2.1), the pragmatic competence has been considered as an essential key competence and part of the twenty-first century language skill (Nugroho & Rekha, 2020). Hence, this new basic position

of the pragmatic competence in research now appeared as gradual development of discovery to its necessity in linguistic aspects, in theory and practice.

In research, the pragmatic competence as a linguistic concept has mostly been defined from two perspectives: 'knowledge' and 'ability'. Accordingly, it can be defined shortly as the knowledge and ability to use language effectively to achieve a specific target and to understand language appropriately within a given context (Li et al., 2015).

To tackle the concept in detail, if we take the term "pragmatics" independently, it has a multitude of meanings, but there is more consensus on the central meaning that denotes to practical communication in context. In essence, "pragmatics" indicates not only understanding messages, but how they are intended (Austin, 1998). Obviously, this means that there is no separation between theory and practice when talking about pragmatics. In other words, understanding message in each language is not independent of the ability to use that language effectively in a certain context within pragmatics, but it means the ability to possess both by a certain language learner and speaker. Hence, according to research, the pragmatic perspective as a concept, centres around the "adaptability of language", the fundamental property of language that enable speakers to engage in talking at every level of linguistic structure in harmony with the requirements of people and their beliefs, desires,

intentions, and the real-world circumstances in which they interact (Austin, 1998).

But as for the “pragmatic competence”, it has come into being as normal product of the debate over the “communicative competence” in which some researchers consider “pragmatic competence” as one of the new aspects of the communicative competence (Campillo, 2007). More specifically, it seems from the research that some researchers consider “pragmatic competence” as an essential component of communicative competence. These researchers argue that mastering of language grammar only is not adequate to acquire a second language but knowing how to use it in the appropriate way is of great significance; as the lack of pragmatic competence can cause both communicative problems and negative reactions on the side of the hearer (Campillo, 2007). Clearly, they added that foreign language learners may master vocabulary and grammar of the target language without having a comparable control over the pragmatic uses of the language in the real-world contexts. Also, in line with that a researcher indicates that these learners may know several ways of thinking, complaining, or requesting without being sure under what circumstances it is appropriate to use one form or another (Campillo, 2007). Therefore, to bridge this gap between linguistic knowledge and practice, they proposed instruction of pragmatic aspects to

second/foreign language learners which may help to develop the pragmatic competence.

That is why the pragmatic competence in research is sometimes called “actional competence” and it is defined similarly as the ability to convey and understand communicative intent, that is, matching actional intent with linguistic form based on the knowledge of an inventory of verbal schemata that carries illocutionary force (Cenoz, 2007). Moreover, there are other researchers tried to widen nearly the same concept of the pragmatic competence and presented it in an obvious way that they defined it from the previous two perspectives: “knowledge” and “ability”. They regard it as the knowledge of the linguistic resources available in each language for realising ideas, knowledge of the sequential aspects of speech acts and eventually, knowledge of the appropriate contextual use of the given languages’ linguistic resources.

To summarise the above discussion, the “pragmatic competence” can be defined as the ability of a second language learner or a foreign language learner to use the target language appropriately in certain social contexts (Hu, 2014; Nelson et al., 2002; Rozina, 2011; Guillot, 2012; Austin, 1998; Stadler, 2018; Aydin, 2013; Huang, 2017; Fetzer, 2011).

However, some researchers (Cenoz, 2007) distinguish between two dimensions of pragmatic competence: pragma-linguistic and socio-

pragmatic competence (Birjandi & Rezaei, 2010). They refer pragmatic-linguistic competence to the use of the appropriate linguistic devices to perform a particular speech act in the different languages (e.g. greetings can be expressed in different ways in different languages, and in many cases, it is not possible to have a literal translation for each type of it) whereas, socio-pragmatic competence is related to implicit social meaning or the ability to perform a speech act in a particular situation or context , and hence, there can be different assessments of social aspects of the setting, such as the social distance between the speaker and the addressee (Cenoz, 2007; Birjandi & Rezaei, 2010). In this sense, socio-pragmatic competence poses the notion of the link between context factors and the communicative action (e.g., deciding whether to apologise or not).

By considering the two dimensions of the pragmatic competence mentioned above, the present study focused on the dimension of the socio-pragmatic competence for its appropriateness to its purpose about exploring the difficulties encountered by Sudanese learners. In research, there are many empirical studies undertaken to record the development of the L2 learners' socio-pragmatic competence by working on the development of either production or comprehension of speech acts with variety of pragmatic functions such as request, apology, greeting, etc. (Hu, 2014). For the present study, the Sudanese learners' pragmatic ability to understand people's intended meanings,

assumptions, purposes or goals, and kind of actions (Rozina, 2011) will be examined by exposing them to different speech acts with variety of functions such as complementing, offering things, suggesting, apology, inviting people, etc.

Since research indicated the presence of cultural background references of interlocutors during mutual conversations and hence, highlighted various aspects of communicative competence, it is now timely to review the relationship between culture and language in anthropology as well as in English as a lingua franca.

### **2.3. Background to the relationship between culture and language**

The purpose of this section is to discuss the relationship between culture and language as a prelude to review the other aspects of communicative competence in research such as intercultural communication and transcultural communication. This is to see which aspects of communication that are relevant to communication difficulties encountered by Sudanese cohort. Firstly, it begins with exploring this relationship in anthropology; and then, gradually in the scope of English as a lingua franca (ELF) which is relevant to the purpose of this study. This section attempts to answer the question that whether culture and language are correlated, or they are independent from each other.



In research, there are different views about the relationship between culture and language in the scope of both anthropology and linguistics. For example, Harris and Rampton (2003) discussed this relationship and displayed various views of anthropologists about it. To highlight it, they defined culture as “Cultures are the sets of values, beliefs and behaviours developed in different settings” (Harris & Rampton, 2003, p. 8). Based on this definition, culture is the overall thoughts, practices, and ways of living that a certain group of people adopts to run their ways of life in a specific location during a certain period. Hence, culture and language are correlated because language is part of the human practices and behaviours in that sense. However, they have not explained if these values are stable or dynamic over time, and if language is part of culture in their definition.

To explore this relationship, another researcher states that if language is seen as an expression of culture, it does not work in vacuousness; it has a social setting like culture, that is, the people who speak it belong to a group or race which is surrounded by physical characteristics from other groups in specific cultural domains. Hence, language does not exist independent from culture in this sense, that is, it is not independent from the practices and beliefs that identify the way of living of that group (Sapir, 2003). Clearly, this means that a given language of a group reflects the cultural practices of that group and

hence, named cultures and named languages are correlated in this sense.

However, research indicates that this relationship of correlation between a given culture and a given language as mentioned above is not eternal or always constant over time and concerns can be raised about it, especially in the globalised society of today where present human experiences proved that boundaries between named languages and cultures are gradually blurred and transgressed (Baker, 2022). For example, a researcher indicates that languages can spread far beyond their original homes (where certain cultural practices exist) and invade the cultural scopes of other groups of people such as the case of the English language in USA, Canada, Australia, etc. Also, he adds that languages may even die in their original areas or migrate to exist among other hostile people to its original speakers (Sapir, 2003). Based on the above two examples, named cultures and languages are not strongly correlated and they cannot exist permanently in parallel domains. Also, their areas of spread may intercross in many ways and the history of each may follow a different course (Sapir, 2003). Likewise, another researcher indicates that cultural borders may be rearranged by historical accidents without necessarily influencing the existing linguistic domains (Sapir, 2003). According to previous examples, there is no strong correlation between given cultures and given languages because change strikes both cultures and languages.

Therefore, it is easy to show that named cultures and languages are not naturally or intrinsically associated. For example, a group of unrelated languages – even a single language - can belong to distinct culture spheres such as that of the ‘Athabaskan languages’ (they form a clearly unified group as they are structurally specialised) where their speakers belong to four distinct culture areas: (1) the simple hunting culture of western Canada and the interior of Alaska, (2) the buffalo culture of the Plains, (3) the highly ritualised culture of the Southwest, and (4) the peculiarly specialised culture of Northwestern California (Sapir, 2003). This indicates that a group of languages need not correspond to a racial group or distinct cultural area. Accordingly, this in essence also refutes the former notion of the correlation between named cultures and named languages.

Likewise, a single language can belong to varieties of cultural domains. For example, regarding English language, the community of language between Great Britain and the United States is far from considering them as a form of ‘community of culture’ (Sapir, 2003): cultural values and practices in the UK, relatively, differ from those in the USA. It is true to say that they both have a shared ‘Anglo-Saxon’ cultural heritage, but the developments in both societies show significant differences in people’s lives and their cultural practices in the two countries. For example, although America can still be considered English because of the colonial history, its cultural orientation partly

drifts towards autonomous and distinctive developments inside its boundaries, and partly towards an immersion in the large trend of the European culture of which England only constitutes a part (Sapir, 2003). It is true that a shared language possesses a strong influence on the mutual understanding between England and America, but other various factors are working hard to obstruct or reduce this influence on the cultural practices in both countries (Sapir, 2003). Hence, a shared language does not necessarily lead to the creation of identical or shared culture when the geographical, political, and economic factors of generating the culture are different throughout in both countries.

Moreover, it is not feasible to state that there is a causal relationship between culture and language. If culture can be seen as what a given society thinks and does, language is seen as a particular way of how people in this society think and do (Sapir, 2003). In this sense, it is difficult to see what specific causal relationships between a selected inventory of experience and the specific way the society expresses all experience, if, again, culture can be considered a significant selection made by the society because the orientation of culture is a complex series of changes of content with changes in formal expression of it (Sapir, 2003). Thoughtfully, it is possible to change every sound, word, and the concrete concept of a language without changing its inner actual essence in the least such as the one who pours water into a

fixed mold water or plaster or molten gold. Likewise, if culture has an innate form and series of contours, the changes of language and culture are unrelated processes (Sapir, 2003). Hence, any attempts to link specific types of linguistic morphology and cultural developments have failed and considered rubbish accordingly.

Therefore, it is confirmed that the content of a given language is not identically related to a given culture. For example, a given society that has no knowledge of 'theosophy' trends, has no name for it. Likewise, people of a society who had never seen or heard of a horse are compelled to invent or borrow a name for it from other languages the time they have acquaintance of it because the vocabulary of a language reflects the culture (Sapir, 2003). In this sense, it is true to say that the history of a language and the history of a culture move along parallel lines.

In summary, as indicated in research in the above review, in general sense, language as practice is part of culture, but there is no correlation between named cultures and languages from the anthropological point of view. Based on experiences of various groups in the world, there may be an overall specific correlation between a named language and a named culture somewhere in a given period because language is the tool through which people express their cultural practices. Also, we can find a group of different unrelated languages belong to distinct cultural domains and vice versa. In

addition, the content of a named language is not necessarily linked to a named culture, and for these reasons, some languages borrow vocabulary from other languages to express new emergent cultural concepts or names in a given culture of a group.

### **2.3.1 The relationship between culture and language in ELF**

In contrast to the different views reported above about the relationship between culture and language in anthropology, the discussion about this relationship in the field of English as a lingua franca (ELF) has taken a different direction. In fact, there is a broad consensus in research that indicates a strong link between culture and language in the scope of English as a lingua franca.

To begin with, English as a lingua franca is defined as a way of interaction in English language between speakers with different first languages (Baker, 2009). Clearly, this definition of English as a lingua franca interaction traditionally excludes native speakers, while it is recognized that English native speakers are potentially part of the global use of English. For this reason, another researcher has redefined the concept of English as a lingua franca communication to include native speakers (Baker, 2009). This means that English as a lingua franca is the communication in English language between diverse native and non-native speakers of English like Sudanese people.

Despite this inclusion, research indicates that the norms of English language communication are not normally governed by English native speaker norms, whether lexical, grammatical, phonological, or cultural. For this reason, it is not possible to talk about the model of English type (with distinct accent, dialects, vocabulary, etc.) spoken by the English native speaker as there are diverse varieties of English language worldwide (Baker, 2009; See Section 2.5.1). Hence, to comply to this, a reformulated definition of English as a lingua franca was offered to indicate communication in English between interlocutors with different ‘linguacultural’ backgrounds, whether they are categorised as English native speakers or second/foreign language users (Baker, 2009a & Baker, 2009b).

Clearly, it is worth noting that the inclusion of the term ‘lingua-cultures’ is useful in highlighting the link between language and culture and the importance of different languages and cultures in communication in the scope of English as a lingua franca. It is generated to describe the area where language and cultural practices meet during mutual conversations of interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds. Particularly, during these mutual conversations, interlocutors refer to sources from different languages and cultures to maintain a successful communication. Hence, this confirms the strength of language-culture connections during communication in the field of English as a lingua franca.

Causally, this correlation between language and culture has resulted from the use of English as a global lingua franca in intercultural communication (Baker, 2011). Hence, English language can no longer be seen as the property of the traditional inner circle countries (the UK, USA, etc.) since participants from many other cultural backgrounds are included (Baker, 2009). Accordingly, this correlation between language and culture in English as a lingua franca communication is attributed to the theory that argues for the fluid and dynamic nature of intercultural communication in which participants from different linguistic and cultural forms and references function in it (Baker, 2009). Based on these cultural forms, practices, and frames of reference through English as a lingua franca, critical researchers do not view these cultural aspects as a priori defined categories, but as in a continuous state of adaptation and emergent resources which are always negotiated and context dependent (Baker, 2009). In this sense, researchers do not see named cultures as separate entities, but always change and mix to generate new forms such as 'lingua-cultures', 'third space' and 'liminality'.

This newly introduced vision of intercultural communication in English as a lingua franca context has generated wide range of views for the relationship between language and culture, but all argue for a link between them in a way or another, strongly or tightly. For example, a researcher noted that in global contexts a given language and a given



culture are not only strongly linked, but they are also in a state of dynamic movement because in the global flows and global complexities of language use and social groupings, languages are changed and adapted to address the local needs and contexts of their users and not fixed to defined social and cultural groupings (Baker, 2009).

Similarly, another researcher proposes the idea of 'third place' between specific languages and cultures in which languages and cultures in the scope of foreign language exist to describe this relationship. In essence, it is similar to the term 'lingua-cultures'. In this third place, the links between a given language and its cultural references are made new in each example of communication and in relation to each participant (Baker, 2009a & Baker, 2009b). Accordingly, the type of English used as a lingua franca does not necessarily represent English native speaking cultures, but the meanings of its users and the surrounding contexts in which it is used.

It is worth noting that the idea of 'third place' that represents the new area where culture is linked with the language in English as a lingua franca communication has emerged from the idea of 'global flows' of cultures and languages. In a researcher's study about global cultures and the English language, he explained the process in which English is reshaped to suit the cultural contexts of its users, while at the same time influencing and changing those contexts. Nonetheless, this

process does not stop here, it advances further. He added that these local adaptations of languages, cultural forms and practices are in turn sent back out into global contexts where the cycle of change continues (Baker, 2009).

Within the same process, another researcher pointed to the tensions between the global and the local which results in the flow, flux, and fixity of linguistic and cultural forms. This means that a process of a 're-evaluation' of English language use moves away from native speaker norms towards the type of communicative skills needed to function in such hybrid and dynamic linguistic and cultural contexts (Baker, 2009).

It is worth noting that the idea of the 'third place' that represents the new synthesis that refers to the new cultural and linguistic emergent forms is similar to the notion of the 'third space' in post-colonial theories in which they talked about the 'hybridity of culture': the post-colonial theorists view culture not in its unchangeable essence, but characterised by change, flux and transformation, and most importantly by mixedness or interconnectedness (Baker, 2022).

Similarly, in the same way, other researchers generated the concept of 'liminality' to describe the new emergent synthesis of cultures and languages to highlight the notion of occupying a 'liminal space' 'in-between' different culture or cultures. They defined 'liminality' as the transitional period or phase of a rite of passage, or practices during

which participants lack social status or rank, remains anonymous and adopts prescribed new and mixed form of conduct (Baker, 2022).

In summary, in examining communication through English as a lingua franca, research needs to focus and work on the idea of culture and language that are situationally emergent, hybrid, and liminal and relevant to global, local, and individual contexts, creating new practices and forms in each instance of intercultural communication (Baker, 2009). As stated above, these new practices and forms were described with linguistic terms such as ‘lingua-cultures’, ‘third place’, ‘third space’ and ‘liminality’. In the case of Sudanese cohort under study, as data indicates, some of them made regular references to various linguistic and cultural forms through employment of different strategies such as code-switching, translation, etc., whereas others failed to do so (See Section 4.3).

### **2.3.2 Intercultural communication: An overview**

To begin with, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is one of the aspects of the communicative competence (CC); and within its definition and its various models in research, it is indispensable for immigrant learners like Sudanese community members who come from different backgrounds to settle and integrate in the British society. Therefore, this section of the review investigated its different aspects to provide immigrant learners with what they need to become proficient speakers of English and effective intercultural speakers.

Generally, there is now a considerable accumulation of data about the intercultural communication, tackling various aspects of it: its definition, necessity and factors that help to develop it. According to Byram and Risager (1999), the debate about the relationship between culture and language is old and has developed recently in the field of language teaching. They state, “The debate about the relationship between culture and language has long been part of the study of language and has steadily gained an importance in the modern age” (Byram & Risager, 1999, p. 59). Based on this, they provided two important reasons for this relationship between language and culture. Firstly, they pointed to the idea that to gain the ability to use and communicate into others’ language, cannot be separated from the understanding of their different way of life and vice versa. Secondly, they pointed to those who follow the traditional and humanistic attitude who view the learning of others’ culture as part of the education process of the whole person.

Similarly, Holtzer (2003) confirmed that the integration into a foreign language community necessitates understanding the culture of that community. He states, “To be integrated into a foreign language speech community is also to understand what are, in a given culture, the appropriate techniques to carry out certain communicative tasks such as, for example, how to bring up a topic in natural way” (p. 47).

In this sense, the term 'foreign language', by definition, implies the link between language and culture.

Likewise, Wandel (2003) in his article 'Teaching India in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom', pointed to the idea that English as a world language implies that the concentration of teaching English should not be only on countries in which English is spoken as a mother tongue language like Britain and USA, but should consider developing learners' intercultural competence. Furthermore, he pointed that teaching learners' English language to use it as a 'Lingua Franca', necessitates accustoming them to be interculturally sensitive (Wandel, 2003). Comparatively, I think these points are supported by the work of Jenkins (2015) in 'Global Englishes', in which she sees that since English becomes the language of 'others', these others have the right to amend, add and change depending on their cultural backgrounds.

Particularly, Byram (1997) discussed the relationship between language and culture in the scope of two terms: the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and foreign language teaching (FLT). He confirmed that the experience of otherness is central in the field of foreign language teaching in which it requires learners to involve in both familiar and unfamiliar experience through another language. Although he pointed that the term 'intercultural communicative competence' intentionally maintained links with

foreign language teaching and benefited from its literature, he confirmed that the intercultural communication expanded the concept itself to a large extent (Byram, 1997).

### **2.3.2.1 Definition of intercultural communication**

This section will deal with what it means the term “intercultural communication”. In research, there might be more than one understanding to the intercultural communicative competence. According to Byram (1997), the intercultural speaker is “Someone who has an ability to interact with ‘others’, to accept other perspectives and perceptions of the world, to mediate between different perspectives, to be conscious of their evaluations of difference” (P. 5). In this definition, there is no explanation whether this interaction takes place among people of same or different languages. For example, if two interlocutors speak the same language, but they belong to two different cultural backgrounds (Britain and Australia), can they be considered as intercultural speakers? Moreover, we must take certain things into consideration now if we would like to provide a relatively accurate definition of the intercultural speaker such as globalisation and the recent immigration of people around the world now. Based on these two factors, it seems that an international community is in process of formulation in the world now in which thoughts and people can move very easily from one country to another. In summary, an appropriate definition to the intercultural

speaker can be the bilingual or multilingual speaker who can communicate with speakers of other languages and cultures into different contexts with appreciation to individual differences related to culture, civilisation, social and religious backgrounds. To communicate together, these people who are of different backgrounds need to develop a strategy of intercultural adjustment with each other which will be tackled in the following section.

### **2.3.2.2 Intercultural adjustment: an overview**

Intercultural adjustment normally takes place when different people come from different cultural backgrounds and try to converse together. As a result, they need to compromise to negotiate meanings to come to a mutual understanding of their messages. This was recently confirmed by many authors who demonstrated that people of different cultural backgrounds may also see differently the conversational roles, or the context in which it is undertaken, or even the world that embrace these conversational roles (Bouton, 2011).

Moreover, research confirms that people from different cultural backgrounds do not only generate different messages and understandings in a conversation, but they also infer different messages from the same conversation in the same context. According to a sufficiently informative study conducted on two different interlocutors belong to the same culture (Malagasy speakers and Western Europeans) in the Malagasy society in Madagascar, it was

found that Malagasy speakers have satisfied less information needs than the Western Europeans because the fact that when members of two different cultures try to apply the conversation rules, the difference in their context and cultural backgrounds often leads them to misunderstanding of each other, (Bouton, 2011).

Scollon (2012) attributes problems of miscommunication to the problem of identity boundaries. He pointed that people have different identities, and within each identity there is a discourse system within which each human individual participates. It is true that people differ in this matter: some individuals are strongly immersed in their cultural backgrounds and give great pride to their membership in their professional association, while others just carry out their duties as members in the association. This is because an individual is born in a certain region in a particular country at a particular time in history. He is also educated within a certain educational system, gains certain values, tastes, interests, political position and develops family and societal interpersonal relationships. Therefore, within the framework of these developments, a person learns a set of languages and linguistic varieties. In this context, the problem is that how does a person gain a sense of identity and then navigate over all these sources of identity and membership of identity to communicate with others successfully (Scollon, 2012).



The problem of the identity is with the discourse system within which individuals participate. The positive side of this situation is that an involvement in certain discourse system gives a sense of comfort to participants within the framework of the same discourse systems. The reason is that it eliminates or at least reduces ambiguity in conversations and creates feeling of solidarity and security. However, there is a negative side of this situation as well because it creates boundaries between the in-group and the out-group and hence, people who are not participants in a particular discourse system, will be refused by the participants of this discourse system and accordingly, they find it difficult to achieve even a peripheral role in conversations (Scollon, 2012). Therefore, a discourse system looks like or is an enclosed circle that positively gives identity and security to its participants, but negatively encloses them within its boundaries. The outcome in both cases, it facilitates the communication to its participants and makes it easier for them to talk to each other than it is for them to communicate with those who are outside the circle of the discourse system. The discourse system in this concern is not a matter of individual issue, but rather is a matter of a group of individuals who imagine themselves as a united group to form a 'culture'. Accordingly, it is the group who decides, not the individual in the group. As a result, a person feels he is a member and has identity in the culture of the group, or he will be refused and abandoned by the group as an alien (Scollon, 2012).

Also, other researchers pointed to problems of communication attributed to cultural boundaries in a broad sense. They stated that “Although people from different cultures often share some basic cultural concepts, there are other concepts that can be seen as irrational or contradictory to one’s own way of doing things” (Wintergerst & McVeigh, 2011, p. 101).

### **2.3.2.3 Definition of inter-cultural adjustment**

The inter-cultural adjustment or the inter-cultural adaptation in essence is an attempt made by multi-cultural interlocutors to negotiate meaning to constitute a successful communication. In 1975, a researcher proposed the term ‘conversational implicature’ (known as Grice’s term) which is similar in meaning to inter-cultural adjustment to help develop communication within different or same culture. It is a form of indirect communication based on what is described as “Co-operative Principle”. It assumes that when people participate in a conversation, they try to say the most appropriate expressions towards the mutually accepted purpose of the conversation to develop the communication to the direction they need it now. To achieve this goal, the researcher proposed that people should follow at least four basic principles: “Be sufficiently informative’ to satisfy your interlocutor’s needs, ‘be truthful’, ‘make what you say relevant’ and ‘be clear” (Bouton, 2011, p. 47). These are set as criteria of intercultural adaptation to maintain successful

communication among interlocutors of different cultural backgrounds.

Also, other researchers proposed different activities which may help to develop inter-cultural communication such as knowledge of the groups and their discourse system, and cultures of other people. Scollon (2012) pointed that to share the knowledge of other groups with different cultural backgrounds is not the same as being a member or a participant in another cultural group. The reason is that normally many discourse systems of other groups have a strong resistance to taking on new participants. Therefore, even if someone develops competence in “intercultural communication”, he will never be a full “participant” in that different group. Accordingly, they proposed that one must learn as much as possible about other discourse systems which may bridge the gap between the cultural differences and bring closer the commonalities between different cultural groups. Therefore, it is confirmed by experience that the successful professional communicator is not the one who is expert in crossing boundaries of cultures and discourse systems of other groups, it is the one who struggles to learn as much as possible about other cultures and groups system (Scollon, 2012).

In addition to the knowledge of discourse systems of other groups, speakers also need to have a working knowledge, at least, of the basic concepts of other cultures that can help speakers to interact

successfully in the new culture, or it may help to reduce the level of the cultural shock. But how do people adapt to a new culture? Entering in a new culture is not an easy matter. It is a long developmental process that involves several steps; it is a process of “assimilation” which takes place when the new culture and its beliefs and values replace those of the original culture, either fully or partially and either by choice or by necessity (Wintergerst & McVeigh, 2011).

In summary, assimilation depends basically on the intentions of the people who are entering the new culture and their desire to integrate in that new culture because adapting to the new culture without abandoning our old cultural identities is called acculturation. In this process people normally take what they think can add a positive impact to their old identities and cultures and avoid what they think can threaten positive sides of their old cultural identities. According to research, the process of “acculturation” follows four stages: the first is the “honeymoon” stage which is full of excitement about everything that is new in the new culture because people are normally have an instinct of discovering new things. The second stage is the “aggressive” stage which is described as “culture shock”. This is not necessarily applying to all people; it depends on the level of education, tendency to integrate and experience of every individual. The “culture shock” is defined as a feeling of distress generated by experiencing several cultural differences and it differs from one person to another.

The third stage is the “adjustment stage” that leads to a gradual acceptance to the new culture and adapting with it by solving some problems and may reject other values. The final stage is called the “recovery stage” in which we accept the new culture and develop a “bicultural identity” (Wintergerst & McVeigh, 2011).

To avoid the culture shock, or at least alleviate its effects and cope with the intercultural adjustment, researchers propose for learners to follow certain strategies: firstly, learners need to understand the process of adjustment, so that the shock is anticipated and hence, the strength of our reactions can be reduced. Secondly, learners need to develop coping strategies to facilitate the adjustment to another different culture quickly and efficiently. Thirdly, learners also need to learn something about the new culture before leaving their home countries, and therefore, they will have realistic expectations about the new culture. Finally, learners must develop skills that will facilitate inter-cultural understanding, communication, and adjustment through intercultural training (Wintergerst, & McVeigh, 2011).

Also, to cope successfully with the culture shock and achieve intercultural adjustment, research proposed that learners must know their host country as much as possible by the following ways: learners study a brief history of the country, learners can learn factual information about that country such as natural resources, religion, political and family system, etc., learn about present day problems

and current national affairs, learners can explore landscape and geography of that country (Wintergerst & McVeigh, 2011).

#### **2.3.2.4 Byram's model of intercultural communication**

According to the various views on the intercultural speaker, there are more than one model for the intercultural speaker. This section discusses some of these models and at the end provides the model that is appropriate to the situation of the Sudanese learners in the UK. For example, Van Ek's model is presented as 'a framework for comprehensive foreign language learning objectives' that was developed in the context of a vision of how foreign language teaching should be justified through its contribution to learners' general education. It is indicated that foreign language teaching is not only concerned with training learners to develop communication skills, but it is also concerned with the learner's personal and social development as an individual. This framework includes reference to three components: social competence, promotion of autonomy and development of social responsibility (Byram, 1997).

Specifically, Van Ek's model of 'communicative competence' includes six competences together with the inclusion of autonomy and social responsibility. According to this model, these six competences are separate from each other, but they are different aspects of one concept (Byram, 1997). Similarly, this model looks like a man circling around the globe and stopping at six points around it. At any one of

these six points, one point is central, whereas others and their relationship to that aspect will also be viewed. Obviously, these six points can be summarised shortly: linguistic competence (the ability to produce and interpret meaningful utterances formed according to the rule of the language concerned), sociolinguistic competence (the awareness of ways in which the choice of language forms is determined by conditions like setting, relationship between communication partners, communicative intention, etc.), discourse competence (the ability to use appropriate strategies in the construction and interpretation of texts), strategic competence (skills used by interlocutors to overcome communication hurdles), socio-cultural competence (the social context in which language is used) and social competence (the will and the skill to interact with others in appropriate social context) (Byram, 1997). To evaluate this, one can agree with Byram's main criticism that Van Ek's model views the native speaker as a model and requires learners to communicate according to the rules of the concerned language without identifying the nature and origin of these rules. However, there is an unanswered question: which native speaker that we mean among the 'global Englishes' now? The concept of the native speaker is controversial. For example, a problem can arise when we talk about the situation of black native Africans now in South Africa and Zimbabwe who speak English as a mother tongue language; there is somewhat disagreement on whether we consider them as native speakers or not.

Following that, to present his model about intercultural communication, Byram (1997) provided a historical perspective to the relationship between communicative competence and its context. He reviewed efforts of other researchers and at the end, he focused his criticism on the model of Van Ek who proposed it to foreign language teachers (FLT). Specifically, he took Van Ek's model as a starting point because it is more detailed and because it was the origin of the model that he will propose (Byram, 1997).

Therefore, Byram (1997) pointed that by including contextualisation, Van Ek complicated the definition of intercultural communicative competence because assessment was involved. For example, the assessment of autonomy or social responsibility may not be technically complicated, but it may draw ethical issues about the right of an institution and its members to judge an individual's degree of social responsibility. In addition, he indicates that Van Ek was not concerned with assessment or methodology, but only with objectives and content.

As a result of his critique, Byram (1997) proposed his model of intercultural communication which is formed of three integrated factors that they should be available in any intercultural speaker. Moreover, he thinks that his model is comprehensive, but he indicated that it will not be appropriate to all situations, because foreign language teaching varies from one situation to another. But he



explained how these three factors interact or work in the daily existing practice. To evaluate, he did not justify or provide reasons for designing a model of three factors and not more than that. The three factors that intercultural speaker should possess are: knowledge (knowledge of self and others, of interaction: individual and societal), skills (to interpret and relate, discover, and interpret) and attitudes (relativising self and valuing others) (Byram, 1997). These three components of Byram's model will be discussed in detail below.

#### **2.3.2.4.1 Knowledge**

It means the knowledge an individual has from another country that he brings it into interaction with other individuals. More accurately, it can be described in two broad categories: firstly, the knowledge about the social groups and their cultures in one's own country; and the knowledge of the interlocutor's country. Secondly, the knowledge of the process of interaction at individual and social levels. In summary, it is true whenever two different interlocutors meet; they bring into conversation their knowledge of their own countries and the countries they have seen (Byram, 1997). To comment on this, I think the whole matter depends on the personal experience and education of each interlocutor. For example, the person who travels much around the world and lives in different parts of it, he is relatively more cultured about the situations of the world than the one who lives all his life in one place.

#### **2.3.2.4.2 Skills**

Particularly, they refer to the ability to understand, analyse, interpret, argue, and deal with the knowledge and information you gained, either by education or by experience. For example, if an individual finds a document from another country, he can interpret it with a help of specific information or a general frame of knowledge that helps him to understand the connotations in this document. Therefore, the ability to interpret a document from a different country for someone from another country depends on the knowledge of one's own and of the other environment. The skill of discovery may be built partly on existing knowledge, but it may also be part of social interaction (Byram, 1997).

#### **2.3.2.4.3 Attitudes**

It means the attitudes towards people who are viewed differently in terms of their culture, belief, and behaviour. Specifically, the intercultural speaker needs to get rid of stereotyping and prejudice towards others who are different from him and be more tolerant, because prejudice may affect mutual understanding. Therefore, the successful intercultural speaker does not only need to be positive towards others, but he also needs to be curious towards others' meanings, cultures, behaviours, and beliefs (Byram, 1997).

To sum up, it appeared clearly from the above discussion that the intercultural communicative competence has arisen because of the

discussion of the situation of people from different cultural backgrounds living and interacting in a mutual community. Therefore, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in this sense can be considered as a specific competence within the scope of the large concept of the communicative competence (CC) which is appropriate for the immigrant Sudanese learners.

Finally, it is worth noting that the intercultural communication has been criticised by many researchers in the theories of languages and cultures. However, they have not rejected its main hypotheses and aspects, but they built on them and alternatively, they proposed further type of communication, that is called 'transcultural' communication'. It is now timely to turn to the transcultural communication in the following sub-section.

### **2.3.3 The transcultural communicative competence**

In contrast to 'cross-cultural communication' and 'intercultural communication', the 'trans-cultural communication' in research is defined as the ability of a given interlocutor to operate and move between different languages during mutual conversations with other interlocutors and make multiplicity of references to target languages and cultures (Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019). This means that when participants from different backgrounds conduct a mutual conversation, each one of them refers to practices or resources from different cultures and languages, including his own culture and

language and uses them to maintain successful communication because cultures and languages are regarded as dynamic, fluid and they are always in a situation of changing and transforming.

The transcultural communication emerged from the continuous observation and discussion to the relationship between 'named' languages and cultures. Based on the view of transcultural communication, these named cultures and languages are not static, but they continuously change and people always gain practices and values of other named cultures and add them to their own named national cultures and languages. As a result, researchers frequently see new emergent cultural practices and references which are neither part of any one culture or necessarily in-between cultures (Baker, 2022). Consequently, complexity and diversity of languages, communities and cultures appeared in the outside of Anglophone settings and in the international universities in the Anglophone settings (Baker, 2016). Hence, they appreciated that these named languages and cultures cannot be taken for granted. From this point, they started criticising the notion of 'cross-cultural communication' and 'intercultural communication' and noted that the use of 'inter' in intercultural communication is not the appropriate or adequate metaphor to describe the new emergent cultures and aspects of languages, proposing that such type of communication is better to be approached by 'trans' in transcultural communication where borders

between languages and cultures are transcended, transgressed, and transformed (Baker, 2022). In this sense, the metaphor 'inter' points to 'between' named cultures and languages where there are clear borders between them, whereas 'trans' points to 'across' various cultures and languages where borders are crossed or transgressed and hence, 'trans' is more appropriate than 'inter' for describing the present fluidity of cultures and languages worldwide.

As mentioned before, the transcultural communication approach has criticised both cross-cultural and intercultural communication approaches to constitute the tenets of transcultural communication. It has focused, exclusively, on the critique of the national level accounts of culture, homogeneity in cultural groupings and the study of communicative practices of specific cultural groups independent from intercultural interaction between interlocutors (Baker, 2018). For example, the transcultural communication approach pointed out that the cross-cultural communication approach studies the Sudanese communicative practices independently and then, compare these practices with those of another distinct group such as English group. Hence, this approach (cross-cultural communication approach) was criticised for its treatment with cultural groupings because it assumes that individuals are synonymous and have characterisations of culture with clear boundaries between their different named cultures and languages (Baker, 2018).

In contrast to cross-cultural perspective, the intercultural communication approach focuses on the communicative practices of distinct other cultural groups in interaction with each other such as the process of French linguists communicating with English linguists to see what similarities, differences, strategies adopted, shared features and what can each group do to maintain a successful communication with the other cultural group. It focuses on the nature of the interactions between two or more distinct groups. Also, this approach of intercultural communication was criticised for more than one reason: firstly, this approach assumes that cultures are characterised as bounded entities within national borders, whereas they are not, cultures are fluid, dynamic and of blurred boundaries (Baker, 2018; Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019). Secondly, this approach also assumes that cultures are homogeneous, whereas they are heterogeneous containing a great deal of variety among their members based on their fluidity. Thirdly, the intercultural communication approach with its features identified above, puts a priori assumptions about the cultural groupings and identities that will be drawn in interaction, and assumes that their interlocutors behave accordingly. Again, this point assumes that cultures are 'static', whereas they are dynamic and in continuous state of changing.

As mentioned earlier, introducing the transcultural communication approach is not to replace the cross-cultural and intercultural

communication approaches, but it is just a further step to maintain successful communication that positively addresses the dynamic nature of the new emerging communicative practices where the boundaries of cultures and languages are transgressed. As Baker (2022) clearly states that the aim is to explore transcultural communication as a new concept which is well-suited to investigating such fluid, dynamic and complex connections, and interactions. Therefore, they confirmed clearly that they are not arguing for a new 'paradigm shift' that dismisses previous ones in research, but to extend the field and open new areas for discussion.

Historically speaking, although the notion of the metaphor 'trans' was recently introduced in applied linguistics and intercultural communication research, but it is deep-rooted in other fields such as anthropology and ethnographical studies. For example, the term 'trans' is used as a counter to static depictions of culture and nations to highlight the complex process of colonisation and immigration that influenced the formation of Coban culture (Baker, 2022). Likewise, the term 'transculturation' was used in post-colonial studies to stand for the idea of 'contact zones' to describe 'social spaces' where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other (Baker, 2022). As a result, the complexity and hybridity of cultures (this trend views culture not in its unchangeable essence, but characterised by change and most importantly by mixedness or interconnectedness) are

generated resulting from the role of power and resistance in social relations within the contact zones with the possibility of new cultural forms emerging and transcending their cultural origins.

For this reason, some researchers noted that the static view of culture does not address the ongoing process of cultural production and interaction. Instead, they adopted a more recent philosophical argument in favour of adopting 'transculturality' over 'multiculturality' and 'interculturality' because transculturality goes beyond (the possibility to trespass or transgress the borders of the identifiable culture) the intercultural perspective of connections between different distinct cultures (Baker, 2022). Therefore, as with 'transcultural communication', the 'trans' metaphor is adopted over the 'inter' to indicate the transgression and transcendence of borders as part of transcultural processes where participants move through and across borders, altering the very nature of those borders (Baker, 2022).

Having explained the meaning of 'trans', proponents of transcultural communication identified the main principles or characteristics of transcultural communication which can be summarised in the following way: firstly, the trans metaphor replaces the inter metaphor to indicate that in such interactions, interlocutors can transgress and transcend linguistic and cultural borders. Secondly, through the process of transgressing and transcending boundaries, those very



boundaries themselves are transformed and potentially, open new social spaces and identities although previous structures and limitations may continue to influence. Thirdly, transcultural communication deals with communicative practices where cultural and linguistic differences are relevant to participants, but not necessarily linked to any group. Fourthly, transcultural communication views cultures as heterogeneous and cultural characterisations are contestable as they are influenced by previous characterisations, limitations, and power structures, but also open to the emergence of new social space, practices, and identities. Fifthly, participants move through and across scales rather than in-between; multiple scales may be simultaneously present and national cultures are one of many potential scales, ranging from the local to the global, alongside variable temporal scales and speeds from transient interactions and connections to long-term historical processes and influences. Sixthly, cultural practices and references can be constructed in situ and emergent participants are not necessarily in between any named cultures. Lastly, cultural and linguistic boundaries can, thus, be transcended, transgressed, and transformed (Baker, 2022).

It is worth noting that although the theorists of 'transcultural communication' have posed interesting ideas, there are no many empirical studies to support the tenets of transcultural

communication. Also, from these very few studies that discussed transcultural communication (Baker, 2022; Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019; Baker, 2018; Baker, 2016), they provided very few illustrative examples from previous empirical research that highlighted it.

Accordingly, as illustrated in those examples, 'inter' of intercultural communication becomes problematic since participants are not 'in-between' easily distinguished cultures and languages. Hence, based on 'trans' theories outlined above, participants can be viewed as drawing on resources of linguistic and other semiotic resources that do not and need not belong to categories of named languages and cultures (Baker, 2022).

In conclusion, transcultural communication appeared as a response to the need to adequately account for communication in which the links between languages and cultures are complex and fluid with participants making use of multiple spatiotemporal scales simultaneously. Such communication stretches the boundaries of intercultural communication perspectives, since it may not be possible to trace the origins of linguistic and cultural practices to any specific 'named' culture or language to question which cultures participants are 'in-between' or 'inter'. Therefore, trans metaphor in transcultural communication is better be able to represent communicative practices in which cultural and linguistic boundaries are moved through and across (Baker, 2022).

## **2.4 The cross-cultural pragmatics**

There are some scholars who indicate that the “cross-cultural pragmatics” (referring to the interaction of individuals from different societies or speech communities) adopts the same principles of the “applied sociolinguistics”; and added that the term “cross-cultural pragmatics” and the term “applied sociolinguistics” can be used interchangeably in the field of language learning and use (Rozina, 2011). Similarly, this claim about “cross-cultural pragmatics” has been supported by other researchers who indicate that “cross-cultural pragmatics” grew out of “socio-pragmatics” which was generated as a new line of inquiry within the domain of “pragmatics after 1983 from which some scholars divided “pragmatics” into two components: pragma-linguistics and socio-pragmatics (the sociological interface of pragmatics) (Huang, 2017).

Broadly, “cross-cultural” studies are studies that deal with contrasting two cultures’ ways of communication, and they use the term “cross-cultural” to mean comparing or contrasting other countries’ ways of doing things (Austin, 1998). Therefore, the work of cross-cultural pragmatics investigates how interlocutors from different cultures construct meaning in which different cultural ways of speaking are normally generated. For this reason, the most recurrent definition relatively provided by several scholars for the term “cross-cultural pragmatics” is that “It is a field of inquiry which compares the ways in

which two or more languages are used in communication” (Zahedi & Mehran, 2013, p. 400). Hence, the different cultural norms and people from different backgrounds are always considered when talking about cultural- pragmatics. In summary, the studying of speech acts, for example, from cross-cultural perspectives normally pays attention to contrastive patterns of pragmatic features; and both pragma-linguistics and socio-pragmatics aspects of language are considered (Zahedi & Mehran, 2013). Therefore, the cross-cultural studies of speech acts do not only consider linguistic factors, but also the cultural sides of the language.

Based on the above definitions, the fundamental tenet of cross-cultural pragmatics can concisely be summarised as that in different societies and communities, people normally speak differently; these differences in the ways of speaking are profound and systematic because they reflect different cultural values, or different hierarchies of values, different ways of speaking or different ways of communicative styles (Huang, 2017). Therefore, in the domain of cross-cultural pragmatics, scholars usually focus on studying communicative practices and preferences across cultures and languages; and hence, they draw their attention to misunderstandings and tensions that arise between linguistic cultural groups and individuals based on different potential expectations relating to norms of interaction and pragmatic misperceptions (Guillot, 2010).

According to these normal differences among individuals, societies and cultures, research indicates that when people from different cultural groups interact together in each context, they cannot assume that they share the same rules for interpreting each other's intentions (Austin, 1998). In the light of this, a risk of miscommunication or a possibility of misunderstanding is inevitable and can result eventually in a breakdown of communication between interlocutors, provided that the listener interpreted the meaning of an utterance in a way that was not meant or intended by the speakers (Rozina, 2011). For this reason, a researcher attempts to distinguish three potential degrees of misunderstanding between interlocutors during a communication: (1) overt misunderstanding that is immediately recognized and subsequently repaired, (2) covert misunderstanding that occurs when recognition is gradual, that is, either it gets gradually repaired, continues, or eventually comes to a halt, and (3) latent misunderstanding that occurs without sound reason in which an interactant has a feeling that has been misunderstood; and the issue under discussion remains unresolved (Rozina, 2011).

According to the types of misunderstanding mentioned above, it can be stated that the miscommunication or break down of conversation can even take place among interlocutors from the same social and cultural background. But this miscommunication can likely become more difficult and multiplies when interlocutors come from different

cultural and social backgrounds. One of the reasons for that is that when interlocutors from different societies or speech communities interact, they normally interact considering the pragmatic norms of the culture they belong to, and this often results in a clash of expectations which ultimately might give room to misunderstanding or might cause a risk of misperceptions of the linguistic behavior on the part of the other interlocutors. Moreover, if people adopt cross-cultural communication's norms across societies as well as within them, it is natural that different rules of interaction might cause stereotyping, prejudice, and even discrimination against the whole group of interlocutors (Rozina, 2011).

A clear example for this was the investigation of sales negotiations between American and Japanese businessmen. The Americans offered the Japanese what they thought was a generous price, when the Japanese did not react favourably and fell in silence; the Americans thought that the silence of Japanese was an indication of their dissatisfaction with the price. Then the Americans offered the Japanese more money for their goods. In the end, it was discovered that the Japanese businessmen used the conversational features of Japanese when communicating in English (Scarcella, 1990).

Apart from this, it is important to note that the communication is either written or spoken. Since the focus of this study is on the oral communication which comprises, both speaking and listening skills, it

is important to review the speaking production skill and its various models in research. It is now timely to turn to the speech production.

## **2.5 The speaking production**

There are various important theoretical perspectives on second language (L2) oral production in the fields of L2 acquisition. For example, Levelt (1989) considers speaking as one of the most complex and difficult skill, and indicates that although each normal child has natural tendency to acquire this skill, it takes his entire childhood to develop it in an extensive day-to-day interaction with others. Therefore, he considers the speaker as a very complex information processor as he transforms intentions, ideas, and emotions into a very fluent speech (Levelt, 1989).

To prove this difficulty of producing and processing speaking, Levelt (1989) used an example of a short conversation between a student and an academic as a case study to show how people generate fluent speech. Therefore, he proposes partitioning the speech processing into different components as an approach to understand the speech processing, which is still not understood to many people. This partitioning of speech processing is known as Levelt's model of speech production which is probably the most influential theory in relation to research into second language processing (Gan, 2012). According to research, Levelt's blueprint is widely accepted because it is well established and one of the crucial characteristics of it is its modularity

that accounts for the speed with which we speak (Lowie & Verspoor, 1984).

To some researchers, this model of speech production consists of four components: a conceptualiser, a formulator, an articulator, and the Lexicon. Generally, these components work autonomously in a sequential processing circle and each of them creates its output which works as an input to the other component. There is no direct interaction or feedback between these components, but there is interaction between subcomponents (Lowie & Verspoor, 1984).

However, some other researchers (Gan, 2012) indicate that Levelt's model comprises three major processing components (conceptualiser, formulator, and articulator), each of which functions differently in the process of speech production. Based on its function, the conceptualiser is responsible for conceptualising the message (generating and monitoring the message); the formulator is responsible for formulating the message (giving grammatical and phonological shape to the message) and the articulator is responsible for articulating the language (relieving chunks of internal speech and executing the message) (Gan, 2012; Sato, 2008). For example, when a person intends to speak, the speech process works in this way: firstly, the speaker selects information that its expression realises his communicative goal, called "macro- planning," then turn it into conceptual planning activity called microplanning. This creates the



“preverbal message” which will be sent to the formulator (Levelt, 1989).

But once this preverbal message was sent to be processed in the formulator, there will be no feedback from the formulator to the conceptualiser. Accordingly, they continue in this way in a linear static process. The interaction only takes place within the sub-modules. For example, when the preverbal message is sent to the formulator, the formulator translates this conceptual structure into a linguistic structure and creates the phonetic plan. The formulator does this in two steps: there is the grammatical encoder that accesses lemmas to produce the surface structure and then passes it on to the phonological encoder that creates feedback to the grammatical encoder at the same time. Then, there is the phonological encoder that builds a phonetic plan or internal speech for the lemmas to be sent to the articulator where it will be executed (Lowie, & Verspoor, 1984).

Although this blueprint is largely accepted among many linguistic approaches, it is also, in the same degree, largely criticised by many researchers. For example, Lowie and Verspoor (1984) who tried to adapt Levelt’s model to a dynamic language system, pointed that those present dynamic approaches to language processing do not view language as a stable and static system, but as instable and dynamic.

Lowie and Verspoor (1984) evaluated the modularity of Levelt's model and considered it as the strongest point of it, for two reasons: firstly, it provides an explanation for the speed of speech processing. Secondly, it allows subdivision for the speech production clearly into distinctive components such as preverbal thought, lexical selection, sentence formulation, articulation, etc. Nonetheless, they criticised it in relation to the modern approaches that are increasingly influenced by modern dynamic systems that view all variables continuously interacting (Lowie & Verspoor, 1984).

Furthermore, Lowie and Verspoor (1984) indicated that Levelt's model is neutral in relation to languages, that is, it does not indicate whether the processing is in the first or second language. According to their criticism to the monolingualism of Levelt's model, they pointed to De Bot's view that any model should consider the fact that "two languages" systems can be used with several degrees of mixing, from completely separated to strongly mixed (Lowie & Verspoor, 1984). In addition, there are other factors that should be considered: cross-cultural influence may happen at different degrees at all levels of the language. Also, proficiency levels differ for different reasons and the second language processing is not by necessity the same as that of the first language.

While Levelt's model is considered as a monolingual mode of speech production, De Bot's model is considered as one of the most

frequently used bilingual adaptation of Levelt's which is proposed by de Bot (Sato, 2008). Like Levelt, de Bot pointed that while the non-linguistic knowledge component used in macroplanning is not language-specific, the microplanning is language-specific (where the information needed for linguistic encoding is added) (Sato, 2008). De Bot assumes formulators of various language-specific where their development relies on factors like the linguistic distance between the two languages and the level of proficiency of the speaker in the languages involved (Sato, 2008). This means that there will be separate systems to be used for different languages.

Relevant to speech production process, research raises concerns about the extent to which this produced speech by L1 or L2 speakers like the Sudanese cohort under study is obvious, difficult, or comprehensible to listeners. Therefore, it is important to review this aspect of speech in a separate sub-section in the following pages. It is now timely to turn to the discussion of speech comprehensibility.

### **2.5.1 Speech comprehensibility**

To review speech intelligibility/comprehensibility in research literature, it is important to note that there are three linguistic terms that are similar in research: intelligibility, comprehensibility and interpretability. Also, they seem ambiguous and sometimes confusing because some of them have more than one definition and sometimes 'intelligibility' and 'comprehensibility', for example, are used

interchangeably. This is relevant to the exploration of communication difficulties between Sudanese learners and English native speakers as both of them are interacting in day-to-day mutual conversations; and hence, producing intelligible speech is important to both interlocutors. To suit the purpose of this study, I decided to use 'comprehensibility' instead of intelligibility because it points to understanding speech meaning within context by cohort under study (Pickering, 2006), rather than 'intelligibility' that points to the ability to identify individual words in and out of context (Matsuura, 2007).

In the following section I presented a review about a speech intelligibility with various aspects such as the definition of speech intelligibility and its differences with the definition of 'comprehensibility' and 'interpretability', reasons for its emergence into research, factors influencing it, how it can be achieved during speech production and how to assess speech intelligibility.

In fact, there are many definitions for speech intelligibility provided by many researchers. However, they are different and hence, speech intelligibility is used with more than one meaning in research, and they can be classified into two main trends. Below, I provided five of these definitions to highlight similarities and differences: (1) "Speech intelligibility is the extent to which the speaker's intended utterance is actually understood by a listener" (Yazan, 2015, p. 202), (2) "Intelligibility refers to word/utterance recognition" (Matsuura, 2007,

p. 293), (3) “The extent to which a speaker’s message is actually understood by a listener” (Munro & Derwing, 1995, p. 77), (4) “It is the ability of listeners to accurately recognize and record individual words” (Kirkpatrick, Deterding, & Wong, 2008, p. 361) and (5) “It is the principle that learners simply need to be understood” (Levis, 2005, p. 370). Taken together into comparison, some of these selected definitions of intelligibility (Matsuura, 2007; Kirkpatrick et al., 2008) besides many others in research, all refer to the ability of a listener to understand or recognize the meaning of the individual word or words he is exposed to from a speaker during a communication, whereas the other definitions (Yazan, 2015; Munro & Derwing, 1995; Levis, 2005) focus on understanding the meaning of a message. Hence, speech intelligibility has two meanings: (1) understanding meaning of individual words in interaction and (2) understanding meaning of speech in context during interaction.

The question that can be raised here, based on these definitions, is whether this speech intelligibility is wholly attributed to the responsibility or the role of the listener, speaker, or both. Clearly, research mostly indicates that intelligibility is not speaker or listener-centred but it is interactional process between speaker and hearer because ‘being intelligible’ means ‘being understood’ by an interlocutor at a given time in each situation (Pickering, 2006; Kirkpatrick et al., 2008). But nearly all previous empirical studies when

assessing intelligibility (the speech intelligibility assessment was discussed at the end of this section), have put the burden of speech intelligibility on the role of the listener because the assessment approaches that were adopted to assess intelligibility have wholly put their practical procedures to test speech intelligibility on the listeners (Masuura, 2007; Munro & Derwing, 1995; Munro, Derwing, & Morton, 2006; Munro, 2008). This implicitly means that it is the listener who bears the burden to identify the speech intelligibility. Hence, criticism was raised to these definitions as they restrict intelligibility on the listener's ability to accurately recognize and record individual words or meaning of utterances in context (Kirkpatrick et al., 2008). In addition, the definition of intelligibility in this sense linguistically penalises the non-native listeners of English like Sudanese learners (Roberts, 2021) as it excludes the role of the speaker to produce clear and comprehensible words or utterances.

Similarly, to distinguish intelligibility from comprehensibility, a researcher stated that while 'intelligibility' is a recognition of a word or utterance, 'comprehensibility' is an understanding of a word or utterance meaning (Matsuura, 2007). It seems from the previous definition that 'intelligibility' is very similar to 'comprehensibility' as both refer to the extent to which utterances or words are understood by listeners. For this reason, another researcher indicated that the only difference between intelligibility and comprehensibility is that

comprehensibility might be a higher level of understanding than intelligibility (Matsuura, 2007). Hence, comprehensibility seems very similar or equivalent to intelligibility based on this definition.

Although many researchers assigned specific meanings to intelligibility and comprehensibility, many researchers because of the similarity have used these terms interchangeably (Matsuura, 2007; Pickering, 2006). By reviewing several previous studies, intelligibility is sometimes used as equivalent to comprehensibility as researchers attributed intelligibility to recognition of utterances and comprehensibility to understanding meaning of utterances. However, another researcher has provided a clear difference between intelligibility and comprehensibility: for example, Pickering (2006) stated that while intelligibility is the ability of the learner to recognize individual words or utterances, comprehensibility is the ability of the listener to understand the meaning of the word or utterance in its given context. In comparison, this definition provides clear distinction between intelligibility and comprehensibility which is (the comprehensibility) the ability to understand words and utterances meaning within their context, whereas intelligibility is only to recognize the meaning of individual words or utterances without indicating the context. Accordingly, the distinction made by Pickering (2006) to comprehensibility from intelligibility is selected in this study as it is appropriate to the situation of Sudanese learners who interact

with English native speakers to understand the meaning of their speech within context.

Likewise, research indicates that ‘interpretability’ is defined as the ability of the listener to understand the speaker’s intentions behind the word or utterance (Pickering, 2006). In contrast to comprehensibility, interpretability is clearly distinguished from intelligibility as it focuses on “latent meanings” of utterances to discover the underlying ideas or hidden concepts behind the surface meaning of words and utterances by looking at any signs or symbols that may lead to these latent ideas.

Relevant to this, it is important to review the reasons that led to the appearance of concerns about speech intelligibility in research. Researchers, in general, attributed the debate about speech intelligibility to a basic single reason and the subsequent reasons that descended from it: the internationality of English language and its various aspects, varieties and accents worldwide (Matsuura, 2007; Pickering, 2006; Kirkpatrick et al., 2008; Yazan, 2015; Munro, 2008; Munro & Derwing, 1995; Derwing & Munro, 2005; Nelson, 2011). This spread of English worldwide generated the existence of numerous varieties of English and hence, led to the idea of ‘world Englishes’ or English as a lingua franca (ELF) (Pickering, 2006) which is defined as a contact language spoken by people who do not share a native language (Pickering, 2006). As a result, the increase of English users



has raised concerns that speakers of different accents may not be intelligible to each other (Yazan, 2015) as many previous empirical studies indicated. Hence, the accent-intelligibility distinction was one of the reasons (Munro, 2008) led to the appearance of the debate over speech intelligibility because many listeners are unable to recognize phonetic segments, words and other larger units that are pronounced with a certain accent (Munro & Derwing, 1995).

Also, some other researchers have raised concerns that some English native speaker varieties are not internationally intelligible, whereas there are many other non-native speaker varieties are more intelligible throughout the world than other English native speaker varieties (Kirkpatrick et al., 2008). In addition, the problem of accent intelligibility distinction was exacerbated by some researchers when accent is present in the real world where incidents were reported about many L1 or L2 speakers who were harassed, denied employment, or even terminated from jobs (Munro, 2008). Likewise, it is likely acceptable that employees worldwide who work in certain public jobs such as telephone receptionists, teachers and nurses should be able to communicate clearly in the language of clients, students, patients, and visitors (Munro, 2008).

Relevant to this review, there are the concerns about the factors influencing the speech production intelligibility. In research, there are many factors: (1) there are several previous empirical studies noted

that the foreign accent has also influenced speech intelligibility of non-native speakers when they are listeners, whereas other studies reported the absence of foreign accent influence in speech understanding (Matsuura, 2007; Munro et al., 2006; Munro & Derwing, 1995; Clopper & Bradlow, 2008; Hahn, 2004). Despite these different views about accent, it is worth noting that the accent variation problem is a common theme reported by all Sudanese participants in this study (See Section 5.2). This shows that the role of the foreign accent, theoretically, is neutral towards speech intelligibility; it depends on the context of the conversation between the interlocutors: the level of language proficiency, familiarity with a certain accent, their familiarity with each other, etc.

Furthermore, (2) other researchers indicated that lexical variation between the interlocutors may likely affect intelligibility in the form of variety of specific idioms or in the use of localised vocabulary terms, or vocabulary that is unknown to one or other of the interlocutors (Pickering, 2006). As this study indicates, the use of local phrases is a basic factor that impedes comprehension of the output produced by English native speakers (See Section 5.7; Section 5.7.4).

Also, (3) other researchers indicated that there are several factors relevant to the listener which may influence his understanding of the speech such as his familiarity with a particular speech event, topic, accent or specific interlocutor (Fayer & Krasinski, 1987), his positive or

negative attitude towards the speaker, his experience with the phonological representations of the target language, that is the more he is exposed to a certain speech production, the more intelligible it will be to him (Pickering, 2006).

To overcome or reduce the influence of the above factors that influence intelligibility and facilitate speech comprehension, research proposes some of the strategies that can be adopted to achieve this. Firstly, researchers indicated that non-native speakers/ listeners must or can familiarise themselves with four variables: familiarity with the topic, familiarity with native/non-native speakers' speech in general, familiarity with a particular native/non-native speaker accent and familiarity with a particular native/non-native speaker (Matsuura, 2007). This goes in line with what both Sudanese cohort and English native speakers reported that they adopt preparatory strategies as methods to familiarise themselves with accents of each other to help improving mutual conversations (See Section 5.8.9; Section 5.9.11).

As a proof to familiarity that can facilitate speech intelligibility, a researcher in Japan exposed students to two different native-speaker English varieties: American English and Irish English. He found that some listeners' familiarity with the Irish accent had a significant effect on their understanding to the speech production (Matsuura, 2007). Secondly, another researcher suggested the idea of 'accommodation' strategy between speakers and listeners through which interlocutors

adjust their speech to lead to convergence with their interlocutors' speech (Yazan, 2015). Through this strategy, the successful interaction between interlocutors depends wholly on the extent to which English speakers and listeners are prepared to listen to and understand varieties of speech to maintain a positive and receptive attitude towards understanding speech. Thirdly, other researchers proposed teaching core features of intelligibility-based pronunciation that adhere to English native speaker norms that help to reduce the effect of the foreign accent (Yazan, 2015).

Lastly, research has focused attention on how to assess or measure speech intelligibility when listeners (the approaches adopted to assess speech comprehensibility focused on the listener) are exposed to speech production. In fact, there is no universally agreed way of measuring speech intelligibility (Pickering, 2006; Munro & Derwing, 1995). But researchers have proposed a wide range of choices to assess L2 speech intelligibility: researchers described 19 different approaches for speech intelligibility assessment (Munro, 2008). Each of these approaches has its own advantages and disadvantages, but none can give a complete image of all aspects of speech intelligibility (Munro, 2008).

It is important to note that the choice of a particular approach depends on many factors such as the type of speech material that is available or that can be elicited, the kinds of demands that can be

placed on listeners, and the specific research questions to be addressed (Munro, 2008). Many researchers have employed listeners' orthographic transcriptions in their attempts to assess speech intelligibility. For example, within this approach, some researchers measured intelligibility by counting the total number of words that listeners transcribed correctly, whereas others counted the percentages of the key words recognized by the listeners (Munro & Derwing, 1995; Munro et al., 2006). Other approaches assessed intelligibility by employing several different methods such as comprehension questions, cloze tests, picture selection in response to a stimulus and determination of truth value (Munro et al., 2006; Munro, 2008).

In summary, for the best ways to measure speech intelligibility, both interlocutors (the speaker and listener) must be considered as speech production is a mutual process between both interactants. While the listener is responsible to recognize the word/utterance or to understand the meaning of a word or utterance, the speaker as well is responsible to produce intelligible speech, considering the context in which conversations take place.

Finally, to develop the L2 learners' communicative competence with its different and relevant aspects such as inter-cultural communication, pragmatic competence, strategic competence, cross-cultural pragmatics and speech production skill, these learners should

as well be made aware of the psycholinguistic and socio-linguistic factors that may influence their attempts to develop their communicative competence. Being aware of them, may hopefully help L2 learners to positively cope with these factors and overcome any potential negative effects of them to improve their linguistic proficiency. It is now timely to turn to the display of these factors.

## **2.6 Factors influencing L2 learner's communicative competence**

There are some potential psycholinguistic and socio-linguistic factors that may affect the development of the communicative competence for the Sudanese ESOL learners and other L2 learners. These factors may have either positive or negative impact on the development of the learners' communicative competence, whereas others may stand as neutral towards the learner's performance as some of them are flexible that they are likely to be turned to either positive or negative factors: it depends on the language learner's purpose and performance. Moreover, some of these factors may have influenced learners in the past, others may influence them at present, while others may affect them during both terms.

To begin with, it is noted in research that a good 'language capacity' mostly plays a positive role in the language learner's proficiency at present, whereas a lack of English language knowledge and language transfer (It is the influence of one language system on another, usually is that the system of the first language influences the system of the

second language (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2013)) are negative factors on the development of second language learning. In the case of the Sudanese ESOL learners, they may transfer the Arabic language system to the English language, which is completely different from Arabic and hence, may negatively influence their language performance. But a factor such as the previous L2 learning experience that refers to the degree of the previous experience of learning a second or foreign language (Dornyei & Ryan, 2015) may stand as neutral; and it is up to the learner whether to turn it to a positive or negative factor in his present language performance (Dornyei & Ryan, 2015).

At present, the factors that influence the learner's proficiency can also be classified into three groups: positive, negative, and neutral. It is important to note that most of these factors are either positive or neutral towards the development of the language learner's communicative competence, whereas very few of them have a negative influence on the language learner's performance. In the following pages, I provided definitions for various factors relevant to these three groups.

For the positive factors, there are several factors that positively influence the language learner's communicative competence such as motivation, integrative orientation, autonomy, etc. (1) To define motivation from the etymological perspective, the word "motivation"

was derived from the Latin verb 'movere' and meaning 'to move' (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2013). It is of great importance in second language acquisition because it is the impetus to start L2 learning and later will be the driving force to sustain the long learning process (Dornyei & Ryan, 2015). Therefore, the students' motivational learning behaviour is their effort and persistence in learning English (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2013). But what motivates learners in general and the Sudanese ESOL learners, is what they gain or achieve behind their learning such as doing further education or finding good jobs.

(2) Integrative orientation: it means that to learn a language of other people, a learner should reflect a friendly and personal interest in the society and culture of the other group (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2013). In contrast, if you do not love the language, culture, and the people among whom you live, you will always be in trouble, hatred, tension, and anxiety. Accordingly, your ability to learn the language of these people will negatively be affected. Adopting this in the case of Sudanese ESOL learners, it will be a positive factor for them to develop their communicative competence.

(3) Autonomy: it is the person's capacity to take charge or control of one's own learning. In this sense, the learner should take all decisions concerning all aspects of his learning: determining the objectives, defining the contents and progression, selecting methods and techniques to be used, monitoring the procedure of acquisition



properly speaking and evaluating what has been acquired (Benson, 2013). Hence, autonomous learning is a positive factor in learning a foreign language.

(4) Willingness to communicate: this concept describes how there are number of factors interact to influence an individual's likelihood of starting communication in a specific situation. It is unlike language anxiety in which people avoid interacting with L2 speakers for many personal causes (Dornyei & Ryan, 2015). Many language educators have encountered people who tend to avoid entering L2 communication situations even though they have a high level of communicative competence. This shows that some people avoid talking to others because they are shy, or they are not sociable people (Dornyei & Ryan, 2015).

In addition, there are other factors that positively influence language proficiency such as (5) Learning strategies which are the strategies people employ to learn the language (Cook, 2012), (6) creativity which is the ability that a learner of language possesses to do innovative things (Dornyei & Ryan, 2015), (7) language aptitude which is the desire that a language learner possesses to learn a language (Dornyei & Ryan, 2015), (8) intrinsic knowledge which is the innate knowledge that every human being or learner born with (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2013), (9) motivational learning behaviour which is the personal motivation of learning for everybody (Dornyei & Ryan, 2015), (10) Self-

esteem that denotes the extent to which a person values himself and his capacities to learn and use the language (Mitchell et al., 2013) and (11) the international posture which is the learners' attitude towards English as an international language (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2013).

In contrast, Language anxiety is one of the negative factors that can influence learners' communicative competence. This term is used by social psychologists to refer to the feelings of nervousness and unease when learning or using a new language (Mitchell et al., 2013). It can be seen as the normal feeling since the speaker of a foreign language will be under the stress of facing potential difficulties during the conversation. Hence, it is a negative factor that influences everybody speaking a foreign language.

Unlike positive and negative factors, there are several neutral factors that can be used by the language learners to be positive factors to help in the development of their communicative competence. To begin with, (1) one of these factors is the learner's personality that refers to one's whole character and nature that represent his characteristics that account for consistent patterns of feeling, thinking, and behaving (Dornyei & Ryan, 2015). Personality can be a positive or negative factor in developing proficiency because people differ from each other, and they range from aggressive to kind or from lazy to active. Also, there is (2) the factor of the person's self-concept which is the understanding of a person to his own personality (Dornyei & Ryan,

2015); and the (3) attribution process which is the causal attributions one makes of past successes and failures that have consequences on future achievement accordingly. It assumes that people try to understand the causal determinants of their past successes and failures; and those different types of causal attributions affect behaviour differently. For example, failure that is attributed to stable factors such as low ability (e.g., I failed because I am stupid), this person will not struggle to succeed, and his explanation will hinder future achievement behavior more than the failure that is attributed to unstable factors (e.g., I failed because I have not prepared well for the test). This person will struggle to succeed (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2013). This means that any negative or positive evaluation provided and adopted by the learner will affect his language proficiency. In addition, there are other factors such as (4) instructional context that indicates the setting in which a language learner learns a language, whether it is helpful or not (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2013), (5) social and cultural context which is the type of the social and cultural context in which people learn the language, whether it is friendly or unfriendly (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2013), (6) individual differences which are the characteristics of L2 learners that may influence their rate of L2 learning or their ultimate success in learning L2 (Mitchell et al., 2013), (7) mental ability which is the degree of intelligence that any individual person possesses to learn the language (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2013) and (8) the language attitudes which are the attitudes of the learner

towards the target language, its speakers and the learning context may play some roles in his success or failure of learning the target language (Mitchell et al., 2013).

## **2.7 The communication difficulty**

To investigate the communication difficulties between Sudanese learners and their peer English native speakers in the United Kingdom, it is important in this review to find out what it is the “communication difficulties” in research literature. This understanding is important in this study to know the nature of this difficulty to find a solution for it through classroom and outside classroom activities. Also, it is important to discuss the reasons that lead to the generation of the communication difficulties. In research, there are more than one definition for communication difficulty provided by different researchers that will be discussed in this section of the review.

Scarcella (1990) explored the communication difficulty in the context (communication difficulty across different cultures) of the American experience. From the outset, she confirmed that when non-native speakers converse with native speakers of a certain language, communication difficulties often arise. Specifically, this may indicate that the cause of the communication difficulty is not only linguistic insufficiency, but there is the influence of other factors such as the differences in the cultural background and knowledge. Therefore, Scarcella (1990) appropriately defines the term “communication

difficulties” as referring to “The particular problems that result when conversationalists do not share the same knowledge of the rules governing conversation” (p. 337). It is any problem that arises when different speakers employ different rules of interaction during mutual conversation, and hence, their mutual conversation is obstructed or they are unable to continue their conversation.

To shed a light on the reasons and rules governing conversations, Scarcella (1990) refers to the influence of the socio-cultural context. She pointed that an interlocutor from different cultural background applies the same rules differently such as thematic development, turn-taking, and topic change. For example, when communication difficulties happen frequently in conversations between native and non-native speakers when conversing, the non-native speakers often transfer the conversational rules of their first language into the second language. For this reason, research indicates that sometimes the inaccuracy or even wrong character judgment arises from such transfer of the rules. For example, interruptions in conversations are considered rude in USA, whereas in Iran interruptions may be associated with friendliness. This idea poses the overlap or the influence of the cultural differences and sociological factors on the communication difficulties besides linguistic incapacity. A clear example for this was the investigation of sales negotiations between American and Japanese businessmen (See Section 2.3.2). This

example of the Americans and Japanese businessmen does not show how cultural differences disturb communication, but it also shows how it can even lead to conveying of inappropriate or incorrect messages. Therefore, communication problems can arise either of linguistic insufficiency or of differences in the cultural background.

In another relatively recent study, a researcher indicates that the term “communication problem” is used in a similar sense to “communication difficulty”, and he defined it as the recognition by an interlocutor at a certain point of the conversation that his linguistic capacity is insufficient to continue the conversation to reach a communicative goal and for this reason, he uses communication strategies to go further with his conversation (Sato, 2008). Unlike the previous one, this definition wholly attributes the communication difficulty to linguistic insufficiency and neglects the context in which language is used.

To summarise, these are two definitions of communication difficulties; one arises because of cultural differences, whereas the other one arises because of linguistic reasons. To this study, I combined the features of the two definitions to adopt a mixed concept that sees the communication problem or difficulty as a hurdle arising either of linguistic insufficiency or of differences in the cultural background during conversations.

Last but not least, research indicates that when interlocutors during a mutual conversation encounter a communication difficulty, they mostly employ a communication strategy or communication strategies to overcome the communication difficulty and push forward their conversation (Bialystok, 1990). Therefore, it is important to review communication strategies and their various aspects in research. It is now timely to turn to communication strategies.

## **2.8 Communication strategies: an overview**

In relation to the investigation of the communication difficulties encountered by Sudanese learners during conversations with English native speakers, it is also important to know how Sudanese learners deal (these efforts are known as communication strategies) with these communication difficulties. Accordingly, this section of the review investigated the communication strategies which are important not only to overcome communication difficulties, but also to enhance conversations between interlocutors. The review comprises different aspects of these strategies such as their definitions, importance of communication strategies for conversations, the interlocutor's use of them, the difference between them and learning strategies, taxonomies of communication strategies and the proposed taxonomy of communication strategies that was employed in this study.

### **2.8.1 Definition of communication strategies**

There are different definitions of communication strategies provided in research. Bialystok (1990) provided these definitions of communication strategies over time to see whether there are any differences or similarities between them (See Table 3).

**Table 3. Different definitions of communication strategies.**

Researcher	Definition of CSs
Corder, 1977	“Systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his meaning when faced with some difficulty” (Bialystok, 1990, p. 3).
Tarone, 1980	“Mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures are not shared” (Bialystok, 1990, p. 3).
Faerch & Kasper, 1983	“Potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communication goal” (Bialystok, 1990, p. 3).
Stern, 1983	“Techniques of coping with difficulties in communicating in an imperfectly known second language” (Bialystok, 1990, p. 3).

By looking at the above definitions of “communication strategies”, they nearly refer to the same concept and similar in meaning. According to them, communication strategies are techniques, plans or steps used by interlocutors to negotiate meaning and push forward the conversation when they encounter a difficulty because of language insufficiency. Similarly, they all attribute the use of the communication strategy to the emergence of a communication difficulty during the flow of conversation between the interlocutors.



However, they neglected the fact that the communication strategy can also be used to enhance the conversation and learn from other interlocutors during this conversation.

Recently, some researchers provided another definition which is also like the above definitions. They view communication strategy as the ability to be able to use different means to solve any language related difficulties to ensure communication process (Kuen et al., 2017). Unlikely, Oxford (2011) indicates that the insistence of learners to continue the conversation despite difficulties keeps the door open for language learning and continuation of the conversation. She stated that “By continuing to use the L2 despite knowledge gaps with the aid of, for example, paraphrasing, L2 learners can keep the door open to both communication and further learning” (p. 90). Accordingly, second/foreign language learners should be encouraged to continue their conversations, using different communication strategies, despite facing difficulties, because by doing so, they will be able to learn and develop their language proficiency.

To summarise, these definitions show that communication strategies are used for three reasons: to solve a communication problem, to push further a conversation, or to learn a language. Also, a reader can add another reason that communication strategies can be used to enhance the communication between interlocutors.

### **2.8.2 Communication strategies and learning strategies**

To highlight communication strategies, it is important to explore the difference between them and L2 learning strategies. In research, sometimes communication strategies are somewhat considered as overlapping with learning strategies (Dadour & Robbins, 1996), and when considering authors' definitions, there seems to be a lack of consensus among them as to whether learning strategies should include communication strategies. The reason is that it would be difficult to deny the fact that the process of learning is sometimes goes hand in hand with the process of communication (Macaro, 2001). Therefore, there is some similarity between 'learning strategies' and 'communication strategies' and hence, many learners and researchers confuse between them. Despite this, some other researchers make a clear distinction between learning strategies and communication strategies. So, while Macaro (2001) defines learning strategies as the behaviours and thoughts that a learner engages in during the learning to influence the learner's encoding process, other researchers define communication strategies as the actions that speakers use to achieve communicative goals, mostly when running into a problem of missing knowledge (Dadour & Robbins, 1996). For the purpose of this study, we tend to clearly differentiate between learning strategies and communication strategies by adopting the following definitions for both: (1) the second language learning strategies are the strategies that refer to intentional and goal-oriented attempts taken by learners to improve their knowledge and understanding of the target language

(Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2008); and (2) communication strategies are strategies used by language speaker to overcome obstacles encountered during conversations by providing the speaker with an alternative form of expression for the intended meaning (Bialystok, 1990). To summarise this, 'communication strategies' are strategies for language use and 'learning strategies' are strategies for developing linguistic and socio-linguistic competence in the target language (Nakatani & Goh, 2007).

### **2.8.3 Importance of communication strategies**

Communication strategies are important to build a successful conversation for the first or second language learners and speakers. In fact, the various definitions of communication strategies that were provided by various researchers indicated the immediate relationship between these strategies and solutions of communications problems (Bialystok, 1990) which are sometimes referred to as challenges, disruptions, hurdles, hitches, etc.

Therefore, their importance arises from their functions during mutual conversations: Firstly, Bialystok (1990) states clearly that communication strategies are "systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his meaning when faced with some difficulty" (p. 3). In this extract, the communication strategies are employed to solve communication difficulties during conversations. Secondly, Cohen (1990) pointed that speaking to communicate exposes the

interlocutor to challenges during the flow of his speech. As a result, the speaker should use several means to facilitate the task of speaking in a target language. Here, they are used to facilitate and enhance the flow of conversation, which cannot continue without the use of communication strategies.

Thirdly, Cook (1996) states, “Communication strategies can be ways of filling vocabulary gaps in the first or second language” (p. 87). He pointed that it is important to use strategies to fill in vocabulary gap to compensate for limited vocabulary size.

Fourthly, Macaro (2001) strongly linked learning strategies to communication strategies, and he confirmed that it is difficult to deny the fact that the process of learning goes simultaneously with the process of communication. Also, he confirmed that by learning to maintain communication through different strategies, we keep the conversation continues. Furthermore, he added that in a conversation you also learn through the feedback from others.

Fifthly, some researchers pointed out that communication strategies can help to raise linguistic competence. For instance, Nakatani and Goh (2011) noted that students of low level in the target language can use communication strategies such as paraphrasing, using gestures, and asking questions for clarification to enhance the effectiveness of communication with interlocutors.

Finally, Cohen (1990) pointed out that communication strategies are important even to successful speakers. He stated that as well as successful speakers are willing to talk, they are also willing or exposed to make errors. According to him, it is not surprising that errors are made because to produce a sentence in a target language, the learner must involve in the so called 'mind-boggling' series of task that all need the use of communication strategies.

Since research confirms that communication strategies are important by the different functions they provide in interaction, it is also important to shed the light on the learner's use of communication strategies. It is now timely to turn to this in the following section.

#### **2.8.4 Learner's use of communication strategies**

There are some researchers focused on the practical side of learners' use of communication strategies and investigated the factors that determine learners' selection and application of the communication strategies. Bialystok (1990) has addressed and examined the factors that determine how learners select communication strategies. He noted that a selection of a specific strategy is governed by identifiable factors such as proficiency of the learner, elicitation task, influence of the first language and speaking in a second language.

#### **2.8.5 Proficiency of the learner**

The first factor that is expected to determine the choice of a specific communication strategy is the proficiency level of the speaker. Accordingly, some strategies may be too sophisticated for learners of limited linguistic and communicative competence and therefore, they may be less appropriate for them to use (Bialystok, 1990). This is a general claim in research, but among previous empirical studies, their findings differ. There are some studies examined the relationship between L2 proficiency and the selection of strategies, but the results are mixed, and researchers failed to make any distinction between them. In line with that, there are some studies tried to test the relationship between proficiency and strategy selection; and one of these studies examined the use of communication strategies in a group of students speaking French as L2. The level of students is mixed with both advanced and regular. The results showed that advanced students relatively used L2-based strategies more than regular students who focused on L1-based strategies (Bialystok, 1990).

#### **2.8.5.1 Elicitation task**

With elicitation task they mean the features of the communication situation and the number of the procedures used to produce data for the analysis of the communication strategies that were used. It includes picture description, picture reconstruction, translation, sentence completion, conversation, narration, instruction, word transmission and interview. Researchers confirm that these

methodological differences may influence the interlocutor's selection of a specific communication strategy. Therefore, some researchers stated that the choice of strategy does not relate so much to the task, but to the nature of the problem (Bialystok, 1990).

### **2.8.5.2 Influence of the first language**

Research indicates that second-language learners who are different in their first language select differently from the classification of communication strategies. And one of the areas that have recently received research focus is 'language transfer'. It is confirmed now that there is insertion of L1 terms into L2 speech, building the communication strategy of 'conscious transfer'. Therefore, researchers saw that learners transfer terms from an L1 to an L2 as a function of several factors (Bialystok, 1990).

### **2.8.5.3 Speaking in a second language**

The selection and using of communication strategies by L2 learners is relatively the same as that of the L1 learner. It depends on many factors: linguistic competence, context, and individual differences from one learner to another. It is not reasonable to provide one general opinion to all learners. However, some researchers expect that all L2 learners to behave in the same way as L1 learners when selecting communication strategies. For example, Bialystok (1990) states "The solutions adopted for second-language communication are just as prevalent when speaking a first language" (p.54).

## **2.8.6 Taxonomies of communication strategies**

Since the purpose of the investigation in this study is to explore the communication difficulties and the strategies used to overcome them, it is important to highlight the different categories of communication strategies so that learners will be aware of them to develop their strategic competence. Therefore, in this section of the review I tried to highlight some of these taxonomies of communication strategies.

In research, taxonomies of communication strategies are defined as systematic organisational structures for a range of various events used by various learners and interlocutors within a domain of language communication (Bialystok, 1990). To the best of my knowledge, there are 13 typologies of communication strategies now (Ellis, 2015; See Table 4). These different taxonomies are characterised by the high degree of flexibility like most other things that can be classified in more than one way. Their classification is based on their shared features and therefore, the position of subjects of taxonomies changes from one taxonomy to another (Bialystok, 1990). To highlight the different typologies of communication strategies, I provided the following table to show how they were manifested in research over time. Then, I provided an explanation for the communication strategies as displayed in Tarone's (1977) typology as the first taxonomy which forms the basis for other taxonomies in research. Then, I provided a complete explanation for Cook's (2012) typology as



the most updated one in research that contains all types of communication strategies displayed in the previous typologies. Finally, I created a proposed typology of communication strategies out of those typologies to be used as a coding-scheme for strategies in this study.

**Table 4. Taxonomies of communication strategies (Taken from Alahmed, 2017, p. 40).**

Tarone (1977)	Farch & Kasper (1983)	Bialystok (1983)	Paribakht (1985)	Willems (1987)	Nijmegen Group (1987)
<b>Avoidance</b>	<b>Formal reduction</b>	<b>L1-based strategies</b>	<b>1.Linguistic approach</b>	<b>Reduction strategies</b>	<b>Conceptual strategies</b>
Topic avoidance	Phonological	Language switch	Semantic contiguity	<b>Formal reduction</b>	Analytic
Message abandonment	Morphological	Foreignizing	- <b>Subordinate</b>	-Phonological	Holistic
<b>Paraphrase</b>	Syntactic	Transliteration	- <b>Comparison</b>	-Morphological	<b>Linguistic/code strategies</b>
Approximation	Lexical	<b>L2-based strategies</b>	Positive comparison	-Syntactic	Morphological creativity transfer
Word coinage	<b>Functional reduction</b>	Semantic contiguity	Analogy	-Lexical	
Circumlocution	Actional red.	Description	Negative comparison	<b>Functional reduction</b>	
<b>Conscious transfer</b>	Modal red.	Word coinage	Contrast and opposite	-Message abandonment	
Literal translation	Reduction of prepositional content	<b>Non-linguistic strategies</b>	Antonymy	-Meaning replacement	
Language switch	Topic avoidance		Circumlocution	-Topic avoidance	
<b>Appeal for assistance</b>	Message abandonment		- <b>Physical description</b>		
<b>Mime</b>			Size, Shape, Colour		

<p>Meaning replacement</p> <p><b>Achievement strategies</b></p> <p><b>Compensatory strategies</b></p> <p>Code switching</p> <p>Interlingual transfer</p> <p>Intralingual transfer</p> <p><b>IL-based strategies</b></p> <p>Generalization</p> <p>Paraphrase</p> <p>Word coinage</p> <p>Restructuring</p> <p>Cooperative strategies</p> <p>Non-linguistic strategies</p> <p>Retrieval strategies</p>		<p>Material constituent features</p> <p>Elaborated features</p> <p>-Locational property</p> <p>-Historical property</p> <p>-Other features</p> <p>-Functional description</p> <p>Metalinguistic clues</p> <p><b>2.Contextual approach</b></p> <p>Linguistic context</p> <p>Use of L2 idioms and proverbs</p> <p>Transliteration of L1 language</p> <p>Idioms and proverbs</p> <p>Idiomatic transfer</p> <p><b>3.Conceptual approach</b></p> <p>Demonstration</p> <p>Exemplification</p> <p>Metonymy</p> <p>Mime</p>	<p><b>Achievement strategies</b></p> <p><b>Paralinguistic strategies</b></p> <p><b>Interlinguistic strategies</b></p> <p>-</p> <p>Borrowing/code switching</p> <p>-Literal translation</p> <p>-Foreignizing</p> <p>Intralingual strategies</p> <p>-Approximation</p> <p>-Word coinage</p> <p>-Paraphrase</p> <p>Description</p> <p>Circumlocution</p> <p>Exemplification</p> <p>-Smurfing</p> <p>-Self-repair</p> <p>-Appeal for assistance</p> <p>Explicit</p>
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			Replacing verbal output Accompanying verbal output	Implicit Checking questions -Initiating repair	
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**Table 4. (continued): Taxonomies of communication strategies (Taken from Alahmed, 2017, p. 41).**

Bialystok (1990)	Poulisse (1993)	Dornyei & Scott (1995a, 1995b)	Rababah (2001)	Dobao and Martinez (2007)	Mariani (2010)
<b>Analysis-based strategies</b> -Circumlocution -Paraphrase -Transliteration -Word coinage Mime <b>Control-based strategies</b> -Language switch -Ostensive definition -Appeal for help -Mime	Substitution strategies Substitution plus strategies Reconceptualization strategies	<b>Direct strategies</b> <b>Resource deficit-related strategies</b> -Message abandonment -Message reduction -Message replacement -Circumlocution -Approximation -Use of all-purpose words -Word-coinage -Restructuring	<b>A.L1-based strategies</b> 1.Literal translation 2.Language switch a.L1 slips and immediate insertion b.L1 appeal for help C.L1-optimal meaning strategy d.L1-retrieval strategies e.L1 ignorance	<b>Avoidance strategies</b> a) Topic avoidance b) Message abandonment c)Semantic avoidance d)Message reduction <b>Achievement strategies</b> 1-Paraphrase a) Approximation b) Word coinage c)Circumlocution <b>2-Conscious transfer</b> a) Borrowing	<b>A-Meaning-expression strategies</b> 1-using an all-purpose word 2-using a more general word 3-using a synonym or an antonym 4-using examples instead of general category 5-using definitions or descriptions 6-using approximations 7-paraphrasing 8-self-correcting, rephrasing, repairing

		-Literal translation -Foreignizing -Code switching -Use of similar sounding words -Mumbling -Omission -Retrieval -Mime <b>Own-performance problem-related strategies</b> -Self-rephrasing -Self-repair <b>Other-performance problem-related strategies</b> -Comprehension check -Own-accuracy check	acknowledge ment strategy <b>B.L2-based strategies</b> 1.Avoidance strategies a. Message abandonment b. Topic avoidance 2.Word coinage 3.Circumlocution 4.Self-correction/restructuring 5.Approximation 6.Mumbling 7.L2 appeal for help 8.Self-repetition 9.Use of similar	b) Language switch <b>3-Appeal for assistance</b> <b>4-Mime</b>	<b>B-Meaning-negotiation strategies</b> 9-asking for help 10-giving help <b>C-Conversation management strategies</b> 11-opening and closing a conversation 12-trying to open the conversation 13-managing turn-taking 14-avoiding or changing a topic 15-sing tactics to gain time <b>D-Para-and extra—linguistic strategies</b> 16-using intonation patterns, and sounds 17-using non-verbal language
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Other-performance problem-related strategies</li> <li>-Asking for repetition</li> <li>-Asking for clarification</li> <li>-Asking for confirmation</li> <li>-Guessing</li> <li>-Expressing non-understanding</li> <li>-Interpretive summary</li> <li>-Responses</li> <li>Indirect strategies</li> <li>Processing time pressure-related strategies</li> <li>-Use of fillers</li> <li>-Repetitions</li> <li>Own-performance problem-related strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>sounding words</li> <li>10.Use of all-purpose words</li> <li>11.Language acknowledgment</li> </ul>		
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		-Verbal strategy markers  -Other- performance problem-related strategies  -Feigning understanding  -			
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By looking at the different taxonomies of the communication strategies above, it can clearly be seen that one of the main problems that researchers encounter in communication strategies lies in the taxonomy of communication strategies themselves which vary considerably (See Table 4). For example, ‘topic avoidance’ and ‘message abandonment’ are classified as ‘avoidance strategies’ in Tarone’s (1977) typology, whereas they are classified as ‘reduction strategies’ in Farch and Kasper’s typology (1983). Also, topic avoidance was linked to the problem when the speaker tries not to talk about concepts for which the target language structure is not known, and the message abandonment takes place when the speaker starts to talk about an idea, but he cannot continue, and then stops in the middle of the conversation in Tarone’s (1977) typology. On the

other hand, the same strategies Farch and Kasper (1983) classify them under reduction strategies. They indicated that reduction strategies happen when speakers overcome a communication difficulty by abandoning the main goal of the message.

Furthermore, not all the typologies in research include the same communication strategies, given strategies appear in certain typology, but disappear in others. Also, the number and names of strategies are different from one typology to another which potentially creates a problem of overlapping between typologies, and hence, this may create a problem of classification.

Obviously, it is not possible or appropriate for the researcher in a short review as this to review all 13 taxonomies, so I reviewed in detail two of them to explain the meaning of the communication strategies: Tarone's taxonomy and Cook's taxonomy. Specifically, I started with Tarone's taxonomy because it is the oldest taxonomy that classified the communication strategies from which most of the successive taxonomies descended.

Tarone's taxonomy includes only nine subjects and seven target language concepts (Bialystok, 1990), but it displays most of the communication strategies that were discussed in subsequent taxonomies. First, this taxonomy was presented in brief in the Table 5 below and a detailed description for the categories followed that.

**Table 5. Taxonomy of Tarone (1977) for communication strategies.**

<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Sub-strategies</b>
Avoidance	(A)Topic avoidance (B)Message abandonment
Paraphrase	(A)Approximation (B)Word coinage (C)Circumlocution
Conscious transfer	(A)Literal translation (B)Language switch
Appeal for assistance	Appeal for assistance
Mime	Mime

### **2.8.6.1 Definitions of Tarone's strategies**

In this section, I provided definitions to the categories of the taxonomy which were presented in five major strategies with sub-strategies. Obviously, the five major strategies display different types of the decision taken during the conversation to solve the communication problem.

#### **2.8.6.1.1 Avoidance**

It is an intentional decision not to speak because you are expecting a communication problem such as unknown vocabulary or grammar, and it has two sub-strategies: topic avoidance and message abandonment. Specifically, in topic avoidance, interlocutors avoid speaking about topics where they present difficulties to them such as lack of vocabulary or information. Similarly, in message abandonment, when interlocutors find a difficulty in discussing a certain topic, they



give up and move to another one (Bialystok, 1990). To summarise, in both cases, interlocutors restrict their discussions to topics they linguistically control and avoid those in which they expect linguistic difficulties to make certain that their conversation continues.

#### **2.8.6.1.2 Paraphrase**

It is defined as the reformulating of a message in an alternative and acceptable target language construction because the previous form is not known or familiar to the interlocutor, and it is divided in three sub-strategies: approximation, word coinage and circumlocution (Bialystok, 1990). In approximation, the interlocutor uses a word or phrase known to be incorrect but, shares some semantic features in common with the correct word or phrase (e.g., 'worm' for 'silkworm'). In word coinage, the interlocutor creates a new word (e.g., 'person worm' to describe a picture of an animated caterpillar). In circumlocution, the interlocutor describes the features of the object instead of using the appropriate target language items) (Ellis, 2015).

#### **2.8.6.1.3 Conscious transfer**

It is an intentional decision from the interlocutor to translate word for word (literal translation) from his native language (e.g., a Mandarin speaker translated the Mandarin toast and produced 'He invites him to drink') or to insert words from another language (language switch) such as 'balon' for 'balloon' (Bialystok, 1990).

#### **2.8.6.1.4 Appeal for assistance**

In appeal for assistance, the interlocutor consults some authority to solve the problem: a native speaker, an expert, a dictionary, etc. (Ellis, 2015).

#### **2.8.6.1.5 Mime**

It happens when the interlocutor uses non-linguistic devices to refer to an object or a word such as clapping hands to indicate 'applause' or 'presence of someone' (Bialystok, 1990).

The above review was the explanation to the Tarone's typology which forms the basis for all the successive typologies of communication strategies. It is timely now to turn to the most recent typology presented by Cook (2012).

#### **2.8.6.2 Taxonomy of Cook's (2012)**

Recently Cook (2012) designed a trilogy model that tackles the classification of communication strategies from three approaches: social interaction, psychological problem-solving and compensation. First, I presented Cook's taxonomy in Table 6 below, then I provided detailed description for all main strategies and sub-strategies and discussed the differences or similarities between the two taxonomies.

**Table 6. Taxonomy of Cook (2012) with different approaches to L2 communication strategies.**

Communication strategies as social interaction.	Communication strategies as psychological problem-solving.	Communication strategies as compensation.
<p>*Paraphrasing: approximation, word coinage and circumlocution.</p> <p>*Falling back: translations from L1, language switch, appeal for assistance and mime.</p> <p>*Avoidance.</p>	<p>*Achievement strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-co-operative strategies.</li> <li>-non-cooperative strategies.</li> <li>-codeswitching.</li> <li>-foreignisation.</li> <li>-inter-language strategies (substitution, generalisation, description, exemplification, word-coinage, and restructuring).</li> </ul> <p>*Avoidance strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Formal (phonological, morphological, and grammatical).</li> <li>-Functional (actional, propositional and modal).</li> </ul>	<p>*Conceptual archistrategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-analytic strategy: breaks the meaning of the word down.</li> <li>-holistic strategy: tries for a word that is closest overall in meaning.</li> </ul> <p>*Linguistic archistrategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-morphological creativity (makes up a new word by adding an appropriate ending).</li> <li>-L1 transfer (uses a word from the first language instead).</li> </ul>

### 2.8.6.2.1 Cook's communication strategies as social interaction

This section deals with the categories of communication strategies that are used for social interaction between different interlocutors. When L2 learners or interlocutors communicate through a language which is not their mother tongue, they interact with others of different social background. They are unlike children learning their first language where mental and social development go together with the development of linguistic competence. Therefore, L2 interlocutors are always in need to express ideas that do not have means in their second language (Cook, 1996).

In this approach, when things go wrong, both interlocutors try to overcome their lack of shared meaning to develop their conversation by using certain communication strategies (besides production and learning strategies). In this case, they employ strategies such as paraphrasing, falling back and avoidance (Cook, 1996).

In paraphrasing, there are three sub-classification types of strategies: approximation, word coinage and circumlocution. Firstly, approximation type of strategy is used when the speaker of L2 tries to solve a communication difficulty by using a word that is approximately the same as the word he is missing or targeting. For example, he can use the word 'animal' for 'horse' so that the listener can deduce the meaning of the targeted word from the context (Cohen, 1990).

In coinage, as another type of paraphrasing, the speaker can make up a word to stand as a substitute for the unknown word: 'airball' for

'balloon' (Cohen, 1990). In the circumlocution as a third type of paraphrasing strategy, the L2 interlocutors start talking a long way around the word until they come to the targeted word or meaning of the word: 'when you make a container' for 'pottery' (Bialystok, 1990).

Moreover, the second overall type of communication strategy as social interaction is the 'falling back on the first language. It is sometime known as 'transfer' strategy. Here there are also four types of sub-classification types of strategies: translation from the first language, language switch, appeal for assistance and mime (Cook, 1996).

In the 'translation from the first language', for instance, a German-speaking student says, 'Make the door shut' as it is literally expressed in his German language, instead of saying 'shut the door'. For 'language switch,' the speaker can say 'That's a nice tirtil' (caterpillar), which is different from 'code switching' (where both speakers know the same two languages) (Cook, 1996) because the listener does not know the first language of the speaker. Concerning 'appeal for assistance', the listener can ask the speaker for some clarifications such as 'What is this', or 'What do you call this in your own language?' In 'miming', you can use gestures and body language in general to present an idea or meaning of something (Cohen, 1990). For example, a lady in France succeeded to get some candles from a shop by singing

'Happy Birthday' in English and miming blowing out candles (Cook, 1996).

Finally, the overall type of communication strategy as social interaction is 'avoidance'. In 'avoidance' strategy, the speaker does not talk about things he knows that they are difficult in the L2, whether as a whole topic or as individual words (Cohen, 1990).

#### **2.8.6.2.2 Cook's communication strategies as psychological problem-solving**

This approach deals with the opinions of some researchers who concentrate on the psychological dimension of what is going on in the L2 speaker's mind. Hence, they pointed out that when L2 interlocutors intend to express something through the second language, but face a difficulty to continue their conversation, they resort to the use of communication strategies to overcome this psychological difficulty (Cook, 1996).

Communication strategies as psychological problem-solving are classified into two basic types: 'achievement strategies' that attempt to solve the conversation problem and the 'avoidance strategies' that attempt to avoid it (Cook, 1996).

The achievement strategies are either 'cooperative strategies' or 'non-cooperative strategies'. In 'cooperative strategies', the speaker, for instance, appeal for assistance from the other interlocutor, which is

like that strategy used in the second overall type of communication strategy as a social interaction discussed above. While in 'non-cooperative strategies', the speaker attempts to solve the problem without recourse to others; and one of the basic aspects of 'non-cooperative strategy' is the strategy of 'falling back' on the first language when facing communication hitch. The speaker can 'fall back' on his first language by either 'codeswitching' or 'foreignisation'. In codeswitching the speaker normally skips the language as in 'Do you want to have some ah Zinsen?' (It is the German word that is used for 'interest'). In foreignisation, for instance, a Dane literally translates the 'Danish' word for vegetables into English as 'green things' (Cook, 1996).

Following that, another overall sub-classification type of achievement strategy is 'inter-language strategies' that are related to the learner's use of second language rather than the first language. These inter-language strategies, in turn, have six sub-classification types: substitution, generalisation, description, exemplification, word coining and restructuring. In substitution strategy, the speaker substitutes one word for another. For example, he can say 'if' for 'whether' if he cannot remember whether. In 'generalisation', the L2 speaker can use a more general word rather than a more particular one such as 'animal' for 'rabbit' and 'bird' for 'parrot'. In description, for instance, if the speaker cannot remember the word 'kettle,' he can

describe it as “the thing to boil water in”. Concerning exemplification, the speaker can give an example instead of the general term such as ‘cars’ for ‘transport’. As for word coining, the speaker can invent an imaginary word if he does not know it such as the French word ‘heurot’ for ‘watch’. Finally, in restructuring strategy the speaker can make another attempt at the same sentence, as in a learner struggling to find the rare English word for ‘sibling’: ‘I have two-er-one sister and one brother’ (Cook, 1996).

Finally, the second type of communication strategies that are used as psychological problem-solving is ‘avoidance strategies’ which are sub-classified into two types: ‘formal avoidance’ and ‘functional avoidance’. In formal avoidance, the speaker avoids linguistic forms, whether in pronunciation, in morphemes, or in syntax, while in functional avoidance, the speaker avoids different types of language functions (Bialystok, 1990).

#### **2.8.6.2.3 Cook’s communication strategies as compensation**

This approach that sees communication strategies as a compensatory factor, stood out because of criticism done by some researchers to both previous approaches of communication strategies: the social communicative strategies and the psychological strategies. They see these approaches as complementary ways of coping with problems of communicating in L2 as well as they are long, simplified, and confusing lists of strategies (Cook, 1996). Also, they observed that the common



factor between all communication strategies is that the L2 learner must use the L2 without knowing a word or some words and accordingly, the crucial factor is the lack of vocabulary. Hence, the strategies exist to plug the gaps in the learners' lack of vocabulary. Therefore, L2 learners use these strategies to compensate for limited vocabulary in their conversations (Cook, 1996).

Compensatory strategies are classified into two types: conceptual archistrategy and linguistic archistrategy. While 'conceptual archistrategy' is sub-classified into 'analytic strategy' and 'holistic strategy', the linguistic archistrategy is sub-classified into 'morphological creativity' and 'L1 transfer' (Cook, 1996).

Concerning the 'analytic strategy,' the learner normally tries to break the meaning of the word into parts and then convey these parts separately. For example, if a student is searching for the word 'parrot', he can say 'talk uh bird', taking the two parts 'bird that talks.' Unlikely, in 'holistic strategy' the learner thinks of the meaning of the word as a whole and attempts to use a word that is the closest approximation. For instance, if the student is seeking for the word 'desk', he can invent 'table' which seizes all salient features of 'desk' (Cook, 1996).

Following that, the second overall type of compensatory strategies is linguistic archistrategy which is sub-classified into 'morphological creativity' and 'L1 transfer'. One of the possible ways in morphological creativity is to create a word using proper endings that is possibly

work. For instance, if a student wants to describe the action of 'ironing', he can invent the word 'ironise'. In addition, the student also can transfer a word from his first language to the second language to make it exist in the L2. For instance, a Dutch student attempting to say 'waist', he says 'middle' (Cook, 1996).

In summary, there is a basic difference between Tarone's taxonomy and Cook's taxonomy: tarone's taxonomy classified communication strategies based on the type of the decision taken by the speaker on how to overcome a communication problem, whereas Cook's taxonomy classified communication strategies based on the reasons for using the communication strategies: for social interaction, psychological problem-solving or as a compensation for limited vocabulary or language proficiency. Also, classification of the strategies into sub-strategies, I see that Tarone's taxonomy includes the same sub-strategies as in Cook's taxonomy.

### **2.8.7 Proposing a taxonomy of CSs for this study**

Considering the various types of taxonomies in Table 4, the comments that followed them, and based on a revision of the most recent taxonomy about communication strategies (Cook, 2012), this study did not depend on adopting one unique previous taxonomy, but rather it generated a combination of communication strategies to suit its purpose: interaction between Sudanese learners and English native speakers in informal context in the UK. To do this, I selected and coded

the strategies in terms of the strategic behaviour of the interlocutors on speaking strategies and I have examined all speaking strategies used during task performance. Firstly, I gathered a list of communication strategies reported in research. Secondly, based on the purpose of the study and preliminary examination of its data, I added other new generated strategies elicited from the data, and deleted those strategies from the research literature that were not used by interlocutors in this study. Hence, the final coding scheme of communication strategies consisted of 21 strategies was classified under 6 categories (See Table 7).

The first part of this combination of communication strategies (this includes interactional strategies, positive self-solving CSs, negative self-solving CSs, time-gaining CSs and mime) was taken from different taxonomies and previous relevant empirical studies that are found in literature on speaking strategies (Manzano, 2018; Alahmed, 2017; Demir et al., 2018; Saeidi & Farschi, 2015; Rabab'ah, 2015; Doost et al., 2017; Razmjou & Ghazi, 2013; Abdullah & Enim, 2011; Salahshoor & Asl, 2009). The other part of the combination which includes the pre-communication strategies (these strategies go beyond what people think and know about strategies that these are preparatory strategies and longer-term developing communication strategies that both Sudanese learners and English native speakers created) was newly introduced from the analysis of the data of this study (See Table

7). There are some extracts from the data for these newly generated communication strategies in the discussion chapter in this study (See Section 5.8.9; Section 5.9.11). Hence, this combination of communication strategies was developed as a proposed scheme of communication strategies to be employed in this study.

**Table 7. A proposed taxonomy of communication strategies.**

Functions of CSs	Target strategies
Interactional strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Asking for confirmation</li> <li>2. Comprehension check</li> <li>3. Clarification request</li> <li>4. Asking for repetition</li> <li>5. Appeal for assistance</li> </ol>
Positive self-solving communication strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Self-correction</li> <li>7. Circumlocution</li> <li>8. Lengthening of words</li> <li>9. Recast</li> <li>10. Guessing</li> <li>11. Appeal for literal translation</li> <li>12. Paraphrasing</li> </ol>
Negative self-solving communication strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. Message abandonment</li> </ol>
Time-gaining communication strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>14. Hesitation devices</li> <li>15. Lexicalised fillers</li> <li>16. non-lexicalised fillers</li> </ol>

	17. Silent pausing 18. Self- repetition
Mime	19. body language
Pre-communication strategies	20. Preparatory strategies 21. Longer-term developing communication strategies

### **2.8.7.1 Interactional communication strategies**

This type of communication strategies is concerned with interactional strategies which includes 5 strategies. As the name indicates, this group of strategies entitles both interlocutors (the speaker and the listener) to cooperate to solve the communication difficulty during their mutual conversation. The interactional strategies include asking for confirmation, comprehension check, clarification request, asking for repetition and appeal for assistance. The strategies of comprehension check, clarification request, and asking for confirmation are used for negotiation of meaning when one of the interlocutors does not understand the other. Asking for repetition is used when the learner does not understand or hear what his partner says to him; and appeal for assistance is used when a learner seeks help from the other interlocutor (Demir et al., 2018).

### **2.8.7.2 Positive self-solving communication strategies**

This type of communication strategies includes self-correction, circumlocution, lengthening of words, recast, guessing, and literal translation. These strategies are those strategies used by the learner to overcome the communication difficulties that he encounters during a mutual conversation, due to his insufficient linguistic knowledge without refuge to assistance from his peer interlocutor (Rabab'ah, 2015; Doost et al., 2017; Razmjou & Ghazi, 2013). The self-correction strategy is used by interlocutors to help them make self-initiated corrections in their sides of utterances the time they have known that they have committed a linguistic mistake such as wrong pronunciation, choice of word or grammatical mistake (Abdullah & Enim, 2011). The circumlocution strategy is an indirect way of speaking such as moving all around until both interlocutors come to a mutual understanding (Rabab'ah, 2015). As for the lengthening of words, it is used either when the other interlocutor asks the speaker for repetition or slowing down his speech pace, or when he feels that the interlocutor does not understand him. So, he speaks slowly and stresses the pronunciation of words (Manzano, 2018). The recast strategy is used when one of the interlocutors understands what the other interlocutor says to him although the way he says it is linguistically not correct such as the wrong pronunciation of a word or words. In this case, he neglects or corrects his error and continues the conversation with him (Rabab'ah, 2015). The guessing strategy is used

by a learner when he does not understand what the other interlocutor says and tries to guess the meaning from the overall context or structure of his speaking (Rabab'ah, 2015). The literal translation strategy is used when the learner does not understand what his interlocutor says, and then, he uses a dictionary to translate a word or words from the other language to his mother tongue language (Doost et al., 2017) to understand what he has said to him. The paraphrasing strategy is like circumlocution, but it is self-initiation strategy employed by a speaker when his interlocutor seems that he does not understand what he says to him. In this case, he rephrases what he has said before in another simple way so that his interlocutor can understand it (Rabab'ah, 2015).

#### **2.8.7.3 Negative self-solving communication strategies**

This includes the message abandonment strategy which is used when learners fail to continue their mutual conversation because of a communication difficulty (Manzano, 2018). In this case, one or both interlocutors stop the conversation and go away.

#### **2.8.7.4 Time-gaining communication strategies**

This type of strategies can be classified into hesitation devices, lexicalised fillers, non-lexicalised fillers, silent pausing and self-repetition. The purpose of these strategies during conversations is to enable the interlocutors to gain time to push forward the conversation and keep it open at the time of the communication difficulty, and

hence, time-gaining strategies are not used to compensate for linguistic difficulties (Abdullah & Enim, 2011; Salahshoor & Asl, 2009), but to enhance the conversation during performance. In hesitation devices, the interlocutor may employ false starts and continue until he finds the appropriate words or sentence to maintain or begin his conversation (Salahshoor & Asl, 2009). In this study, lexicalised fillers are used to refer to words such as ‘well’, ‘you know’, ‘let me see’, ‘let me think’, or ‘I see what you mean’. Non-lexicalised fillers refer to voiced pauses such as ‘uh...huh’, ‘yeah’ or ‘oh’ (Saeidi & Farshchi, 2015). The silent pausing strategy is employed when all participants needed time to focus and allow their mental processes to deal with the information received or produced (Salahshoor & Asl, 2009). The self-repetition strategy is employed by speakers to repeat what they have said to gain time to think of what to say next or how to say it (Abdullah & Enim, 2015).

#### **2.8.7.5 Mime**

These strategies include body language such as facial expressions and hand gestures (Manzano, 2018). They are used by the speakers to enable them to employ gestures and facial expressions in the place of lexical items or actions (Manzano, 2018; Rabab’ah, 2015).

#### **2.8.7.6 The pre-communication strategies**

These are the new communication strategies that emerged from the analysis of the data in this study: the preparatory strategy and longer-



term developing communication strategy. The preparatory strategies are the strategies that are used before the communication takes place between the interlocutors in the real world. It is used when learners, for example, have appointments with the medical doctor where they are likely to hear specialised vocabulary from the doctors or nurses. Hence, they prepare the vocabulary, phrases, or specific sentences they are expecting to use before meeting the doctor by looking at the dictionary or by asking someone else for certain vocabulary and information (See Section 5.8.9).

Also, one of the new strategies that emerged from the analysis of the data in this study are the longer-term developing communication strategies. In these strategies, both Sudanese learners and English native speakers continuously attempt to make themselves familiar with accents and local dialects of the cities in which they live to develop their communicative competence (See Section 5.9.11). For example, Sudanese learners attempt to develop understanding the meaning of the local phrases, slang and colloquial words used by English native speakers. Moreover, to bridge the gap between themselves and English native speakers, the Sudanese learners carry out regular attempts to make themselves familiar with the pronunciation of British accent, dialects, and ways of expressions during the longer-term of their existence in the UK. In line with this, research indicates that learning and communication strategies

relatively go together in the scope of L2 learning and use (Cohen, 1990). This is because by continuing to use the L2 despite knowledge gaps with the aid of communication strategies such as paraphrasing, L2 learners can also keep the door open for developing communicative competence and further learning (Oxford, 2011).

Finally, since Sudanese learners are non-native speakers of English, it is important to identify their relationship with the English language among several linguistic terms such as English as a lingua franca, English as a foreign language, English as a second language and English as an international language to see who learners of English they are. It is timely now to turn to English as a second language and English as a foreign language in the following section.

## **2.9 English as a second language and English as a foreign language**

In research, there is a continuous debate on the concepts of similar linguistic terms. In this section, I reviewed the discussion about definitions for the different terms of using English language in research to identify whether Sudanese learners use English as a foreign language or as a second language. This is to avoid confusion and inappropriate use of terms in this study. Subsequently, I presented definitions of English as a second language (EFL), English as a foreign language (ESL) and English as an international language.

Ellis (2015, 1999) noted that when people normally use either of the two terms: English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language, they think that they refer to the same concept, while there is a slight difference between them. In one of the definitions, English as a second language (ESL) refers to any other language that a learner uses besides his first or mother tongue language. However, this definition is relatively problematic in two senses: in one sense, many language learners, in addition to mother tongue language, they have a considerable knowledge in other languages. Also, multilingualism is prevailing in African and Asian countries now. Therefore, Dornyei (2009) stated that human beings are characterised by multilingualism and now there are more than 6,000 languages in the world over 200 countries; and hence, he stated that multilingualism is humankind's norm. In this situation, we sometimes need to make a distinction between a 'second' and 'third' or even 'fourth' language. In another sense, using the term in other learning settings as in the case of black learners of English in South Africa may be perceived as something shameful because some of them use English as their mother tongue language and therefore, using the term in this setting may be considered as a sort of racial discrimination against them. In this case, the term 'additional language' may be more appropriate than 'second language' (Ellis, 1999). Accordingly, this definition may raise the problem of bilingualism and multilingualism where many learners in the world now can speak two languages as mother tongue languages.

To avoid those problems to make clear distinction between 'second' and 'foreign' language, Ellis (1999) noted that second language is basically used where the language plays an institutional and social role in the community. For example, English language is learnt in the UK and some African countries like Nigeria and Zimbabwe basically, because it is used as a means of communication between native speakers of English and speakers of other languages. This means that there must be a necessity of using English by certain citizens in each country. In contrast, foreign language learning takes place in countries in which the language does not play an essential role of communication in the society, and it is basically learnt in the classroom for educational purposes (Ellis, 1999).

Similarly, English as a foreign language (EFL) is used to refer to any language other than the mother tongue language. The only difference between this definition of English as a foreign language and that of English as a second language is that some researchers differentiate between the two terms from the role that English plays in each community. Ellis (2015) indicates that if English is learnt and used in day-to-day conversations between the people in the social space in each country, in this case, it is considered as English as a second language such as that is learnt and used in the UK and some African countries like Nigeria and Zimbabwe. However, if English is learnt and used among a small number of people in educational institutions in a

country, it is called English as a foreign language (Ellis, 2015) such as that in Sudan where English is learnt and used in classrooms only and not in day-to-day conversations between the people of the whole country among the general population. This is the definition that will be used in this study where Sudanese learners are dealt with as speakers of English as a foreign language. It is timely now to turn to the review of English as an international language.

## **2.10 English as an international language**

The purpose of this section is to present a background about the emergence of English as a lingua franca (ELF), its definition and the potential linguistic problems or implications generated as a result of its emergence to L2 speakers of English such as Sudanese learners.

Jenkins (2015) indicated that English language has spread gradually between 1603 and the beginning of the twenty-first century taking the position of a globalisation wave. As a result, English today has acquired the status of an international language, with users around the world including an estimated 375 million English native speakers, 375 million second-language speakers, and 375 million foreign-language speakers like Sudanese cohort because it serves various roles in different countries and regions of the world (Matsuura, 2007). For this reason, research proposes the notion of ‘three concentric circles’ to describe the spread of English worldwide: (1) the Inner Circle that includes countries where English is used as a primary language such as the UK,

USA, Canada and Australia, (2) the Outer Circle that includes the multilingual countries and regions such as Singapore, Hong Kong, India and Philippines where English is used as a second language as a medium of communication in governmental institutions, and (3) the Expanding Circle that includes countries like Japan, Korea and China where English is used as a foreign language (Matsuura, 2007). Accordingly, the Sudanese cohort are part of the expanding circle because they learn and speak English as a foreign language besides Arabic for pedagogical purposes. Hence, regarding these three circles, English now is used by people of various nations and regions for their own purposes (Matsuura, 2007).

To highlighted it, researchers attempted to define English as an international language, better known as English as a lingua franca (ELF) to refer to “A way of referring to communication in English between speakers with different first languages” (Baker, 2009, p. 9). In this sense, English as a lingua franca is used as a ‘contact language’, that is, ‘a vehicular language used by people who do not share a native language’, or it is viewed as talk comprising expanding circle speaker-listeners or non-native speakers, competent L2 speakers and non-bilingual English speakers (Pickering, 2006). Unlike other ‘contact languages’, the enormously diverse intra-and international contexts of use and the continual movement of users routinely result in interactions between speakers from all groups in the three circles of

English (Pickering, 2006). For example, English is a contact language for the Sudanese cohort who interact in daily conversations with different English native speakers and non-native speakers of English in the UK.

As a result, this spread of English has created many implications on the use of English for speakers of English as a lingua franca like Sudanese learners: (1) the existence of many varieties and speakers of various English varieties such as the Hong Kong English which is considered as the unique type of Outer Circle English (Matsuura, 2007). (2) Consequently, this emergence of different varieties of English raised concerns about speech intelligibility and comprehensibility that refer to what extent utterances are understood by listeners (Matsuura, 2007; See Section 2.5.1). (3) Relevantly, this led to the discussion of the factors that influence English as a lingua franca intelligibility such as familiarity with non-native-speaker speech in general and familiarity with a particular non-native speaker accent (Matsuura, 2007). This raises the problem of which model of English variety or accent those speakers of English like Sudanese cohort can familiarise themselves with because, as mentioned before, the result of this spread of English worldwide shifts away from the notion of English native speaker model as there are many varieties of English in the world today.

Particularly with accented speech in English as a lingua franca, there are several empirical studies with diverse results on the effect of accent on understanding heavily accented speakers. For example, researchers investigated the effects of native language accent on listening comprehension and found that Spanish speakers scored higher marks when listening to Spanish-accented English, whereas Chinese speakers scored lower marks when listening to English spoken with their native language accent (Matsuura, 2007). This indicates that accent in English as a lingua franca does not necessarily reduce comprehensibility in all situations, it depends on the extent to which a listener is familiar with the accented speech of the speaker. However, findings of this study noted that accent variation is a common communication difficulty reported by all Sudanese learners during their interaction with English native speakers in the UK (See Section 5.2).

It is worth noting that the debate on factors influencing the speech-accented intelligibility, consequently led to the thinking about 'effective communication', the responsibility of maintaining successful communication and the identification of the 'native speaker' in the scope of English as a lingua franca. Although some researchers as mentioned before noted that accent does not always affect communication, other researchers reported that there are many other linguistic factors that were observed obstructing



communication among English as a lingua franca conversation such as phonology and grammar (Pickering, 2006). For example, a researcher analyses conversational and information gap task data collected from L2 mixed-language dyads; following an examination and analysis of all examples of 'communication breakdowns', he discovered that pronunciation issues were the biggest source of loss of comprehensibility, mostly at the level of segmental levels (Pickering, 2006). Also, other researchers tested both native-speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) listeners mutual conversations in a psycholinguistic study, discovered that lexical stress and vowel quality were manipulated on sets of disyllabic words where stress was shifted leftward or rightward and, in some cases, vowel quality altered greatly (Pickering, 2006). In the case of Sudanese learners, they also reported pronunciation and stress as common communication difficulties during their communication with English native speakers (See Section 5.7.5; Section 4.2.9).

Despite the emergence of part or all linguistic variables during mutual interactions, even with 'extreme divergences' from the rules of 'inner circle' English varieties, research noted in some previous empirical studies that this does not necessarily impede comprehensibility because, as observed in some empirical studies, some non-bilingual English speakers accommodated to each other, increasing intelligibility by converging on more target-like forms and reducing L1

transfer features when dealing with the high risk core areas (pickering, 2006). Also, this is similar to the case of both Sudanese learners and English native speakers who attempt to familiarise themselves with the accent of each other to achieve successful mutual conversations with the adoption of preparatory strategies (See Section 5.8.9; Section 5.9.11). In this sense, effective or successful communication is regarded when intelligibility or comprehensibility is reported by the listener. However, the previous strategy of accommodation adopted by non-bilingual English speakers from both the speaker and listener indicates that the successful communication can be achieved by mutual efforts of both interlocutors such as those adopted by both Sudanese learners and English native speakers mentioned before.

Therefore, to develop the discussion about effective communication, it is important to point to the responsibility of this effective communication in native and non-native or non-native and non-native mutual interactions in the field of English as a lingua franca. To identify this responsibility, nearly all approaches adopted in research to measure speech intelligibility for successful communication in previous empirical studies, noted that most researchers put the burden of intelligibility on the listener although they confirmed that speech intelligibility is not a one-way process, but an interactional process between the speaker and the listener (Kirkpatrick et al., 2008; Pickering, 2006; See Section 2.5.1). Hence, in this study, the

responsibility of successful communication is attributed to both speaker and listener because if the listener is obliged for careful attention to the input, the speaker is also responsible for producing standard speech and adopting accommodation strategy towards the listener.

Lastly but not least, the discussion of the issues about successful communication in mutual interactions in the field of English as a lingua franca, raises concerns about the identification of the native speaker and non-native speaker. Although the term 'non-native speaker' did not generate much debate in research, the term 'native speaker' has been a controversial issue and generated much and continuous debate over the last few decades (Baker, 2009; See Section 2.14; Section 3). Although it has been regarded as inappropriately defined in research, the concept of the native speaker continued to exercise a strong influence on English language policy and teaching. However, to identify the native speaker of a language, researchers tend to imply certain features that should be available when considering someone as a native speaker: (1) must inherit particular language through birth into the social group associated with it, (2) able to speak it well, (3) grow up among people who are mother tongue speakers, (4) must have the comprehensive grasp of a language, and (5) must be born among people of one country who are native speakers of one mother tongue (Rampton, 2003). However, all these features about a native

speaker can be criticised and were contested by many people in research. For example, the capacity of a language can be inherited, but languages are normally acquired in social settings. From the perspective of sociolinguistic, it is always inaccurate to think of people belonging to only one social group as people usually participate in many social groups such as the family, the peer group, class, region, age, ethnicity, gender, etc. (Rampton, 2003). Also, both the membership in these groups and language change over time as they are not eternal; and being born among a group does not mean that the person automatically speaks its language well, as many native speakers of English cannot write or tell stories, whereas many non-native speakers can. Also, the functional command of a language is not total or perfect as some users of a language are more proficient in some areas than others. In addition, there are many countries that are bilingual in which children from early age speak two or more languages (Rampton, 2003). Despite this criticism, the term 'native speaker' and 'mother tongue' remains adjacently circulating continuously together in research. For this reason, this study identified a particular definition for the native speaker when selecting its participant to refer to any who speaks the language as a mother tongue from his birth (See Section 2.14; Section 3).

### **2.10.1 The future of English as an international language**

Regarding the different types of English that resulted from the implications and the large dispersal of English around the world, research indicates that English has become the language of others. Hence, these others regularly generate their own vocabulary, rules, and expressions (Jenkins, 2015). Accordingly, some researchers predicted that there may be a possibility that within the twenty-first century, English of native speakers may lose its position as a principal world language to one or more of the languages of these others (Jenkins, 2015). This is possible if we consider the fact that globalisation has gone together with the globalisation of English.

As mentioned in the introduction, language is context specific. Hence, it is important to review the different contexts in which language is learnt and used in research and their manifestations in previous relevant empirical studies. It is now timely to turn to the formal language learning and use.

### **2.11 Formal language learning and use**

Since the present study focuses on the informal interaction between Sudanese ESOL learners and native speakers of English in the UK, it is important to provide an overview of the different contexts of language learning and use to situate this study within the wider context of research literature; and to identify the gap through which this study can be directed. Accordingly, in this section, I discussed the different contexts of formal language learning and use, whereas, in

the following section I discussed the informal language learning and use.

According to Benson (2011), he defines formal language learning as “the gathering for a given period of time, of two or more persons (one of whom generally assumes the role of the instructor) for the purposes of language learning” (p. 8). This means that formal language learning is learning that takes place in educational institutions under classroom instruction to lead to qualifications. However, one can object to this definition by indicating that not all formal language learning takes place in classroom settings.

To narrow it down for the purposes of this study within the formal context of language learning and use, I specified three formal settings for language learning and use: (1) classroom-based language learning and use in which learners gather for a period of time for learning and using a language; (2) out-of-class and school-based language learning activities that are undertaken less formally outside the classroom, but inside the school so as to develop learners’ linguistic competence such as debating, taking part in public speaking activities, producing school publications, etc.; (3) out-of-school language learning and use that encourages learners to engage in activities that broaden their knowledge of a subject after school (Benson, 2011). Therefore, the “formal” use of communication and communication strategies is used in this study to refer to either one of the three above settings. To draw

the boundaries for the concept clearly, it is important to highlight the informal concept of language learning and use in the following subsection.

### **2.12 Informal language learning and use**

Generally, both empirical studies and research indicate “non-formal” or “informal” language learning and use which refers to non-institutionalised programmes or individual learning projects. Accurately, it includes all informal learning activities that take place in daily life, in the family, in the workplace or communities and through the interests of individuals (Benson, 2011). Accordingly, we identified three informal settings for language learning and use: (1) informal learning of language which anything people do to gain knowledge, skills or information to develop their linguistic competence such as watching television, using the Internet, talking to experts, etc.; (2) school-based informal use of the language by learners during breaks, free chats, lunch time, etc.; and (3) informal use of the language by different people in the free social space under no instruction (Benson, 2011). Therefore, informal communication and communication strategy use are used in this study to refer to one of the three above informal settings of language learning and use.

As mentioned in the introduction, the Sudanese learners and similar migrants in the UK are mostly enrolled in ESOL classes to develop their linguistic knowledge and communicative competence as part of the

UK government integration policy. Therefore, it is important to provide background to ESOL studies in the UK. It is now timely to turn to the historical background of ESOL studies in the UK in the following section.

### **2.13 Background to ESOL studies in the UK**

As Sudanese learners are considered as speakers of English as a lingua franca, it is worth noting that this study must review the British government policy upon their situation in the UK. The purpose is to see how they can develop their communicative competence to interact with English native speakers, achieve integration and raise their contribution in the British society.

Historically speaking, it is a bit difficult to identify when accurately teaching and researching English for speakers of other languages has first been initiated in the UK and other countries. However, Richards and Rodgers (2001) have stated that English language teaching has been started as a profession in the twentieth century. They stated that “The whole foundation of contemporary language teaching was developed during the early part of the twentieth century, as applied linguists and others sought to develop principles and procedures for the design of teaching methods and materials” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 1). According to them, teaching the language at the beginning was characterised by recurrent change, innovation, and the development of conflicting teaching ideologies.



Like Richards and Rodgers, Ellis (1999) also pointed that although there is not an identified date on when teaching and researching English as a second language started in the UK, “There is general agreement that it took place around the end of the 1960s” (Ellis, 1999, p. 1). He mentioned that there were several studies of the second language published during this period. For example, Ravem 1968 and Huang 1970 have issued their studies about second language learning during this period. In parallel with that, theoretical studies about testing second language have also been developed and a huge amount of practical research about describing the characteristics of second language learner has been provided during this period. Meanwhile, there has been a growing interest in the second language theory construction, models, and theories of second language teaching among various researchers (Ellis, 1999).

Recently, because of the influx of migrants like Sudanese people to the UK, the British government has adopted a clear policy towards the new immigrants. To integrate into the society and acquire citizenship based on this policy, migrants must demonstrate progress in the English language. For those with insufficient proficiency in the language, they have the option of taking an English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) courses because it is seen by the British governments as a way of encouraging migrants to develop the competences that are seen necessary for social integration as well as

are seen as a means for them to demonstrate their willingness to integrate (Han et al., 2010). In this case, language is seen by the British government as the main factor of integration for migrants like Sudanese cohort if they would like to integrate in the British society and raise the level of their contribution. Hence, it is indispensable for Sudanese cohort and similar migrants to develop their English language proficiency.

Nonetheless, concerns were raised about (1) the benefits ESOL courses for developing language proficiency and (2) whether they are as well adequate to contribute to the development of the migrants' genuine language capacity. For example, in a previous empirical study conducted with a migrant group at a community college in London to provide an account of the experiences of the students in the light of those concerns about progress in English language, it was found that the ESOL classes are of positive experience. Hence, ESOL classes were considered as the front line of the government policy for security and social integration in the British society (Han et al., 2010).

Similarly, other researchers indicated that the UK is a multi-cultural society under the framework of civic values and common legal and political institutions. In fact, this resulted from the global flows of migrants that are transforming United Kingdom cities into cosmopolitan cities which are producing superdiverse classrooms with students from widely different educational backgrounds and literacy

levels (Roberts & Cooke, 2007). Accordingly, they identified the use of English as possibly the most important means for diverse communities participating in a common culture with key values in common. Hence, the mastery of English in this situation means, for Sudanese people and other similar migrants, more than its practical use for work and in everyday life. For these researchers, the English language enables migrants to participate in this common culture which is essential in the process of social integration (Han et al., 2010). Therefore, the recent research about language use in the United Kingdom has reflected a 'social turn' in adult ESOL studies, focusing on the relationship of context and language where the ESOL classrooms are only part of sociolinguistic environment (Roberts & Cooke, 2007).

Therefore, ESOL classes are conducted in the UK to achieve two purposes: (1) to comply to the government's policy that summons all immigrants aspiring to gain naturalised citizenship that they should reach certain levels in English language; and (2) to provide skills for employment or teaching courses towards language needed to work in a particular sector such as health and social care (Roberts & Cooke, 2007).

However, some researchers noted that the reasons behind imposing ESOL courses for immigrants are not because it is only a government condition for acquiring citizenship, but also because English language works as a glue necessary for community cohesion; and the inability

to use it appropriately may lead to breakdown in cohesion and national security in towns and cities. In addition, the inability to use English may influence opportunities of gaining jobs and hence, researchers observed that English language proficiency qualification in job interviews presents a major barrier to second language speakers and contribute to high levels of unemployment among them (Roberts & Cooke, 2007; Roberts, 2021).

Practically, there are many previous empirical studies that indicated the importance of taking ESOL courses in the UK. Their statistical findings showed that the delay for the newcomers to the UK accessing ESOL courses has affected their opportunities of making progress in their English language capacity and hence, they needed more specialised pathways to meet their employment requirement and higher education aspirations (Roberts & Cooke, 2007). Likewise, in the same previous empirical study conducted at London community college investigated the English language proficiency development about students studied ESOL courses, findings showed that some students who previously needed an interpreter when they went to see the GP, might now have the confidence to go alone (Han et al., 2007). For this reason, in the case of migrants from different countries and linguistic groups, it was discovered that some of the ESOL students regarded English language as being indispensable as a lingua franca, not only between them and English citizens as the hosted population,

but also in interaction with other migrants and it would help them to get jobs and pursue further education (Han et al., 2010).

Last but not least, it is now timely to draw the boundaries between the identity of the native speakers and non-native speakers of English as the two different populations that form the cohort of this study.

#### **2.14 Native and non-native speakers of English**

Since the focus of the present study is the informal communication between Sudanese learners and English native speakers, it is important to make clear distinction between the native speaker and non-native speaker of English to adopt it when selecting the sampling size in this study. Specifically, I have reviewed the ongoing debate over the concept of the native speaker in research reflecting the various views about it.

It is important to note that there has been an extended controversial debate over the term “native speaker” that has generated different definitions for it. For this reason, the discussion in this section of the review will focus basically on the native speaker rather than on the non-native speaker. As a result of that debate, the concept of the native speaker has become complicated and a bit opaque. According to some researchers, this concept is relatively made controversial now, may be because we are entering globalised world where there

are many bilingual and multilingual speakers (No & Park, 2008). As a result, there might be native speakers of two or more languages.

Specifically, if we start with definitions of dictionaries to set up criteria for identification of the native speaker, we are provided with two criteria for defining the native speaker of English: (1) he must speak English as specific native or mother tongue language and (2) must learn English as his first language (No & Patrick, 2008). This means that some people can speak English as a first language, but it is not considered as his mother tongue language such as the second-generation migrants who are born in the UK.

In line with that, this definition is nearly supported by another definition which confirms that the concept of a native speaker in Applied Linguistics seems clear enough: “It is surely a common sense idea, referring to people who have a special control over a language, insider knowledge about ‘their’ language; they are the models we appeal to for the ‘truth’ about the language, they know what the language is (‘Yes, you can say that’) and what the language isn’t (No, that’s not English, Japanese, Swahili ...)’” (Davies, 2003, p. 3). This definition takes the proficiency of the language as a criterion to determine who the native speaker is. However, there are many people who can control a certain language at the same level of proficiency as those who speak it as their mother tongue language, although it is not their own mother tongue language, nevertheless, they are not

considered as native speakers to many people. Moreover, many people can master a specific language by education and practise it to the extent that they can say, for example, this is English, and this is not English. However, this may not apply to all languages for many reasons: some languages that are not written, or languages that are grammatically complex, etc.

On the other hand, the two above criteria, i.e., the oral use of a language as a mother tongue language and learning it as a first language, to identify the native speaker have been criticised by another researcher (Davies, 2003) in relation to the appearance of the so-called new Englishes such as the English of Singapore, or India and so on. Davies (2003) indicates that these criteria have generated a lack of clarity for most of the definitions of the native speaker of English. Specifically, she notes that both criteria are unsafe to produce a perfect or an ideal definition of the “native speaker” term: the first can be criticised by the existence of bilingualism where many people can speak at least two languages as their mother tongues. Similarly, the second criterion can be criticised by the idea that an adult may have shifted dominance from one first language to another or even the second learnt language may have as much influence on the first learnt as the other way around (Davies, 2003).

Based on my experience in the United Kingdom, I think both arguments seem reasonable if we consider the experience of the new

generations from Somalia, Yemen and Sudan who grew up in the UK. Some of these new generations start learning English in their early childhood and continue to use it as their dominant language in the UK, until they reach a certain level of fluency that is similar or equivalent to their peer native English speakers. Although the parents work to keep their children committed to speak their native languages as their mother tongues, these children also speak English with the same degree of proficiency to that of native speakers of English in the UK. In addition, we can also mention the case of black learners of English in South Africa who use English as their mother tongue besides their local languages. Therefore, using the term “native speaker” of English to differentiate between them and other native speakers of English from the developed world countries (such as the United States and the United Kingdom) might be considered, for instance, a sort of racial discrimination against them or unfair judgement.

To generate an “ideal” definition of a native speaker of English, some researchers established a number of certain characteristics for what they thought as an “ideal” native speaker of English: (1) The native speaker acquires Language 1 of which he is a native speaker in childhood, (2) in terms of acceptability and productiveness, the native speaker has intuitions about his Grammar 1, (3) the native speaker has intuitions about features of the Grammar 2 which are distinct from his Grammar 1, (4) the native speaker has a unique capacity to produce



fluent spontaneous discourse, (5) the native speaker has a unique capacity to write creatively, and (6) the native speaker also has a unique capacity to interpret and translate into Language 1 of which he is a native speaker (Davies, 2003). However, these characteristics can also be criticised as they are not applicable to all people with the same degree as people themselves are different and they have different capacities of gaining knowledge.

In addition, there is as well reasonable criticism that has been directed to the above criteria to identify the “ideal” native speaker. While the characteristics of childhood acquisition cannot apply to the L2 native speaker who learns and becomes a target-language native speaker, the other five characteristics can apply to him (Davies, 2003). Concerning the intuitions of Grammar 1, it is possible to gain access to intuitions about his/her own Grammar 1 of the target language with enough contact and practice for the second language. Moreover, the same thing applies to the other characteristics of the “ideal” native speaker: through learning and continuous practice, the target-language native speaker can become an accepted creative writer, a capable interpreter and translator, a creative discourse producer and can gain an appropriate degree of intuitions about the features of Grammar 2 (Davies, 2003).

For this reason of the continuous debate over the definitions of the native speaker, some researchers proposed the use of the “native

language user” instead of the “native speaker”. Specifically, they defined the native language as the language learnt at one’s mother’s knee or the first language that one learns to speak (No & Patrick, 2008). This definition seems more accurate and appropriate than the previous definitions, but it might be criticised for focusing only on speaking skill to define the native language user.

To solve the problem of the definition of the native speaker, some other researchers distinguish between two senses of native speaker: the “flesh and blood” native speaker and the “ideal” native speaker or the “reality” and the “myth” native speaker. In this sense, they refer to the “ideal” native speaker provided with the characteristics above as a “myth” (No & Patrick, 2008). To make it clear, they provided different definitions of “flesh-and-blood” native speaker: (1) the native speaker by birth, (2) the native speaker-like by being an exceptional learner, (3) the native speaker through education using the target-language medium, (4) the native speaker by virtue of being a native user such as the post-colonial case, and (5) the native speaker through long residence in the adopted country (Davies, 2003; No & Patrick, 2008).

Therefore, the debate about the native speaker will continue based on this flow of different definitions. Obviously, it seems that the definition of native speaker like any other linguistic concept depends on the context in which a certain term is used. To this study, I adopted

the definition of the native speaker of English to refer to any individual who speaks English as his mother tongue language from his birth (Morris-Adams, 2008).

On the other hand, to define the non-native speaker of English, it seems from research there is no contradicting views on how to identify who the non-native speaker is. Unlike the native speaker of English, the non-native speaker of English is the speaker that does not communicate in English as his mother tongue language, irrespective of how many languages he may be capable of using for communication (Morris-Adams, 2008). This is the definition that the study has used to differentiate between the native and non-native speakers of English upon selecting its sampling size.

### **2.15 Section summary**

In this chapter, it was indicated that the Sudanese cohort like other similar migrants of many nationalities in the UK must develop their communicative competence in English and pass a test on the British culture to acquire citizenship in the UK (Han et al., 2010; See Section 1).

More importantly, upon their longer settlement in the UK, they must develop their EFL communicative competence to enable them to interact effectively with English native speakers in the target language (Roberts & Cooke, 2007; See Section 1.2). This means that they must

develop their English language proficiency to the extent that, at least, they can carry out successful conversations with both native and non-native speakers of English in the UK.

To develop their communicative competence, literature suggests that they have many options. One of these options is the enrollment in ESOL classes through which they can, at least, acquire basic knowledge about English language and its rules to build on it and autonomously develop their proficiency via further extracurricular activities outside classroom contexts. If they fail to develop their proficiency in English, literature indicates that their contribution in pursuing further education and obtaining jobs, for example, will be affected. As mentioned before, migrants and ethnic minorities are mostly excluded from jobs during interviews if their language proficiency is not developed to the extent that satisfies the expectations of job interviewers (See Section 1.2).

Regarding developing communicative competence in the multicultural society of the UK, literature indicates that migrants like Sudanese learners do not only need to develop linguistic communicative competence, but they also need to develop other aspects of communication such as intercultural communication and transcultural communication (Yufrizal, 2017; Aguilar, 2007; Baker, 2022). This necessitates that Sudanese cohort should educate themselves or should be educated about the social traditions and

cultural heritage of the British society if they want to carry out successful conversations with their peer English interlocutors in the UK (Baker, 2009).

However, research indicates that to use English as a lingua franca among participants from various cultural backgrounds, interactants will inevitably encounter communication difficulties (Sato, 2008; See Section 2.8). As a result, literature indicates that learners normally employ communication strategies to overcome these communication difficulties to reach a communicative goal. Therefore, Sudanese learners may benefit from using communication strategies for overcoming linguistic and cultural difficulties during their conversations with English native speakers in the UK.

Regarding encountering communication difficulties, research indicates that there are many previous empirical studies that investigated communication difficulties among undergraduate and postgraduate students studying temporarily in classroom contexts. However, there is no research investigating these communication difficulties among people in the state of longer-term settlement in a different society and interacting informally in informal contexts with cohorts of that society like Sudanese people. Hence, this study hopes to fill in that gap in research literature.

Regarding the employment of communication strategies, literature indicates that language learners do not only employ communication

strategies to overcome communication difficulties, but also to push forward and enhance their conversations during their mutual communications (Bialystok, 1990; Cohen, 1990). Hence, it is important for Sudanese learners to raise their strategic awareness to develop their strategic competence to help, in turn, to improve their communicative competence and its various aspects.

The next chapter discussed the research methodology, including an overview of methodology in previous research, paradigm, research strategy, data collection instruments, procedures, populations and participants that were selected in this study. It is now timely to turn to the methodology chapter.

### **3 Chapter 3: Methodology: An overview**

For practical reasons and in response to the situations of Covid-19 pandemic, I adopted a research strategy led to the design of this thesis in two separate studies, but they are thematically complementary to each other that the second study builds on the first one. Clearly, this two-part research design strategy was employed in this thesis for two reasons: firstly, to take further the themes that emerged in the first study to be examined in depth in a second study; that is, to test the Sudanese participants' pragmatic competence. Secondly, to overcome the limitations of the interviews data obtained in the first study by employing the DCTs method in a second study and address the credibility of the data about communication difficulties, strategies,

and pragmatic competence of Sudanese participants (Hammersley, 2008).

When the pandemic broke out, I discovered that conducting the primary research strategy of the study about observation of communicative task interactions for both Sudanese participants and English native speakers in face-to-face meeting interaction was not possible (See Section 6.3). Hence, I employed the second research method about the semi-structured interviews hoping that situations may change shortly for employing tasks observation. However, the situations created by Covid-19 continued. To cope with these situations, I employed the interviews over telephone calls for both Sudanese participants and English native speakers to explore their communication difficulties and strategies in the first study. Then, I employed DCTs to examine the Sudanese participants' pragmatic competence in a second study based on the theme (inappropriate vocabulary use) that appeared in the first study.

To answer my research questions about communication difficulties and strategies in the first study, I employed interviews for the following benefits: Firstly, the semi-structured interviews are flexible in their wording and adaptable through which I used a checklist of topics to change it to suit the flow of the conversation with the participants to explore their insights and underlying ideas about communication difficulties and strategies (Hollander, 2004; Kvale,

2007). Secondly, I created rapport with the participants through interviews and hence, obtained profound information from them (Garsbarski, Schaeffer, & Dykema, 2016). Thirdly, I employed effectively different strategies of probes through interviews and hence, I obtained rich information from the participants (Bernard, 2013; See Section 3.4.3.2.4 in the first study).

However, interviews have some limitations in this study: firstly, the participants may suffer from the flaw of “social desirability bias” in which they generally may try to present themselves in a favourable way in the presence of others or the researcher (Hammersley, 2008; Dornyei, 2008). Hence, they may not provide true answers about themselves; that is, the participants may report what they feel or believe rather than what they really face or do on the ground (Dornyei, 2008). As a result of this social prestige bias, the participants may also fall into ‘self-deception’ through minimising their difficulties and maximising their competence about communication difficulties (Dornyei, 2008).

Secondly, the participants may as well suffer from the ‘halo-effect’ in which they either overestimate or underestimate their reports about communication difficulties in the presence of the researcher (Dornyei, 2008). Thirdly, the interviews data is self-report data and hence, it may not reflect the learners’ actual opinions, behaviours and success in oral communication (Boxstaens, Blay, Pereto, & Decarpes, 2015;



Stuckey, Kraschnewski, Miller-Day, Palm, Larosa, & Sciamanna, 2014). However, I tried to mitigate all these limitations through creating rapport with the participants by, for example, telling them about my own experience of encountering communication difficulties before employing the interviews. In addition, I triangulated the sources of the data from Sudanese participants with those from English native speakers and employed DCTs in a second study to enhance the credibility of the whole interviews data.

Likewise, to answer my research questions about Sudanese participants' pragmatic competence in the second study, I employed DCTs for the following benefits: Firstly, to corroborate the data I obtained through interviews by highlighting the communication difficulties in the second study (Hammersley, 2008). Secondly, DCTs were easy to employ, and hence, enabled me to collect a large amount of data about speech production in a variety of functions about communicative situations within relatively a short period of time (Cyluk, 2013). Thirdly, DCTs were flexible method that enabled me to avoid socially and culturally inappropriate responses to participants in any given context (Byon, 2006). Fourthly, they suited the nature of the research problem and enabled me to obtain information about communication difficulties and strategies that Sudanese participants employ during their realisation of speech acts (Byon, 2006; See Section 2.1.2 in the second study).

However, there may also be limitations of employing DCTs in this study: firstly, there is discrepancy between the written data of the DCTs which cannot be equivalent to the raw spoken data in naturally occurring settings (Cyluk, 2013). I mitigated this limitation by audio-recording the DCTs and played them to the participants to refresh their memories. Secondly, unlike the naturally occurring contexts, the participants in DCTs have no option to 'opt out' during their realisation of the speech acts (Byon, 2006). To mitigate this limitation, I gave the participants the freedom to opt out whenever they needed. Thirdly, the speech acts may put the participants in unfamiliar roles and situations and hence, they may generate unnatural responses (Cyluk, 2013; See Section 2.1.2). I mitigated this limitation by selecting contexts and roles that are familiar and more likely to be encountered by Sudanese participants in their daily lives in the UK.

As detailed before, the primary aims of the first study in this thesis were to explore both the communication difficulties and strategies among the Sudanese learners and their peer English native speakers in the UK. This chapter addressed the research design and methodology that were employed to achieve these aims. It began with providing a rationale for the adoption of an interpretivist research paradigm and case study approach. Then, it presented the aims of the study and the research questions. After introducing the population, participants and sampling strategy, it discussed the instrument design

and research procedures. Subsequent sections presented procedures of the data transcription, an overview of data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, pilot study, results, discussion of results and the contribution of the study. Finally, the chapter concluded with a summary.

To select the research methods for this study, I have reviewed various methods employed in previous empirical studies to see the best methods that suit the nature of this project. It is important to note that the selection of the research methods in this study is determined by the nature of the data this study intended to obtain. This study hoped to obtain rich, credible, and more objective data to answer its research questions. By reviewing several previous relevant empirical studies, I found out that the research methods that were employed were questionnaires (Sato, 2008; Nakatani, 2010; Abdullah & Enim, 2011; Gan, 2013; Zhao & Intaraprasert, 2013; Zulkurnain & Kaur, 2014; Toomnan & Intaraprasert, 2015; Yanagi & Baker, 2016; Bijani & Sedaghat, 2016; Park et al., 2017; Demir et al., 2018), interviews (Salahshoor & Asl, 2009; Lam, 2016; Matsumoto, 2011; Gan, 2012; Wang et al., 2015; Toomnan & Intaraprasert, 2015; Yanagi & Baker, 2015; Kuen et a., 2017; Demir et al., 2018; Manzano, 2018), participant observation (Sato, 2008; Matsumoto, 2011; Manzano, 2018), test (Nakatani, 2010; Saeidi & Farschi, 2015; Rabab'ah, 2015; Kuen et al., 2017; Doost et al., 2017) and audio-recordings from

databases (Morris-Adams, 2008; Lam, 2010; Kirkpatrick, 2010; Abdullah & Enim, 2011; Razmjou & Ghazi, 2013).

Most of these studies employed a single research method, whereas there are few of them employed a combination of methods, sequentially or concurrently, to collect the data. Therefore, the employment of these methods in this way has some limitations. For example, although questionnaires are trusted methods in that they are anonymous and can be employed to many participants in relatively a short time with less effort, the researcher may obtain limited data, respondents may provide superficial answers, respondents may leave some unanswered questions; and if the researcher is away, he will not be able to correct some mistakes and explain other questions to participants (Dornyei, 2008). Also, interviews that were employed individually or in combination with questionnaires in most of these studies have their own limitations (See Section 3.4.3.2) such as self-deception and social prestige bias as they are both self-report data (Roulston, 2013). In addition, the pre-test and post-test method that were employed to test learners' strategic competence during teaching communication strategies in control groups and experimental groups are not appropriate to be employed in this study: the study is investigating communication difficulties, strategies and pragmatic competence and not testing the development of their communicative or strategic competence within a period. Finally, using audio-recorded

data from databases does not suit this study that investigates the communication difficulties among the Sudanese learners and English native speakers in mutual conversations.

For the above reasons, in my primary research strategy I decided to use a combination of methods to address the credibility and objectivity of the data in this study: task observation, stimulated recall interviews and follow-up semi-structured interviews. However, when the pandemic broke out and I found out that it was not possible to employ this combination of methods, I employed the semi-structured interviews in the first study, and then, I employed DCTs in a second study to overcome the limitations of interviews.

Therefore, I interviewed 20 Sudanese participants from the immigrant Sudanese community in the UK, as well as 20 English native speakers to report their communication difficulties and strategies they encounter in their daily mutual conversations. Below, I discussed the criteria I used to identify English participants as native speakers of English and Sudanese participants as language learners and the definition of the 'communication difficulty'. Then, I provided a report about the research approach, case study, aims and research questions, instruments, procedures, data analysis and the findings of these interviews.

Relevant to the nature of the research participants in this study, it is important to discuss the criteria used for the description of Sudanese

participants as English language learners and English participants as native speakers of English. To do so, I have consulted research literature to describe the two groups of participants in this study. In research, there is accumulation of data about the discussion of the language learner and native speaker. While there is nearly consensus among researchers on the definition of the language learner or the non-native speaker of a language, there is an extended debate on the nature and definition of the native speaker of the language (See Section 2.10; Section 2.14). Accordingly, in this section, I reviewed different definitions of the native speaker provided by different researchers and at the end, I identified the definition that I employed in this study upon selecting the sample from the English native speakers in the UK.

To identify the native speaker, researchers provided a set of non-developmental characteristics that native speakers may share such as (a) a subconscious knowledge of language rules, (b) an intuitive grasp of meanings, (c) the ability to communicate within social settings, (d) creativity of language use, etc. (Cook, 1999). Although some of these characteristics are in a sense obvious, most of the others are seen debatable because they are variable and not a necessary part of the definition of the native speaker of a language. However, there are two of these characteristics that are indisputable in the definition of the native speaker: (1) a native speaker is a person who learns and uses

that language as a first language and (2) when a person speaks only one language from Childhood (Cook, 1999). Hence, these are the characteristics employed for the description of the English native speaker in this study to mean an individual who speaks English as the L1, learnt and used it from his birth and childhood.

In contrast to native speaker, the term “language learner” or “non-native speaker” of a language that was used to describe L2 learners refers to someone who uses English as L2 (Cook, 1999). Therefore, the Sudanese participants were described in this study as English language learners because they were not born in an English-speaking country (they were born in Sudan) and they did not learn and speak English as their first language from their birth as their mother tongue language (their first language is Arabic) (Saed, 2018).

Additionally, to investigate the communication difficulties between Sudanese learners of English and their peer English native speakers, this study consulted research to identify what it is a communication difficulty, its matter, factors creating it and how do these learners know that there is a communication difficulty during their mutual conversations. There are several empirical studies in research indicated the regular appearance of communication difficulties during conversations between L1 and L2 interlocutors (Yang, 2016; Johnsson, Carlsson, & Sonnander, 2012; Manzano, 2018; Sato, 2008; Zulkurnain & Kaur, 2014; Garcia, 2022); and they defined the communication

difficulty as “The recognition by an individual ... of the insufficiency of his ... existing knowledge to reach a ... goal ... or insufficient means which can reasonably be put to use under the prevailing situational conditions” (Sato, 2008, p. 29). Clearly, this definition means that the communication difficulty is the understanding of the interlocutor at a certain point during the conversation that his linguistic and other capacities are insufficient to reach a communicative goal (See Section 2.7).

Moreover, research indicates that the communication difficulty takes place during conversations between L1 and L2 speakers for either the learner’s lack of English language knowledge such as the lack of lexical items, accent, pronunciation, intonation, grammar or suitable vocabulary according to context (Zulkurnain & Kaur, 2014; Garcia, 2022), cognitive factors such as the lack of understanding of culture-specific concepts (Sato, 2008) or for the receptive capacities such as the interlocutor’s limited background knowledge about the subject of the conversation (Sato, 2008). Also, research indicates that communication difficulty does matter, and it is important to understand it because it obstructs the mutual conversations, produces hidden disjuncture or inaccurate and missing information, extends the length of the conversation, or may even lead to the failure of intersubjective understanding in the conversation (Garcia, 2022).



In addition, researchers in some empirical studies observed that the language learners during the conversations understand or manifest their communication difficulties through exhaustion, boring and loss of interest to continue conversation (Johnsson et al., 2012) or through “gap markers” such as gestures, pointing to a particular thing, gazing at the interlocutor, stepping movements, circling of hands, waving of hands, scratching heads, using fillers, silent pauses, etc. (Manzano, 2018). Also, learners’ employment of communication strategies is seen as an indication that they experience communication difficulties in the oral interaction (Manzano, 2018).

### **3.1 Research approach**

As mentioned before, the aim of this study is to investigate the communication difficulties that Sudanese learners encounter in their interaction with native speakers of English. Also, it attempts to explore the communication strategies that are used by these learners and their peer English native interlocutors to overcome the communication difficulties.

To achieve the aims above, I decided to adopt a qualitative approach as it is the most appropriate research strategy that matches with the nature of this study. Firstly, by its definition, Qualitative research approach is defined as an inquiry process of understanding through distinct methodology of inquiry that explores a social or human problem (Nkansah & Chimbwandah, 2016). This definition that means

investigation a human problem in a natural social setting is applicable to this project. Also, Merriam (2016) clearly states, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 6). This is the most appropriate definition that suits the research questions of this study that intends to understand the communication difficulties and communication strategies from the viewpoints of both Sudanese learners and their peer English native interlocutors.

Secondly, qualitative approach also applies to this study by its essential features. In research, there are key elements that characterise qualitative studies: (1) Ontologically, the qualitative paradigm assumes that knowledge of reality is subjective, embedded within the human mind and it is constructed jointly through the interaction between the participants. In this study, the main knowledge and understanding of the communication difficulties and communication strategies were provided by the Sudanese learners and their peer English native speakers. (2) Epistemologically, the qualitative paradigm follows constructivism/interpretivism which is the view of the social science like history and geography. According to this view, the social phenomena and their interpretations are accomplished by social actors; and they are in a constant state of revision and interpretation by their social actors. In this sense, it is the

Sudanese learners and the English native speakers' views that were used as data to provide description and interpretation for the communication difficulties and communication strategies they use during their mutual conversations in the informal communications. (3) In the relationship between theory and research, this study has not followed a certain theory to understand the communication difficulties and communication strategies, but it rather intended to understand the communication difficulties and strategies to generate a theory out of this research (Dasgupta, 2015), and (4) based on the data, in this study the focus was on words, not on numbers (Silverman, 2014).

### **3.2 Case study**

As this study is exploratory, it is appropriate to employ a case study method to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the participants' informal communication difficulties and communication strategies in the free social setting. The term "case study" is strongly associated with qualitative research and sometimes they are used synonymously (Gray, 2018). There are many definitions and types of the case study in research literature. One is that "A case study is a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle" (Cohen et al., 2008, p. 289). This definition indicates that a case study is an example created to represent a large group of people or phenomenon. However, the most appropriate definition that applies

to this study is that which is provided by Yin (2009) who defines case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. This is like the former definition in which a case study stands as a representative for a wider group, but it situates it within a contemporary real-life context.

In research, it is confirmed that anything can serve as a case: individuals, a role or occupation, organisations, a community or even a country (Gray, 2018). Also, research indicates that there are certain issues that need to be addressed when employing a method of case study in research: (1) what is the unit of analysis for the case, e.g., individuals, organisations, sectors, etc., (2) who are the participants, (3) how many participants, and (4) who are the population (Gray, 2018). Doing these elements in a particular study draws the boundaries of the case study.

Based on the identification of the case study characteristics mentioned above, I have drawn the boundaries of the case study in this project. If the population is defined as the universe of units from which the sample is to be selected (Bryman, 2016), the population in this project is the members of the Sudanese immigrant community in the UK. Since these immigrants are now settled in the UK and are interacting in daily conversations with others, the population of the project also includes some units or elements from their native speakers of English interlocutors. In research, Units or elements of

population are defined as the individual members of the population whose characteristics are to be measured in this research project (Check & Schutt, 2018).

Since it is unreasonable to survey all individuals that are included in the population, a certain sample was selected from the population of this study during employing interviews as research methods in this project. The “sample” is defined as the segment of the population that is selected for investigation; and the representative sample is a sample that reflects the population conveniently so that it will be a microcosm of the population in a context (Bryman, 2016). The number of participants in this study were 20 Sudanese learners and 20 English native speakers.

### **3.3 Aims and research questions**

This study aims to explore the communication difficulties reported by the Sudanese learners in their informal interactions with native speakers of English in the free social space. It is necessary to understand these difficulties before examining the solutions they use to overcome these difficulties. It also aims to explore the communication strategies these learners report that they use to overcome the communication difficulties they encounter in interaction with native speakers of English.

It is important for educators and policymakers to understand the native speakers' perceptions of communication difficulties they encounter in interaction with non-native speakers of English like Sudanese learners to see whether they are the same or different from those reported by their peer non-native speakers of English. According to this understanding, educators will have different views on the social phenomenon; and accordingly, they will decide which appropriate solutions they adopt to solve these communication difficulties.

To achieve its aims, this study poses the following research questions:

1. What communication difficulties do Sudanese learners report that they encounter in their interaction with native speakers of English in the UK?

(a) Are these communication difficulties the same as those reported by the English native speaker interlocutors?

2. What communication strategies do Sudanese learners report that they use to overcome the communication difficulties encountered in their interaction with native speakers of English?

3. What communication strategies do the English native speaker interlocutors report that they use to overcome the communication difficulties they encounter in their interaction with Sudanese learners?

### **3.4 Overview of methods**

Specifically, this section provided a review in detail about the sampling strategy, research population, participants (both the Sudanese learners and English native speakers) and sampling size, the instrument design, the pilot study, procedures, data analysis and ethical approval, trustworthiness, consideration of reflexivity, contribution of the study, results, discussion and a conclusion.

### **3.4.1 The sampling strategy**

The research population dealt with in this study is the Sudanese immigrants' community members in the UK. To select the sample size from this population, I used a flexible approach which is the most appropriate for this population to gain the trust of potential participants. To reach relatively credible results from the data where Sudanese learners of different levels of linguistic ability to report their views on communication difficulties and strategies, I adopted flexible sampling strategy: combination of "convenient sampling" and "snowballing". These strategies were chosen because these participants are classified as "hard-to-reach" and they are potentially vulnerable sections of society (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012). Furthermore, they are often reluctant to engage with research and even actively resist attempts of the researcher to recruit them. Also, the size of the population in the UK is small: the number of Sudanese migrants in the UK is estimated to be 35,000 according to the Office for National Statistics (2020). To facilitate approaching them, both

convenient and snowballing strategies are reliance on participants who are readily available and accessible to me (Abrams, 2010). Practically, they are least costly to the researcher in terms of time, effort, and money (Gray, 2018) under the present situations of Covid-19 restrictions. Additionally, as a native of Sudan, I have access to a wide informal network of friends and acquaintances in the UK, and some assisted in actively recruiting further participant (Dornyei, 2008).

### **3.4.2 The populations and participants**

This sub-section of the report provided the identification of populations and participants for both Sudanese learners and English native speakers from which the sample size of this study was selected.

Research indicates that in qualitative study the sample size is relatively small because the purpose is to provide an in-depth and thick description of a social phenomenon under study (Cohen et al., 2008; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014). The reason is that the purpose in the qualitative research is not to generalise the information to wider context, but to elucidate the specific social phenomenon. Therefore, Creswell (2013) proposes 4 or 5 participants in a single study which he thinks that this number can provide ample opportunity to identify themes of cases. However, there are other researchers who argue against this view and indicate that even in qualitative studies the number of the participants can be more than that until



researchers reach the saturation point in which no further information is needed (Gray, 2018). Hence, the number of the participants selected in the present study was provided in the next section about the Sudanese participants.

#### **3.4.2.1 The Sudanese learners**

The population from which I selected the sample size of the participants in this study is the immigrant Sudanese community members in the UK. The sample size that was selected to respond to the protocol of the semi-structured interviews included twenty Sudanese learners. From this population, the Sudanese learners who met the criteria of the study were accepted to participate in the study voluntarily. It is confirmed in the study that each participant satisfied all the criteria set by the researcher to confirm the quality of the sample. In this study, the criteria that were established were: (1) the participant had to be Sudanese who studies and speaks English as a foreign language, (2) he had to be one of the people who settled permanently in the UK and (3) he had to be one of the people who were born in the Sudan, moved and settled in the UK, excluding those generations from the migrants who were born in the UK and speak English like native speakers. In the table below, I provided the Sudanese participants' information background:

**Table 8. Sudanese learners' background information.**

No. of participants	Gender	Age	Cities lived in	Years in the UK	Study of ESOL
20	-19 males -1 female	30-45 years	Liverpool London Glasgow Birmingham Cardiff Swansea Nottingham	10-15	18 learners

All participants of this study met the above criteria and agreed to participate voluntarily because the study used convenient sampling and snowballing that entitled the participants to volunteer in this study (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, the participants were from those who replied to the message recruitment and stated their desire and availability to be involved in the study. The participants were 20 who settled in various cities and towns in the UK. It is important to note that there were 19 of these participants were males and a single female because there was sensitivity of approaching females among Sudanese community members for religious beliefs and social constraints.

### **3.4.2.2 English native speakers**

The population from which I selected the English native speakers to participate in the interviews about communication difficulties and strategies with Sudanese learners were members from the white members in the British community in the UK. The criteria that were adopted to identify the sample size was that the participant should be a fluent native speaker and speaks English as his mother tongue and first language from his birth (See Section 2.14). In the table below, I provided the English native speakers' background information:

**Table 9. English native speakers' background information.**

No. of participants	Gender	Age	Cities
20	-15 males -5 females	40-70	Liverpool Wirral St. Helens London Belfast Manchester

The participants were 20 English native speakers who are currently settled in different cities in the UK. I selected them based on the definition of the English native speaker that I identified in the literature review to refer to any individual who speaks English as his

mother tongue language from his birth. Therefore, I checked this clearly upon accepting their participation in this study. They were all adult people who worked in different jobs. Based on the convenient sampling and snowballing strategies that I adopted in this study, these participants with various backgrounds (doing different jobs and exposed to Sudanese learners in various situations) may likely help to obtain rich and credible data that helps to answer the research questions.

Finally, it is important to note that these 20 English native speakers have never personally met the 20 Sudanese participants who were recruited in this survey in face-to-face meeting, but they reported their communication difficulties and strategies based on their previous experiences in conversations with Sudanese people in the UK.

### **3.4.3 Instruments design: An overview**

This sub-section of the report provided an account of the interviews review, interview protocol, procedures, data transcription and method of data analysis. Before applying the instruments for data collection in the main study, they were piloted and modified according to the results of this pilot study.

### **3.4.3.1 Pilot study**

A pilot study was conducted to examine the feasibility of the initial research instruments, practise the procedures, and improve the quality and efficiency of these instruments and procedures for the main study research methods if the results of the pilot study summon that. There were six participants from the migrant's Sudanese community in the UK were recruited for the pilot study during February 2020. It took around a week from sending text messages to ten Sudanese learners asking them to participate in the survey to the receipt of eight replies stating their agreement and interest to participate in the survey. Two out of eight participants were not involved in this pilot work because enough number of the participants for the pilot study had already been recruited. Finally, six Sudanese learners attended the induction of the pilot study in March 2020. They are all adult, speak English as a foreign language and have settled in different cities in the UK for about ten to fifteen years. Also, there were four English native speakers from the British community members participated in the pilot work.

Before starting interviewing, all participants read the information sheets, filled in the consent forms and I took their consent to audio record the interviews. At the beginning, I explained to the participants that the information they gave will be confidential and their participation in the interviews is voluntary, and they could withdraw

from the study at any time without giving a reason. To start the interviews, I introduced myself to the participants, stated the purpose of the study, identified the expected time of the interview's session (15 to 20 minutes for each session); and in turn, I asked them to introduce themselves to create rapport.

The pilot study demonstrated that the period of 20 minutes is quite enough to employ procedures of initial interviews with each individual participant. Also, it was observed that the linguistic ability for two of the Sudanese participants is limited because they could not speak fluently in English and made many hesitations and silent pauses and hence, they could not report their communication difficulties and strategies clearly during the initial interview. For this reason, I proposed to modify the instruments design to give the participants an option of employing the interview in Arabic during the main study. This modification assisted to collect appropriate and rich data during the main study. Moreover, the results of the pilot study demonstrated that the interview guide used during the pilot study is limited regarding the different informal situations in which the Sudanese participants are likely to meet English native speakers. Therefore, the interview guide was elaborated to comprise extra situations of the potential interactions between Sudanese learners and their peer English native speakers such as hospitals, shops, Job Centres, cafés, train and bus stations, streets, etc.

### 3.4.3.2 Interviews

This is to provide a definition of interviews, a justification for using them, the limitations and how they can be mitigated to suit the purpose of this study. Some of these interviews were also given to low proficient learners in Arabic, and later were translated into English. In research, there is more than one definition of interviews, but they look like each other. In an early research, interviews are defined as “An interview is literally an *“inter view”*, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (Kvale, 1996, p. 14). This short definition can be summarised as that the interview is an exchange of information between two persons.

Based on the ways in which they are carried out, interviews can be classified into three types: individual face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews and group interviews (Nkansah & Chimbwanda, 2016). But based on their structure, interviews can also be classified into three: structured interviews, unstructured interviews, and semi-structured interviews (Zohrabi, 2013).

In this study, I adopted semi-structured interviews for these reasons: (1) semi-structured interviews are flexible in their wording and adaptable with a checklist of topics to explore participants’ insights and their underlying ideas as the researcher cannot observe the informants’ feelings and thinking (Hollander, 2004; Roulston, 2013; Zohrabi, 2013; Kvale, 2007). To answer the research questions in this

study, the flexibility of questions is important because I interviewed learners of different levels of language proficiency, and for this reason, I needed flexible questions to be adapted during the interview to suit everybody. (2) Through interviews, I created a rapport with the participants through which I obtained profound information from the interviewees; rapport is defined as “A range of positive psychological features of an interaction, including a situated sense of connection or affiliation between interactional partners, comfort, willingness to disclose or share sensitive information, motivation to please, and empathy” (Garbarski et al., 2016). The rapport could potentially increase respondents’ motivation to participate, disclose, or provide accurate information. In relation to the research questions of this study, the rapport is important method to encourage those learners who may be shy to talk about the communication difficulties they face in interaction with English native speakers.

(3) Semi-structured interviews allowed me as the researcher of this study to use my multi-sensory channels during the interviews with my interviewees where I had gleaned both verbal and non-verbal cues about my research problem (Cohen et al., 2008). During interviews, I had observed how learners manifest their communication difficulties through gestures, body language and pauses, and what solutions did they use to continue their conversations. (4) Semi-structured interviews allowed me as the researcher to probe effectively for more



information. Probing is defined as the process of stimulating a respondent by the researcher to produce more information, without injecting myself so much into the interaction to influence it negatively (Bernard, 2013). In research, there are many ways for probing more information: silence probe, echo probe such as repeating the last thing someone has said, or asking him to continue, the “uh-huh” probe and tell-me-more probe (Bernard, 2013). In relation to the communication difficulties and communication strategies, probing is useful to get rich data, because I had been able to build on what interviewees said during the interviews to pose further questions.

One of the basic limitations of the interview method that may potentially have a negative influence on this study is the discrepancy between what respondent report about their communication difficulties and what they face or do (Roulston, 2013). In fact, in our daily life we can regularly meet people who may say their English is fluent and they do not face any communication difficulties with the native speakers of English, while they are not. To address this limitation and mitigate its potential negative influence on this study, I created a rapport with the respondents by talking about my own communication difficulties, made respondents feel relaxed by confirming confidentiality and anonymity to improve the quality of the data (Gray, 2018). Overall, interviews are the most appropriate

method to tap into people's views, attitudes, and report about their behaviour (Boxstaens et al., 2015).

#### **3.4.3.2.1 Interviews protocol**

There are many protocols of interviews in research literature that suit this study. I have used the following interview schedule that was adapted from Robson's work (Robson, 2016, p. 284):

**1. Introduction:** I started with introducing myself to the respondent, explained the purpose of the interview, confirmed confidentiality and anonymity, time of the interview, filled in consent forms, and asked for permission to record the interview and took notes.

**2. Warm-up:** I started with easy non-threatening questions to settle down both of us. I used to talk about personal experience on communication and asked the respondent in turn about his background such as his name and where he grew up to develop the rapport.

**3. Main body of the interview:** I focused on the main topic of the study: the communication difficulties and communication strategies. I used my interview guide to confirm that all questions are answered, and any "risky" questions were relatively delayed in the sequence of the questions list.

I started to confirm the information given in the questionnaires about communication difficulties and communication strategies. I built on

what was confirmed and went down to ask for different items from the interviewees to see whether they had alternative problems, reasons, or different explanations.

**4. Cool-off:** At the end, I posed a few straightforward questions to defuse any tension that might have built up such as how can we develop our communicative competence?

**5. Closure:** I thanked the participant, valued his contribution, and thanked him for participating in the interview.

**(This interview protocol has been taken and adapted for the purpose of this study from Robson, 2016, p. 284).**

In addition, I have considered the valuable advice provided by Jacob and Furgerson (2012) that I followed some of it in this study: (1) I made the research guides my questions, (2) I used a script for the beginning and end of the interview, (3) I used open-ended questions in the interview, (4) I started with easy questions and moved on to more difficult ones, (5) I did not make the interview too long, (6) I used some prompts and probes to obtain deep information, etc. (See Section 3.4.3.2.4).

Finally, I provided two types of interview guide that I used as guides and checklists during the employment of interviews with both Sudanese participants and English native speakers to report their communication difficulties and strategies they encounter during their

mutual conversations. It is worth noting that these interviews were conducted with both Sudanese learners and English native speakers through the phone calls as the pandemic and lockdown procedures prevented conducting them in face-to-face meetings.

#### **3.4.3.2.2 Interview guide to Sudanese participants:**

This interview guide is a combination of semi-structured interviews that was taken and adapted from IRIS and those designed by the researcher to suit the purpose of this study.

1. What have you done today/yesterday/ during this week? Where did you go yesterday? Who did you talk to?
2. How did you find your conversation with him?
3. What communication difficulties did you face? You said ..., What problems with these ...? What else did you find problems about? How about ...?
4. What did you do to continue your conversation? If this ... does not help, what else do you do?
5. You mentioned ... what else do you do to maintain your conversation?
6. How about going to hospital? How did you find that? What difficulties did you find there? How did you manage your conversation

with doctors? You said ... what else did you use to maintain your conversation?

7. Where do you normally go shopping? How do you do that? What difficulties or problems do you face? What problems do you face with ...? What strategies do you follow to do your shopping?

8. How often do you talk to English native speakers in streets? How are your conversations with them? What problems do you face? You said ... what problems with these ...? What do you do when you face such problems? How about using ...?

9. How often do you go to train stations? What problems do you face when talking to people there? How do you keep your conversation continue? You mentioned ... what else do you do?

10. What other places or situations do you talk to English native speakers? What difference do you find? What problems do you face there? What problems with ...? Can you tell me more about that? How do you continue your conversation in this case? What else do you use?

11. How about talking to people in the Job Centre? What problems do you face? When you face problems, what do you do to support your talking with people?

### **3.4.3.2.3 Interview guide to English native speakers:**

1. What have you done during this week? What places did you go to? Who did you talk to?
2. To what extent do you talk to Sudanese people? How did you find your conversation with them?
3. What communication difficulties did you face? You said ..., What problems with these ...? What else did you find problems about? How about ...?
4. What did you do to continue your conversation? If this ... does not help, what else do you do?
5. You mentioned ... what else do you do to maintain your conversation? How about using ...?
6. This is in general but let us see a specific situation. How about going to hospitals? Who did you talk to? How did you find that? What difficulties did you find there? How did you manage your conversation with Sudanese doctors? You said ... what else did you use to maintain your conversation? If that does not help, what else can you do?
7. Where do you normally go shopping? How do you do that? Who do you talk to? What difficulties or problems do you face? What problems do you face with ...? What strategies do you follow to do your shopping?

8. How often do you go to train stations? What problems do you face when talking to Sudanese people there? How do you keep your conversation continues? You mentioned ... what else do you do?

9. How about the Job Centre? How about talking to Sudanese people in the Job Centre? What problems do you face? When you face problems, what do you do to support your talking with these people?

10. How often do you talk to Sudanese people when meeting casually in streets? How are your conversations with them? What problems do you face? You said ... what problems with these ...? What do you do when you face such problems? How about using ...?

11. What other places or situations do you talk to Sudanese people? What difference do you find? What problems do you face there? What problems with ...? Can you tell me more about that? How do you continue your conversation in this case? What else do you use?

#### **3.4.3.2.4 Sample of probes**

This model was selected and adapted from Bernard's work (Bernard, 2013, p. 187). Ways to probe interviewees:

The silence probe: In some situations, I kept silent or quiet to let the interviewee continues. I could just nod or mumble "uh...huh".

The echo probe: I regularly repeated the last thing the interviewee said and asking him to continue.

The uh-huh probe: I just encouraged the interviewee to continue by making affirmative comments such as “uh-huh” or “yes, I see”, right, etc.

The Tell-me-more probe: I probed with “could you tell me more about that?” “Why do you say that?”

### **3.5 Data transcription**

There are different styles of transcribing verbal data collected from research participants such as interviews, which suit various analytic methods. In this study, I adopted a style of audio transcription known as ‘orthographic’ or ‘verbatim’ which focuses on transcribing spoken words in recorded data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Cohen, et al., 2013). Unlike other styles of transcriptions that, for example, include more ‘phonetic’ or ‘paralinguistic features’ such as speech pace (faster, lower) or volume (louder, quieter), the orthographic transcription records what was said (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is adopted in this study because it focuses on what was reported about communication difficulties and strategies by both Sudanese participants and English native speakers. Therefore, I focused on recording only words, non-lexicalised fillers such as ‘uh...huh’, ‘yeah’, and ‘oh’ and three full-stops for silent pauses (...) (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Bernard, 2013; Manzano, 2018)) as transcription conventions.



For ethical considerations, in this study the participants' real names were anonymised and pseudonyms were used instead: Sudanese 1, Sudanese 2, ... etc. for Sudanese participants; and English 1, English 2, etc. for English native speakers.

### **3.6. Data analysis: an overview**

Qualitative data analysis involves organising, accounting for, and explaining the data, or making sense of it in terms of the participants' definitions of themes, situations, and categories (Cohen et al., 2013). Other researchers define qualitative data analysis as a process of breaking down the data into smaller units to reveal their characteristic elements and structure; and research as well indicates that data analysis involves description, interpreting and explanation of data (Gray, 2018).

In this study, I adopted thematic analysis (TA) method for the following reasons: (1) it enabled me to bring together the commonalities and differences in participants' descriptions of their experiences (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017); (2) it was a flexible method to organise, describe and interpret qualitative data, and it could be modified for the needs of many studies (Nowell et al., 2017); (3) it was easy to conduct because it is essentially independent of theory and epistemology and can be applied across a range of approaches (Crowe, Inder, & Porter, 2015); (4) it tends more towards inductive approaches ( appropriate to the social constructivist theory)

to uncover latent meanings in the data (Crowe et al., 2015); (5) it is interpretive and it does not lend itself to calculation (Crowe et al., 2015); (6) it is useful for summarising key features of a large data and helps to produce a clear and organised final report (Nowell et al., 2017); and (7) it is accessible to novice researchers or researchers with little experience in qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **3.6.1 Steps of thematic analysis**

There are six steps in thematic analysis as exposed in research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

(1) Familiarising yourself with your data: Transcribing the data, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.

(2) Generating initial codes: Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.

(3) Searching for themes: Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.

(4) Reviewing themes: Checking if themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic “map” of the analysis.

(5) Defining and naming themes: Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.

(6) Producing the report: The final opportunity for analysis, selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research questions and literature and producing report of the analysis.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

The ethical considerations have become increasingly important in any research as there are ethical issues related to research in social life where human, animal and environmental participants are included. These ethical problems arise from the nature of the research in which we research private lives and put accounts about them in the public arena where many people can know about it (Kvale, 2007).

In this study, I followed the ethical principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018, and I obtained an ethical approval from the Department of Education Ethics Committee at the University of York. After obtaining the consent form, I confirmed to the participants from the beginning that they are free to participate or refuse, and they are also free to withdraw once the research has started (Cohen et al., 2013).

To respect the privacy of the participants and maintain the confidentiality of the data, I employed several strategies in this study. In the interviews, there were no names on them. Also, during the analysis of the data obtained through interviews, pseudonyms were given to interviewees in all data sheets (Cohen et al., 2013).

As for data management and accessibility, the participants were provided with an option in which they can ask for the data collected from them to be destroyed within a given period. Also, participants were informed that there is a possibility that the findings of this study can be presented at academic conferences and/or published in journals to obtain their consent. In addition, participants were told that a report of the findings will be offered to them and to the members of the community. I also, informed the participants that I have an intention to share the findings with my supervisor and colleagues at the educational research group (ERG) meetings at the University of York.

### **3.8 The trustworthiness: An overview**

To address issues of validity and reliability in this study, I made amendments to validity and reliability in quantitative research to suit those in qualitative research. This study used the alternative criteria that were generated by some researchers to evaluate the qualitative research data as equivalent to reliability and validity in the quantitative studies. Therefore, trustworthiness is used to evaluate

the data in this study. It is made up of four criteria, each of which has an equivalent criterion in the quantitative research: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Nowell et al., 2017).

### **3.8.1 Credibility**

Credibility is parallel to internal validity in quantitative research; and in this study the credibility was corroborated by four methods: prolonged and persistent engagement, respondent validation, methods triangulation, and peer debriefing (Mertens, 2010). Firstly, to increase the credibility in this study by having a prolonged engagement with the phenomenon under study, I have spent two months (during June and July 2020) to employ interviews in the first study and two months (during September and October 2021) to examine the Sudanese learners' pragmatic competence in the second study. I believe this prolonged existence among the participants during the survey allowed me to better understand the communication difficulties, communication strategies and the pragmatic competence of Sudanese learners in the UK. Secondly, in respondent validation, the findings of this study were submitted to the Sudanese ESOL learners and their English native interlocutors to obtain confirmation. Thirdly, in triangulating the methods, the data of this study was collected through a combination of views of both Sudanese and English native speakers on the same social phenomenon where comparison is possible. Fourthly, in peer

debriefing, I exchanged the findings of the data with the supervisor and presented the findings of this study among colleagues in ERG meetings for external check and comments (Nowell et al., 2017).

### **3.8.2 Dependability**

Dependability is parallel to reliability in quantitative research, and it refers to the idea of “repeatability” of the findings of the study (Bryman, 2016). Mertens (2010) indicates that reliability means stability over time, but change may strike any position such as in a constructivist paradigm like qualitative studies. Therefore, each research study is unique and that findings may differ from one study to another in constructivist paradigms (Bostancioglu, 2015). Therefore, researchers propose dependability to establish the merit of a research and advised that a researcher should adopt an “auditing” approach (Bryman, 2016). To establish the dependability for this study, a complete record was kept for all phases of the research process, detailing all steps taken and indicating any changes from the beginning to the end for tracking and checking: problem formulation, selection of research participants, procedures, data analysis, reporting findings, etc.

### **3.8.3 Transferability**

Transferability is parallel to external validity in quantitative research. It relates to the idea of whether the findings of this study can be

generalised to wider context or other context based on the assumption that the sample used in this study is representative of the population (Mertens, 2010). Based on the idea that qualitative studies are concerned with the study of a small group in depth rather in breadth and accordingly, their findings cannot be generalised as you cannot freeze a social setting in constant situation, this study aims to produce a “thick description” (rich accounts of the details of a phenomenon) of its case study (Bryman, 2016). This thick description will remain as a “database” for others to refer to and judge or decide whether it is possible to transfer its findings to other contexts. However, there are similarities between the situation of the Sudanese migrants and other migrants in the UK: speaking English as a foreign language and taught ESOL courses for an intention of integration in the British society. This may indicate that the findings of this study can be generalised to other migrants in the UK.

#### **3.8.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability is parallel to objectivity in quantitative research, and it refers to the idea of minimising the effect of the researcher’s personal judgment and influence on the study (Mertens, 2010). The researcher is advised to do his best not to allow his values and personal views to sway the conduct of the research and the findings emanating from it (Bryman, 2016).

To strengthen the objectivity in this study, I adopted four methods: (1) participants' interviews were audio-recorded, (2) I shared some of my findings with the supervisor and presented the study findings among PhD students during the department's educational research groups meetings to give them an opportunity to comment on my views, (3) I submitted my findings back to the participants to comment on the objectivity of the findings, and (4) a complete record of the findings and analysis was available for readers to judge the validity of the data.

### **3.9 Consideration of reflexivity**

As a researcher and conductor of this study, I should be cognizant of my role, personal identity, personal preferences, cultural background, theoretical orientations, and emotional biases; and their potential influence on my data findings during conducting this study to increase the credibility of the findings.

To begin with, I was first introduced to the Sudanese immigrant community in the UK in 2011 when I arrived in the UK in July 2011 to do a pre-session course in English language at the University of Liverpool as a requirement to qualify for an MA in Applied Linguistics. After completing the course, and for many personal reasons, I decided to settle down in the United Kingdom and obtain a permanent residence permit. Subsequently, I have become a member of the immigrant Sudanese community in the UK in 2012 after several steps (See Section 1.4). During that time, I was exposed to all processes and



steps applicable to immigrant people in the UK. Based on some considerations such as my internal membership in this community, I have chosen the members of the Sudanese immigrant community as a case study population for this study.

Since the process of reflexivity permeates the whole research employment, I have taken several steps, which will be explained below, to minimise my influence on this study although I do not believe that it is possible to completely remove myself and my influence from this research. Since all qualitative studies are contextual; that is, they occur within a specific time and place between two or more people (Dodgson, 2019), I obviously described the contextual intersecting relationships between me, and the participants hoping to increase credibility and deepen the understanding of the work. The purpose of this is to highlight the similarities and differences between me and the participants to the reader (Dodgson, 2019). In compatibility with that, I have become a member of that Sudanese immigrant community based on my refugee status, but I remained peripheral to most of its members because of my personal circumstances, aspirations and the different passion that I have adopted all throughout my existence during this period in the UK. I identify myself as a middle-aged black African, who was a former teacher of English language as a foreign language in my home country and a postgraduate student at present in the UK. While most of the

Sudanese community members remained closely linked to their small community members with relatively regular meetings in their isolated community venues in different cities in the UK, I led a different passion: I volunteered as an interpreter in the British Red Cross, joined Philosophy in Pubs groups for free discussions to develop my communicative competence to pursue my postgraduate studies and better understand life in the UK attempting to integrate in the British society to upgrade my contribution.

It can be argued that distancing myself from the Sudanese community in this way might have prevented me from fully understanding the dynamics and nature of the community. However, to balance or compensate for this during data collection of this study, I adopted a combination of convenient and snowballing strategy for selecting the participants and spent four months moving around the Sudanese community venues to select participants and introduce myself to them.

I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with 20 Sudanese participants who had different levels of activities to explore the communication difficulties and strategies they encounter during informal interaction with English native speakers in the free social space in the UK. During these interviews, I rarely used prompts, but mostly used probes to generate much information from participants' insights. Also, during these interviews, I tried as far as I could to

prevent any researcher influence impacting the interviews by hiding my prior assumptions and knowledge about communication difficulties encountering non-native speakers of English: allowing participants freedom and more time to report their views (See Section 3.4.3.2.1). To increase the credibility of the data, I have triangulated the Sudanese participants' views on communication difficulties with those of English native speakers. Hence, I conducted 20 interviews with 20 English native speakers in the UK in the same way to record the similarities and differences between the Sudanese reports and English native speakers' reports on communication problems.

It is important to note that my position in the research as an outsider and insider might have caused problems to arise relevant to trust on data. However, I contacted the participants who volunteered to participate in the interviews personally and shared my personal experience with some of them before interviews start to encourage participation and create rapport to gain their trust. But during the employment of the interviews, I had never intervened in reporting their views; and only interrupted to probe or very rarely prompt their insights. Upon the final analysis of the interviews data, I offered a report on the findings to the participants as an incentive to check the data; as well as presenting the data with the research group at the Department of education, the University of York attempting to increase credibility of the data.

In the second study of this thesis, I have employed discourse completion task (DCT) situations (the DCT situations protocol includes 12 situations with different functions that the Sudanese participants are likely to meet in their daily lives in the UK) to each of 20 Sudanese participants; then the whole Sudanese participants' responses were double-rated by 8 English native speakers with justification to their ratings. During the employment of the DCT situations, and to obtain trusted data, I read out the 12 DCT situations to each individual participant one-by-one without any intervention during his response to each situation.

In summary, I strived to increase the trustworthiness of this study through various strategies, which were generated prior to (planning to collect data from multiple sources for triangulation during data collection and analysis, prolonged engagement (I have spent 4 months among the Sudanese participants to collect data); and maintaining an audit trail for the whole study stages), during (staying as peripheral member so as not to influence the participants during data collection and remain as far as I could as objective as possible), and after (i.e., checking the findings of the study with participants and receiving feedback; and external check with community research members and obtain their comments on the study findings) the data collection and analysis phases (Dodgson, 2019).

### **3.10 The contribution of the study**

Theoretically, the study will contribute to the general understanding of communication difficulties and strategies in education; and it will highlight the voices of ESOL learners, the very people at the centre of the teaching and learning ESOL process. Practically, this study hopes to provide valuable information about the challenges and difficulties facing Sudanese ESOL learners' communication when interacting with native speakers of English as well as non-native speakers. The data will aid teachers' understanding learners' needs so that they can develop their pedagogical methods and tailor language materials to help learners overcome these problems.

The study is also expected to shed light on how Sudanese ESOL learners' endeavor to develop their language proficiency when interacting with their peer interlocutors in English which is effective in learning and using a language. From the analysis of this endeavor within the data, the study has introduced new strategies and new concept of communication strategies that go beyond what people think about strategy that were defined as 'pre-communication strategies' which is a novel contribution of this study to research in theory and practice. These new strategies such as 'preparatory strategies' and 'longer-term developing communication strategies' will be an addition to the existing body of research in the field of communication strategies. Hence, this will inform teachers about the

support and interventions these learners may need to improve proficiency.

In addition, answering the research questions of this study will inform local authorities, language researchers and ESOL tutors of the best ways to design language materials, teaching methods and extracurricular activities. Therefore, improving the proficiency of ESOL learners will significantly impact national efforts towards integration and help to break the cycle of isolation often experienced by immigrant learners.

The study will provide a unique opportunity for understanding the challenges associated with English language learners in the UK, and it will help by proposing practical solutions to them. The data will constitute valuable reference for policy makers where issues related to immigration and integration are currently taking center stage in the public awareness.

#### **4. Chapter 4: Procedures of data analysis**

In qualitative research, there are variety of ways for the researcher to gather and analyse data. For analysing the interviews, I decided to apply Thematic Analysis (TA) with its six phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2013). The reasons for why I decided to adopt Thematic Analysis in this study were discussed in the previous sections (See Section 3.6).

Thematic analysis as discussed before is a flexible method for identification, analysis and reporting of patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This indicates that thematic analysis is not bound by theory, and hence, it enables the researcher to produce rich and detailed account of the themes in his data. The theme is defined by Braun and Clarke (2013) as what captures something important about the data in relation to the research questions and represents some level of patterned and consistent manner. Therefore, the theme is not only just a question of which is the most frequent elements in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This means that the higher number of occurrences of a theme within the data set do not necessarily mean that it is more important. However, researchers are warned that they should not use their data collection questions as themes and adopt them as an analytic approach for the identification of themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

All these considerations were considered when analysing the data of interviews in this study. It is also important to note that both Braun and Clarke (2013) indicated that the thematic analysis can be employed either inductively (data-driven) or deductively (theory-driven). In the deductive approach, the researcher is guided by using a pre-existing theoretical framework to support the data analysis, whereas in the inductive approach the researcher is free of theory restrictions in data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013)

Braun and Clarke (2013) created a step-by-step guide for researchers (See Section 3.6.1) conducting the thematic analysis to draw a clear view throughout. In this study, I employed the inductive approach of the analysis, following the six steps of the thematic analysis. After reading and re-reading the data, I started generating the initial codes in the dataset about the communication difficulties and strategies that were reported by both Sudanese learners and English native speakers (See Appendices K and L). Coding is a process of identifying aspects of the data in relation to the research questions; and a code can be a 'word' or 'brief phrase' that captures the essence of what a researcher considers it a particular bit of useful data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). There are two approaches of coding: selecting coding and complete coding (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In selecting coding, researchers just look for particular instances, whereas complete coding includes everything relevant to the research questions. In this study, I employed a complete coding in which I identified anything and everything relevant to answering the research questions (communication difficulties and strategies) within the entire dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

When searching and naming the themes, I first generated 'candidate' themes throughout dataset in this study (See Appendix M). To name the final themes, I reviewed the different forms of the candidate themes until I created the final themes that were hoped



to reflect the appropriate meaning of what was reported by the participants about communication difficulties and strategies in this study (See Table 10 & Table 11).

It is important to note that on ranging between semantic or explicit level and latent or interpretive level that are available in thematic analysis, I decided to adopt the interpretive approach to develop these themes to comprise 'latent themes' to help in the interpretation and reporting of the data. The latent analysis was described as the analysis that goes beyond the surface meaning of the data and examine the 'underlying ideas', assumptions and concepts that inform the semantic content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

#### **4 Chapter 4: An overview of results**

Broadly, this chapter presents the findings about communication difficulties and strategies reported by both Sudanese learners and English native speakers in this study. They were firstly presented in tables in the following way: (1) the communication difficulties reported by Sudanese learners (See Table 10), (2) the communication difficulties reported by English native speakers (See Table 11), (3) the communication strategies employed by Sudanese learners (See Table 12) and the strategies employed by English native speakers (See Table 13).

## 4.1 Communication difficulties reported by Sudanese learners

Research question 1:

RQ1: What communication difficulties do Sudanese ESOL learners report that they encounter in their interaction with native speakers of English in the UK?

To answer the first main research question, the Sudanese learners reported the following communication difficulties (See Table 10). These difficulties were broadly classified under two main trends or themes: British accent and dialects and lexis; each with sub-themes. They were discussed in detail in this section.

**Table 10. Themes of communication difficulties reported by Sudanese learners.**

Communication difficulties	
1. British accent and dialects difficulties	2. Lexical difficulties
-Phonological variation of accent	-Limited vocabulary size
-Regional dialects variations	-Technical vocabulary
-Perceived speech rate	-phrasal vocabulary

## 4.2 Communication difficulties reported by English native speakers

The sub-question to research question1:

- a) Are these communication difficulties the same as those reported by the English native speaker interlocutors?

To answer the above sub-question within the first main research question, the English native speakers reported the following communication difficulties (See Table 11). To compare these difficulties with those reported by Sudanese learners, these communication difficulties were classified under two main trends: similar communication difficulties and different difficulties from those reported by Sudanese learners.

**Table 11. Themes of communication difficulties reported by English native speakers.**

Communication difficulties	
Similar communication difficulties with those reported by Sudanese learners	Different communication difficulties from those reported by Sudanese learners
-Regional dialects variations	-Suprasegmental features
-Limited vocabulary size	-Inappropriate vocabulary use
-Phrasal vocabulary	-Cross-cultural variations

### **4.3 Communication strategies (CSs) reported by Sudanese learners**

This chapter presents the findings to answer the second research question in this study:

RQ2: What communication strategies do Sudanese ESOL learners report that they use to overcome the communication difficulties encountered in their interaction with native speakers of English?

The communication strategies reported by Sudanese learners were presented in the following table in a descending order from the most frequent to the least frequent types across the 20 Sudanese learners. It is important to note that the frequency of the communication strategy was calculated based on the number of the times a given strategy is reported by the Sudanese participants across the whole interviews data. Secondly, they were supported by extracts from the data and a discussion for each communication strategy (See Table 12).

**Table 12. Communication strategies reported by Sudanese learners.**

Number of CSs	The communication strategies (CSs)	Frequency
1	Appeal for assistance	56
2	Asking for repetition	30
3	Clarification request	22
4	Asking for lengthening of words	20
5	Body language	15
6	Circumlocution	13

7	Message abandonment	10
8	Appeal for literal translation	5
9	Preparatory strategy	4
10	Guessing	2

#### 4.4 Communication strategies reported by English native speakers

This chapter presented the findings to answer the third research question in this study:

RQ3: What communication strategies do the English native speaker interlocutors report that they use to overcome the communication difficulties they encounter in their interaction with Sudanese ESOL learners?

The communication strategies were presented in the following table in a descending order from the most frequent to the least frequent types across the 20 English native speakers (See Table 13).

**Table 13. Communication strategies reported by English native speakers.**

Number of CSs	The communication strategies (CSs)	Frequency
1	Appeal for assistance	32
2	Asking for repetition	29
3	Body language	22

4	Clarification request	20
5	Asking for lengthening of words	15
6	Circumlocution	13
7	Guessing	12
8	Message abandonment	10
9	Appeal for paraphrasing in standard English	9
10	Asking for confirmation	5
11	Longer-term developing communication strategy	4

## **5 Chapter 5: Discussion of the findings: An overview**

This section discussed the findings about the communication difficulties and strategies reported by Sudanese learners and English native speakers to answer the research questions in this study. Firstly, I displayed the communication difficulty or strategy, supported by an extract or extracts from the data, and a discussion for both the extracts and the theme of the difficulty or strategy. Firstly, I discussed the communication difficulties reported by Sudanese learners (See Sections 5.1; 5.2; 5.3; 5.4; 5.5; 5.6; 5.7). Secondly, I discussed the communication difficulties reported by English native speakers (See Sections 5.7.1; 5.7.2; 5.7.3; 5.7.4; 5.7.5; 5.7.6; 5.7.7).

### **5.1 Discussion of the communication difficulties reported by Sudanese learners: an overview**

In this sub-section, I subsequently discussed the following communication difficulties reported by Sudanese learners: phonological variation of accent, regional dialects variations, perceived speech rate, limited vocabulary size, technical vocabulary, and phrasal vocabulary.

## **5.2 Communication difficulty 1: Phonological variation of accent**

“The accent is very hard ... the accent ... they speak some letters or something like that” (Sudanese 3).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner reported that one of the communication difficulties he encounters is the way people in England articulate words. It seems to him that they do not articulate some letters in a word or there is something influences their production of words that he does not know.

“OK, the accent, in general, English people huh...huh their accent is different from the English that I learned in my country uh...huh for example, they do not pronounce some letters like ‘r’. OK, in my country, we insist when pronounce this letter at first, they pronounce it” (Sudanese 5).

Also, in this extract, the Sudanese learner reported that one of the communication difficulties he encounters in the UK in interaction with English native speakers is their accent and the way they articulate words. Clearly, he indicated that their articulation of words is different from that he used to hear in his home country. As an attempt of explanation to that, he indicated that English native speakers do not articulate, for example, the letter ‘r’ when they speak, whereas he

used to pronounce words with full letters; and this generates a communication difficulty for him.

Taken together as examples, the phonological variation of accent is a common theme reported by all Sudanese participants in the data. Similar findings of the phonological variation of the British accent as a communication problem have been reported in previous studies (Yang, 2016; Sato, 2008; Morris-Adams, 2008). Similarly, a recent study conducted on international students in the UK indicated that they encounter the same difficulties of understanding both British accent and dialects (McKenzie, 2015). Also, Yanagi and Baker (2016) collected data from 33 undergraduate and postgraduate Japanese students studying in Australia confirmed the same results and indicated that most of these Japanese students encountered difficulties of speaking and pronunciation in Australian accent.

Moreover, it is confirmed in several other studies that the speaker's accent mostly has positive or negative reactions on the listener because accent is defined as a unique mode of sound production that is influenced by speaker's native language (Carlson & McHenry, 2006). Therefore, phonological variation of accent among speakers from different backgrounds is a key component of accents features like prosody, rhythm, stress, and emphasis that play a major role.

Also, this goes in line with several previous empirical studies that investigated the effects of native speaker accent on non-native



speakers. For example, in a previous study, a researcher asked ELF students to listen to two different English native speaker varieties: American English and Irish English. His findings noted that the familiarity with Irish English accent had significant effect on the Japanese learners' comprehensibility to Irish English (Matsuura, 2007). Similarly, another researcher investigated the effects of native language accent on listening comprehension, he found that Spanish speakers scored significantly higher when listening to Spanish-accented English (Matsuura, 2007; See Section 2.5.1) because of familiarity with their own accent.

### **5.3 Communication difficulty 2: Regional dialects variations**

“Uh...huh the first thing the accent, really, especially people from Liverpool, the Scouser people uh...huh as you know their accent uh...huh is very difficult. So, uh...huh and sometimes they use different words. So, uh...huh the accent is the first thing uh...huh and some people, they talk very quickly. So, I ask them to calm down and speak slowly” (Sudanese 5).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner indicated that he encountered a difficulty of communication when interacting with people speaking in British dialects. For example, he indicated that it was difficult for him to understand the ‘Scouse’ dialect in Liverpool. Specifically, speakers of that dialect seem to him that they may use unfamiliar words and they appear to speak very fast that he cannot follow their production of speech so that he is forced to ask them to speak slowly.

“It is OK uh...huh sometime uh...huh language Scouse uh...huh is different uh...huh, but I understand uh...huh sometime uh...huh they speak fast uh...huh and uh...huh like some words is no clear. They uh...huh the local language is different” (Sudanese 1).

Similarly, another Sudanese learner from Liverpool in the above extract indicated that he encounters difficulties to interact with speakers of ‘Scouse’ dialect in Liverpool because speakers of that dialect speak fast, their structure of the language they use is difficult to him and some of the words they use are not quite clear to him.

“Uh...huh different, 8 people, they talk together, OK, uh...huh I cannot catch a lot of words of their conversation because they speak fluently with their local accent. But, when they start to talk with me, uh...huh they start speaking clearly. So, uh...huh ...” (Sudanese 5).

Also, in the above extract, the Sudanese learner indicated that once upon a time, he listened to eight British people speaking in their own dialects that he did not understand them. It seemed to him that they were speaking fast, using unfamiliar words and for that reason, he had not understood many of their words and speech.

Taken together all extracts above, regional dialects variations are a common theme reported nearly by all Sudanese participants in the data. They indicated that they encounter communication difficulties with regional dialects when talking to English native speakers in those dialects because of choice of words and language structure. Similar findings of British regional dialects influencing communication have also been reported in many previous studies (McKenzie, 2015; Montgomery, 2007; Tagliamonte & Molfenter, 2007). Similarly, there

is a study about the nature of the second dialect employed on the performance of twenty speakers in the UK, indicated that some of these people who moved into a new community where the same language is spoken, but a different dialect is used need to adapt to a new set of linguistic rules to sound like their peers (Tagliamonte & Molfenter, 2007).

Similarly, in a previous empirical study investigated outer circle speaker-listeners listening to a non-standard British English variety, a researcher found that the undergraduate Singaporean listeners encountered several segmental issues such as 'th fronting', glottalisation of medial /h/, and fronting of the high, back, rounded vowel as barriers to speech intelligibility. Also, they failed to identify several words correctly (Pickering, 2006).

Moreover, there are other previous empirical studies noted dialect variation as one of the many important sources influences speech processing and hence, affects speech intelligibility. With respect to dialect variation, researchers reported that talkers and listeners who shared a dialect were more mutually intelligible than those from different dialect regions. The results of these studies suggest that when a listener encounters a familiar dialect, the appropriate mapping between acoustic-phonetic and lexical information is already in place and hence, speech comprehensibility is improved. They also observed that many of the listeners or speakers under study cannot normalise

for or adapt to dialect variation in speech processing (Clopper & Bradlow, 2008; See Section 2.5.1).

#### **5.4 Communication difficulty 3: Perceived speech rate**

This theme of communication difficulty is created to indicate that Sudanese learners reported that they encounter difficulty to process and comprehend huge amount of speech that they receive from English native speakers when they talk to them very quickly.

“Uh...huh they are speaking fast uh...huh but generally when the language uh...huh it is not a common language” (Sudanese 2).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner reported that one of the communication difficulties he encounters during conversations with English native speakers was the rate of speech he receives due to the pace of speech. It seems to him that they speak so fast to the extent that the rate of the speech he receives instantly cannot be processed to be understood to him.

“Uh...huh it somehow uh...huh, but if you are talking more or uh...huh like run a conversation, that will make at least a lot of expressions which you cannot uh...huh unless if you are just really have uh...huh in touch with them more” (Sudanese 2).

Also, the Sudanese learner in the above extract reported that one of the communication difficulties he encounters is the flow or rate of the speech he receives during conversations with English native speakers. According to him, unless you are accustomed to the way they speak,

you cannot understand the rush of expressions they produce instantly during interaction.

Taken together, there are previous studies indicated that the communication difficulty of speech rate produced by English native speakers represents a hurdle to successful communication with L2 speakers (Yang, 2016, Sato, 2008; Morris-Adams, 2008). Similarly, in Yanagi and Baker's study (2016) among the 33 Japanese students in Australian universities, most of the respondents reported fluency and rate of speech as a challenge in their interaction with English native speakers in Australian universities.

Similarly, in a previous empirical study investigated the effect of speaking rate on 106 Japanese students when exposed to American English and Hong Kong-accented English, the results revealed that the increase in speech rate from normal to fast, decreased comprehension to a greater degree with respect to the most heavily accented speaker in the study than it did for the other speakers (Matsuura, 2007; See Section 2.5.1).

#### **5.5 Communication difficulty 4: Limited vocabulary size**

Also, a common theme reported nearly by all Sudanese participants as a communication problem is vocabulary that they sometimes do not recognize. Vocabulary has many aspects, but many Sudanese participants reported that they face a problem to understand many

words during conversations with English native speakers. Below are some extracts shedding a light on this problem:

“Yah, you know, like some words are not usual ... like ... I am not using ... like from words day to day when I talk to other people. But, some people, they use this word here in a different way, not like the way we use to talk at home in English.” (Sudanese 9).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner reported that one of the problems he encounters during interaction with English native speakers was the understanding of some words. His explanation of this was that some words are unusual to him, they are not like the words he uses in daily conversations with other interlocutors or maybe his interlocutors use them in a different way. But this problem is attributed to his limited size of vocabulary in English.

“Uh...huh really, sometimes there are some names you do not know, or you do not find them in the store. Then you came to ask about them; and here you face the problem” (Sudanese 10).

Also, in the above extract, the Sudanese learner reported that when going shopping, he lacks the knowledge of recognizing names or words for some items in the store. When he tries to ask the store assistants for certain items, he finds a difficulty of not knowing the exact words for the items.

Taken together, the Sudanese participants possess inadequate vocabulary to enable them to understand what their English interlocutors say, or they do not have a wide range of vocabulary to cover large aspects of life in the UK to express themselves

appropriately when they talk to English native speakers about different topics relevant to their daily life.

Similarly, there are other studies conducted on various language learners indicated that inadequate vocabulary was a common theme among interaction obstacles (Zulkurnain & Kaur, 2014; Sato, 2008; Gan, 2011; Gan, 2013). For example, a study conducted on 20 students in Hong Kong interviewed about speaking difficulties reported that lack of vocabulary was a main obstacle for spoken communication by Chinese English learners (Gan, 2011). Also, the data that obtained from more than 290 students in a Chinese university in the mainland of China, indicated that most students reported inadequate knowledge of vocabulary as a basic English-speaking difficulty (Gan, 2013). It is important to note that all these studies were conducted among students in formal contexts under supervision of class tutors.

Studies of native speakers' vocabulary point that second language learners need to know very large numbers of words to interact with others appropriately in the second language (Nation, 2013). In research, there are different views about the vocabulary range that language learners like Sudanese participants should have to understand a spoken language. It was earlier thought that around 95% coverage was sufficient for a learner to understand spoken discourse. However, more recent researchers suggest that the figure is closer to 98-99% which would mean that one word in 50 is unknown, still does

not facilitate the comprehension. In this sense, if we use word lists, a researcher can calculate that 6000-7000-word families are required to reach the 98% goal (Schmitt, 2008). But in a general sense a researcher confirms that the knowledge of more vocabulary is always better to produce better comprehension of the conversation (Schmitt, 2008).

Lastly but not least, there are also many other previous empirical studies noted that the more common present linguistic variable that causes communication breakdowns in English as a lingua franca interaction is vocabulary that is unknown to one or other of the participants (Pickering, 2006) in mutual conversations.

## **5.6 Communication difficulty 5: Technical vocabulary**

“Uh...huh hospitals are something scientific, they are something difficult. In most cases, I ask for interpreter because these are medical information, and I may not give the right information. For this reason, I feel afraid in the hospital” (Sudanese 11).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner reported that he encounters difficulties in communication with the medical staff members in hospitals because they use scientific vocabulary which are specialised technical terms. For this reason, he asks for an interpreter when he goes there as he is scared to give incorrect information to the doctor or nurses.

Similarly, there is a study about communication difficulties in formal context conducted among 32 Japanese university EFL learners indicated that technical terms were one of the greatest hindrances in



the interaction between Japanese students and English native speakers in the UK.

“Uh...huh if I have a meeting with the GP, I study the case that I am going to complain about: the symptoms or something like that. I bring a piece of paper and summarise the all the complaint and then I go to the meeting with GP and talk with him. The things that I cannot tell them to the doctor, I talk with the people in the hospital to help me” (Sudanese 10).

Also, in the above extract, the Sudanese learner reported that when he has a meeting with his GP, he likely expects to encounter communication problems relevant to specialised vocabulary. For this reason, he employs a preparatory strategy before he meets the GP: he looks for medical words in dictionaries or elsewhere relevant to the symptoms of his illness and write them down on a piece of paper or look for assistance from staff members in the hospital.

In line with this, a researcher in a previous empirical study investigated syntactic forms produced in 22 hours of conversation between outer and expanding circle speakers noted that lexical variation such as idioms and specialised vocabulary are likely to obstruct the comprehension of the speech produced in mutual conversations between these speakers (Pickering, 2006; See Section 2.5.1).

## **5.7 Communication difficulty 6: Phrasal vocabulary**

“Uh...huh They speak fast uh...huh and uh...huh like some words is no clear ... they uh...huh the local language is different” (Sudanese 1).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner reported that one of the difficulties he encounters during conversations with English native

speakers is that they speak fast and use local phrases from their own dialects which are not clear to be understood by him.

“For example, for example, let us talk to you uh...huh and said to you and you said uh...huh did he sun uh...huh, sorry, uh...huh the sky, sorry the rain uh...huh it rains uh...huh it rains cat and dogs, for example, ... Cat and dogs, you could say that, so if you do not know this expression, so what you going to say, and you cannot ask him for any expression for any word ...” (Sudanese 2).

Similarly, in the above extract, the Sudanese learner reported that he finds difficulties to understand local phrases such as ‘it rains cats and dogs’. So, in this situation, he said that if a person does not know this local phrase, he cannot continue his conversation with the English native speaker because he cannot understand him.

“Secondly, they have their own terminologies, you know, the new terminologies like “what sap” that means “how are you?” In the traditional English we learned it means how are you, how you do; and now it became ... there are new things, you know” (Sudanese 20).

Also, in the above extract, another Sudanese learner reported clearly that when interacting with English native speakers, he encounters difficulty to understand local phrases that are sometimes used by his peer English native speakers such as ‘what sap?’ that means ‘how are you?’

Similarly, there is a recent study conducted among postgraduate international students in a UK university on phrasal vocabulary during a 10-week EAP class on both control group and experimental group. By the end of the course, it was discovered that those who were given training on phrasal vocabulary became orally more proficient than

those who have not received training about phrasal vocabulary (Schmitt, 2008). In line with that, there are also two other studies conducted in the UK and Malaysia about communication difficulties among both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Findings in both studies indicated that one of the communication difficulties encountered by the students were the use and comprehension of local phrases that other interlocutors use (Sato, 2008; Zulkurnain & Kaur, 2014).

Similarly, there are previous empirical studies also found that lexical variation is likely to impede comprehension during mutual conversations of lingua franca interlocutors. Specifically, in a study investigated the syntactic forms of conversations between outer and expanding circle speakers, findings reported that lexical variations in the form of variety specific idioms was one of the greatest barriers to successful communication (Pickering, 2006; See Section 2.5.1).

### **5.7.1 Discussion of difficulties reported by English native speakers**

In this sub-section, I subsequently discussed the following communication difficulties reported by English native speakers: regional dialects variations, limited vocabulary size, phrasal vocabulary, suprasegmental features, inappropriate vocabulary use and cross-cultural variations. It is important to note that the communication difficulties reported by English native speakers which agree with those difficulties reported by Sudanese learners (regional

dialects variations, limited vocabulary size and phrasal vocabulary) were presented briefly with extracts and a discussion for the extracts: it is not necessary to repeat the same discussion for the second time (See Sections 5.3; 5.5; 5.7).

For those communication difficulties which disagree with those reported by Sudanese learners, I presented the following difficulties: suprasegmental features, inappropriate vocabulary uses and cross-cultural variations (See Sections 5.7.5; 5.7.6; 5.7.7).

### **5.7.2 Communication difficulty 1: Regional dialects variations**

“Uh...huh the interesting thing I think about a person in the deep section of the country uh...huh has it on ... accent uh...huh and regional phrases. So that, if uh...huh when I moved to live in some at for instance, I could not understand the local some set people uh...huh the indigenous people if you like. And if you come actually at Liverpool, you will not understand Scouse if they belong to that segment of the society which uh...huh really does not speak uh...huh queen’s English. That has their own specials and so up; and that is true at every part of this country if you know uh...huh so, if you have problems with that, you have to learn uh...huh, you know, uh...huh for instance, there is uh...huh I think there is Welsh now, there is a Welsh problem uh...huh from on uh...huh from various Scots uh...huh and did you see they use a lot of Welsh expressions which will just be silly if you did not get what it meant and if you want to say something which is very good, they say oh it is cracking. And so, if I imagine this is a problem that did you would meet... that Sudanese people would meet, and we meet as well, the British are some different sections as well” (English 1).

In the above extract, the English native speaker noted that there are different dialects in the UK which have different regional phrases such as the Scouse, Scottish and Welsh dialects. The differences between these dialects potentially lead to the emergence of communication difficulties for both non-native speakers of English and English native

speakers at the same time. The reason is that speakers of these dialects use special words and local expressions in interaction with other interlocutors. Therefore, their interlocutors normally find problems in interaction with them (See Section 5.3).

### **5.7.3 Communication difficulty 2: Limited vocabulary size**

“... the words, verbs, and nouns ... and things in verbs ... and doing things like that and ... sometimes it is not having the exact word, you know, the vocabulary” (English 3).

In the above extract, the English native speaker noted that one of the communication difficulties that he encounters during interaction with Sudanese learners is that they do not have sufficient vocabulary or parts of vocabulary like verbs and nouns to run a successful conversation (See Section 5.5).

“Well. I think the most difficulty comes from ... they cannot say what they trying to say because they do not know their knowledge of the language is not strong enough to say what they trying to say; they have not got a wide range of words ... their vocabulary is not developed enough to say exactly what they want to say” (English 7).

In the above extract, the English native speaker noted that one of the difficulties that obstructs the oral communication with Sudanese learners was their limited linguistic knowledge. For example, he indicated that his interlocutors’ vocabulary range is limited, and they do not have large number of words to cover different aspects of life during daily oral conversations (See Section 5.5).

“Well, as you know, learning a language, you do not always know the full range of the vocabulary. You may not know certain situations that you can deal with like buying a coffee or buying food; or you may

not know how to describe a medical situation or uh...huh a computer situation; you know, you may know five hundred or thousand words, but you may not know two thousand words” (English 10).

Also, the English native speaker in the above extract indicated that the Sudanese learner of English does not have wide range of vocabulary which can potentially be a threat to oral communication. Hence, the Sudanese learner may not be able to speak properly with English native speakers in certain situations such as asking for coffee in a café, buying some food from a restaurant or describing certain medical diseases. Therefore, limited vocabulary size is a communication difficulty that influences the oral interaction between English native speakers and Sudanese learners (See Section 5.5).

#### **5.7.4 Communication difficulty 3: Phrasal vocabulary**

“Yah. So, let me think uh...huh something, you know like ..., if, for example, it is raining cats when it is raining cats and dogs, when it is raining really heavily at this morning ... well ... I would not really say as I was speaking to non-native speaker, I would not probably say something like that, I just feel it would totally go over their heads. If I know it was an idiom used there without realizing ‘say over their heads’, so I said over their heads which it means they would not understand it, I would be ... I guess I would be careful about using those phrases when in a conversation with a non-native speaker uh...huh for fear that they would not understand it; and it would just confuse them” (English 7).

In the above extract, the English native speaker reported that one of the communication difficulties he encounters during interaction with non-native speakers of English like Sudanese learners is the local phrases. For example, if he uses the local phrases such as “raining cats and dogs” which it means raining heavily or “going over their heads” which it means they will not understand the speech, this will confuse

the Sudanese learner and hence, it may cause break down to their mutual conversation. For this reason, the English native speaker noted that to run successful conversations with non-native speakers of English like Sudanese, he normally avoids using these local phrases (See Section 5.7).

“Yah. So, like ‘bus’ in Liverpool or you know, another word for trainers in Liverpool is traps, you know, like ... so uh...huh I would say to a friend, may be, do you like menu traps, but to a non-native speaker, I just would not use those ... those words because something inside may feel like ... they may not know them. Again, if I knew the person well, then, and even if he is non-native, then of course I would use them. I would say then in my initial interactions within the non-native speaker ... I would ... definitely, tone down and go back to a more correct formal English. Then I would probably generally use them in my day-to-day life” (English 7).

Also, in the above extract, the English native speaker indicated that local phrases are one of the difficulties that influence his conversation with non-native speakers of English. For example, English native speakers in Liverpool use “traps” for trainers. In this case, he can use this local phrase when talking to a native speaker friend, but he cannot use it when interacting with a non-native speaker. To avoid break down of communication with non-native speakers of English in this case, he resorts to speaking in standard English (See Section 5.7).

“Well. If you are taught English in Sudan, you are not ... you are not taught English out of a book, yah. You are not taught very rare or not taught any slang words. So, am I called ‘a mouse and moggy’ ... am I called a’ cat and moggy?’ No, that ... that would depend on where you work, you know, in some places in the UK, a moggy is a mouse; and in other places a moggy is a cat, do you know what I mean?” (English 10).

In the above extract, the English native speaker noted that if a Sudanese learner was taught English in Sudan, this means that he was taught the standard English, not the slang words or local phrases. For this reason, he likely encounters communication difficulty when local phrases are used by the English native interlocutor. For example, if English native speaker uses the phrase “mouse and moggy”, it will be very confusing to non-native speakers as well as other native speakers of English because moggy in certain places in the UK means mouse, whereas in other places it means cat. Therefore, it will be confusing to non-native speaker interlocutors and hence, it influences their mutual conversation (See Section 5.7).

“So ... usually if there is uh...huh so if they ask me to clarify it, it maybe uh...huh so I have slipped using Irish slang or I have, I have, I have used a colloquial term that, that the I know, but that they may not know, for example, uh...huh I might say “oh call to my house”, but for Irish people call to my house means, you know, ... call, call at the door, you know, knock at the door, but for someone else who is non-native English speaker, they might think oh do you want me to call you on the phone before I arrived at your house, things like that” (English 14).

Similarly, in the above extract, an English native speaker from Ireland reported that when his interlocutor asks him for clarification, he sometimes resort to using slang or colloquial Irish words which may potentially influence the interaction. For example, he may say “Oh call to my house” which to Irish people means call at the door or knock at the door, whereas for others who are non-native speakers it may mean “call me on the phone before you arrive at my house”. Accordingly, using local phrases in interaction with non-native



speakers of English may cause break down to the conversation (See Section 5.7).

“They speak very fast, and it will make a huge difference if English is not your first language, and also use quite a lot of slang, it could be a very extreme slang. For instance, they say dead good which it means very good, and this for one using English for the first time can’t understand it, which very confused to him” (English 18).

In the above extract, the English native speaker from Liverpool noted that English native speakers use several local phrases in their daily conversations. This makes huge difference in conversations for those who are non-native speakers of English. For example, he noted when he says, “dead good”, he means very good. So, he noted that using this local phrase in mutual conversations makes it difficult to understand by non-native speakers of English who hear it for the first time (See Section 5.7).

#### **5.7.5 Communication Difficulty 4: Suprasegmental features**

“Uh...huh what uh...huh how often, sorry, could you repeat that? Or ... let me see ... I did not quite understand uh...huh then ... I was collecting for a while uh...huh the people who ... are using the wrong stress on words and making it sounds, if it is funny, then there is a list somewhere uh ...huh but there is limits, but uh...huh you can ... you see normal English, the spoken English has some a stress on the first syllable; and that goes away from Sudanese hospital, hospital, the emphasis ... we do not use any grammatical uh...huh marks that emphasize that, you have to guess it or know it, hospital. But if you want to say I am going to a hospital; and put the emphasis on the middle one ‘hospital’, I think it will be very strange” (English 1).

In the above extract, the English native speaker reported that one of the communication difficulties he encounters during conversations is that the non-native speakers of English like Sudanese learners do not

normally put the stress on the correct syllable in the word. Hence, this makes their mutual conversation funny or difficult to continue. He noted that there are no grammatical marks or signs to show the location of the stress in a word, but speakers must learn it by practice or guess it. For example, the stress on 'hospital' is on the first syllable, but if a speaker puts it in the middle, it will be difficult, and the word appears very strange in articulation.

"Well, uh...huh it is that what came to my mind. So, uh...huh the word 'oregano' ... we say oregano, so, we are emphasizing the last letter of the word oregano; and in America, they say 'original'. So, they emphasize the first part of the word" (English 11).

Likewise, in the above extract another English native speaker reported that the emphasis on correct letters in a word differs from one speaker to another worldwide. For example, he, as an English native speaker, stresses the last letter of the word 'oregano', whereas in America speakers stress the first part of the word. Hence, non-native speakers of English like Sudanese learners who are not aware of this, will put the stress on the wrong syllable and this makes it difficult to maintain successful conversation between different interlocutors.

Taken together, English native speakers reported that stress as one of the suprasegmental features is one of the communication difficulties that influences their informal conversations with non-native speakers of English like Sudanese learners. Similarly, in a study conducted in a UK context, investigated the communication difficulties and strategies among 32 Japanese students, the suprasegmental features such as

stress and rhythm were reported as a difficulty of communication by most of the postgraduate students (Sato, 2008).

Similarly, there are many previous empirical studies in research addressing phonological factors in interlanguage interactions found that comprehensibility of L2 speech by native speakers is more significantly related to prosodic variables than segmental effects (Pickering, 2006). In line with that, there are also other researchers studied L2 mixed-language dyads found that all examples of communication breakdown were caused by pronunciation issues such as stress shift or tonic placement (Pickering, 2006).

#### **5.7.6 Communication difficulty 5: Inappropriate vocabulary use**

“Uh...huh right. I to... one of two kinds: either it is an inappropriate word in English as it is not the right word in English, that is my problem; and the other one might be the mispronunciation of the word; and the third possibility might be the word is in the wrong place. All three are possible” (English 3).

In the above extract, the English native speaker reported that he encounters a communication difficulty relevant to the inappropriate use of vocabulary within context. Specifically, he attributes this to either the wrong pronunciation of the word or the use of the word is inappropriate in that context, or it is the wrong word in the structure of the speech.

“I would probably I have met certain words from uh...huh my conversation with them, words that I would be assume either rightly or wrongly would be more understood by local or native speakers” (English 7).

Likewise, in the above extract, another English native speaker reported that one of the communication difficulties he encountered during interaction with Sudanese learners was the inappropriate use of vocabulary in context. He noted that it was probably the words that Sudanese learners use are either in the wrong place or they are inappropriate in relation to the structure of the speech. Accordingly, these words will be difficult to comprehend by English native speakers in that setting during a mutual conversation.

“That is a real problem because when they are trying to negotiate their status if they use the wrong words, and they get into even more difficulty than they were” (English 14).

Also, in the above extract, another English native speaker reported that there is a real problem that he faces in interaction with Sudanese learners because of using wrong words in their speech which is difficult to understand in the context of the conversation. He added that when these learners attempt to negotiate meaning to push forward the conversation, they sometimes involve themselves into deeper complicated difficulties that hinder the flow of the conversation.

Taken together all the three above extracts, there is a study that dealt with communication difficulties among 32 Japanese postgraduate students in the UK indicated that most of them experienced difficulties of inappropriate vocabulary use within context (Sato, 20058). Similarly, there is a recent study about

communication difficulties conducted among undergraduate international students in Malaysia confirmed that the use of inappropriate words in context was a common problem experienced by most of the students (Zulkurnain & Kaur, 2014). Also, another empirical study conducted among international Chinese students in a UK university reported that the problem of identifying and using appropriate word in a particular context was a common difficulty encountered by most students participated in the survey (Yang, 2016).

Finally, this goes with the claims about communication difficulties of mutual conversations reported by several researchers in previous studies. For example, in a study of English-accented German, a researcher discovered that vocabulary errors that are inappropriate to context influenced listening comprehension most significantly among several interlocutors (Munro & Derwing, 1995; See Section 2.5.1).

### **5.7.7 Communication difficulty 6: Cross-cultural variations**

This theme was generated to refer to the idea that when there are two or more interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds interact together in each context, difficulties of communications arise due to their personal application of their culture-specific norms of concepts. Hence, their mutual conversation maybe interrupted or terminated. In the following extracts, I provided different examples of

extracts from the data to highlight the ‘cross-cultural variations’ as a communication difficulty.

“You see, I can give an example from Spanish. In Spanish you would say when you use a command, you say ‘Give me that book!’ You do not feel anything offensive about saying, ... you say that in English, and you have been offensive; you say, ... in English you say, ‘Please pass me that book!’ Or can I have that book? You know, that is how we learned to address each other, but in Spanish, I think this is ridiculous to say please or thank you all the time; Spanish good, they say it intrinsic in the language; there is no need to say it. And those things you can tease out in English, but it is easier if you have some knowledge of say Sudanese. I have no knowledge and so I cannot imagine what your language is like. So, do you think it can be very helpful” (English 1).

In the above extract, the English native speaker compared the different ways of making ‘command’ in Spanish and English language as example of generating communication difficulty in mutual conversations between Spanish and English speakers. For example, he explained that if someone says to another person “Give me that book!”, it is considered as rude or offensive behaviour in English while it is the normal way of doing that in Spanish language; and if you add ‘please’ or ‘thank you’ all the time, speakers of Spanish may consider it as ridiculous because these norms are intrinsic in their language. Hence, this may generate misunderstanding that leads to difficulties or termination of conversation between interlocutors from Spanish and English cultural backgrounds.

“Uh...huh not, not really uh...huh I do not think so uh...huh for me, that is the basic problem in the communication; and there are other participants uh...huh of cultural differences. I remember famously uh...huh when I first went to Sheffield, uh...huh and void of something wrong, was not seriously robbed and I was talking to him; and I said to him ‘Look me in the face while I am talking to

you'; and he was explained to me that was a sign of disrespect to him to look me in the face. So, sometimes the communication uh...huh varies in cultural range as well" (English 8).

Similarly, in the above extract, the English native speaker reported that the application of cultural differences in mutual conversations between interlocutors from different cultural background is a basic communication problem to him. For example, he mentioned that when he was in Sheffield for the first time, he said to someone else "Look me in the face while I am talking to you!" For reasons relevant to the cultural norms of that person, he was upset and explained to him what he said was offensive and kind of disrespect to him. Hence, this indicates that the cultural norms of interlocutors influence mutual conversations when they are applied.

"And ... oh so, they can be ... sometimes, there can be major misunderstandings like sometimes, uh...huh Just ... the way phrases used in one language is not the same way as the phrase is used in another language, uh...huh, for example, uh...huh, a friend of mine once told another that she had no credit, but she meant no phone credit, but when you translate that into Portuguese, when you tell someone that they have no credit it means that do not ... they have like ... they do not have your respect anymore, they ... they cannot be believed" (English 15).

Also, in the above extract, an English native speaker of Irish background reported that the use and meaning of words or phrases from one language differs from that in another language based on the cultural differences of the interlocutors. For example, she mentioned that a friend of her said to another interlocutor that she had no 'credit' to mean that 'she had no phone credit to call her'. However, this in Portuguese means that 'you do not like this person,

or you do not respect that person anymore'. Also, this shows that the cultural norms of people from different backgrounds influence their mutual conversations and may lead to break down of it.

From previous empirical studies, Scarcella (1990) in his study about trading experiences among two groups of American and Japanese traders in the USA indicated that when non-native speakers converse with native speakers of a certain language, communication difficulties often arise. For example, in his investigation of sales negotiations between American and Japanese businessmen, the Americans offered the Japanese what they thought was a generous price, but the Japanese did not react favourably and fell in silence; and hence, the Americans thought that the silence of Japanese was an indication of their dissatisfaction with the price. Accordingly, the Americans offered the Japanese more money for their goods. In the end, it was discovered that the Japanese businessmen used the conversational features of Japanese when communicating in English (Scarcella, 1990).

Based on the above discussion, some English native speakers reported that the cultural differences factor sometimes affects their communication with non-native speakers of English which leads instantly to misunderstanding or embarrassment or may even be considered as rude behaviour. Also, research indicates that using a language in a particular context is not independent of the cultural background; and for this reason, communication difficulties are



inevitable (Byram & Risager, 1999) because the ability to communicate into others' language, cannot be separated from the understanding of their different ways of life and vice versa. For example, Bouton (2011) demonstrated that people of different cultural backgrounds may also see differently the conversational roles or the context in which it is undertaken. And he added that people from different cultural backgrounds do not only generate different messages and understandings in a conversation, but they also infer different messages from the same conversation in the same context.

In contrast to some of the previous empirical studies that attributed speech intelligibility and communication difficulties wholly to linguistic variables (See Section 2.5.1), this study has reported a different communication difficulty relevant to cross-cultural variations and intercultural communication tenets. This communication difficulty reported within the findings of this study does not go in line with the newly introduced 'transcultural' communication principles that refer to the ability of the interlocutors to operate between languages and make multiple references to target languages and cultures (Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019) to carry out a successful communication. In the view of transcultural communication, the interlocutors in a mutual conversation regularly resort to various linguistic and cultural sources to maintain a successful communication, and they do not necessarily refer to their own

linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Baker, 2021). In contrast to Sudanese cohort and English native speakers in this study, participants in that (Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019) study succeeded to negotiate cultural practices in interactions with other participants in the scope of English as a lingua franca and achieved a successful communication on Facebook because they resorted to various sources from various languages and cultures (Baker & Sangiamchit, 2019; See Section 2.3.3). In line with intercultural communication principles, the Sudanese participants in this study failed to understand the norms of English native speakers' practices during their mutual conversations and hence, sometimes encountered cross-cultural variations communication difficulties.

## **5.8 Discussion of CSs reported by Sudanese learners**

In the following sub-section, I presented a discussion of communication strategies reported by Sudanese learners to overcome the communication difficulties encountered during conversations with English native speakers. Each communication strategy is presented with several extracts and a discussion for each extract. Finally, an overall discussion was presented for all strategies reported by the Sudanese learners.

### **5.8.1 Appeal for assistance**

"Uh...huh some either use my phone or ask them to write down the word" (Sudanese 3).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner reported that when he encounters a communication problem about vocabulary, he appeals for help through either using his phone to check the meaning of the word or ask his interlocutor to write the word down to check it.

“When the situation ... for my child ... when I try to ... when they try to make an operation for him, an operation for his hand, then they bring for us an interpreter to understand properly” (Sudanese 4).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner reported that when he goes to hospital with his son to see the doctor, staff members in the hospital present an interpreter to facilitate the mutual conversation between them. To overcome the potential difficulties of communications, they appeal for assistance from an interpreter because there are likely many technical terms used during the conversation.

“Uh...huh it does not help, it does not help, you ... so you ... you have to ... so, you ... if you do not understand, if something important, may be, if you have friend, you tell them to explain to you what it means, so, ... you are talking about or something like that” (Sudanese 6).

In the above extract, another Sudanese learner reported that when he interacts with English native speakers; and encounters a communication difficulty which may lead to obstruct the communication, he appeals for help from a friend of him to facilitate the conversation.

“Uh...huh talking to the doctor, of course if you ... your speech is not very good, is very hard, so, sometimes that is why they ask you to bring friend to explain for you ... translation, so, for you. If you do not have friend sometime, ask them sometime to phone, you know, someone knows Arabic translation to translate for you” (Sudanese 6).

Similarly, in the above extract, the Sudanese learner indicated that speaking with doctors is potentially difficult. Therefore, he indicated that when speaking with the doctor, he calls for a friend of him to interpret from English to Arabic and vice versa.

### **5.8.2 Asking for repetition**

“Uh...huh if they talk with me uh...huh and if I do not understand a word uh...huh I say can you repeat the word, or I do not understand what you said” (Sudanese 1).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner noted that if he does not understand what the English native speaker says, he asks him to repeat his speech. Similarly, if he also did not understand the English native speaker, he indicated that he says “I did not understand your speech” to inform his interlocutor in an indirect way to repeat his words or speech.

“Uh...huh personally, I try, as far as possible, to ask him to repeat the speech until I uh...huh the good thing is that these people are very alert; as soon as you say, ‘Excuse me or please’, or say again, they understand you” (Sudanese 12).

Also, in the above extract, the Sudanese learner said that he struggles to interact with English native speakers. Hence, when there is a communication difficulty during the interaction, he asks his interlocutor for repetition of the speech. Also, he indicated that sometimes some of the English native speakers once felt that you did not understand them, or you said, “Excuse me” or “Say it again”, they repeat their speech so that you can understand them.

### 5.8.3 Clarification request

“Uh...huh When you do not understand ... you ask him ... what you say ... What did you say?” (Sudanese 1).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner indicated that when he does not understand the speech of an English native speaker, he asks him to explain what he has said so that he can understand and continue the conversation with him.

“Uh...huh when I face a difficult word, I tell uh...huh just I do not understand the word, so, what does it mean if he explains for me more ...so, if I understand so, uh...huh If I do not understand I just ask him, you know, to phone a translator uh...huh so, ...” (Sudanese 6).

In this extract, the Sudanese learner indicated that if he encounters a difficult word while speaking to an English native speaker, he informs him that he does not understand certain word or words. In this case, he either explains what he said to him in different words, or the Sudanese learner looks for an interpreter to help him.

### 5.8.4 Asking for lengthening of words

“OK, I ask them just please, this is not my real language; I have another language as well, just you must speak slowly; I can understand that” (Sudanese 7).

In this extract, the Sudanese learner reported that when he speaks with English native speakers who sometimes speak very fast that he cannot understand them, he explains to them that English is not his mother tongue language. In this situation, he asks them to slow down

their speech pace, stressing words and lengthening them clearly so that he can understand them.

“You know, because just the English sometimes just speak, you know, very fast, that is a problem. But when you say just, I have not understood what you say, you just must speak slowly, sometimes it come down it comes down slowly; and you can understand, you know” (Sudanese 7).

Also, in the above extract, the Sudanese learner noted that English native speakers sometimes speak very fast to him. Hence, it is difficult for him to process that rate of speech and understand it. In that situation, he asks them to speak slowly word-by-word so that he can understand them.

### **5.8.5 Body language**

“Yes, I use to sign for the information in the desk uh...huh find to order something” (Sudanese 7).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner noted that when speaking with English native speakers, for example, in cafes, restaurants or shops, and he does not understand them, he uses signs and gestures with his hand and point to what he wants such as items in a store or some food in the menu.

“Yah, if there is a chance to meet them in person, that can make it much easier because communication is not just language, but there are lots of other things; you will be able to fill the gap with the body language whatever the topic is” (Sudanese 13).

Likewise, in the above extract, the Sudanese lady, who works in an office with charity organisation, noted that when her conversation with English native speakers encounters difficulties, she asks her

interlocutors to meet her personally where she can use body language such as facial expressions and gestures to overcome difficulties of communication and push forward the conversation.

### **5.8.6 Circumlocution**

“Uh...huh the conversation is always uh...huh if you miss a word, you can ask, or you can just overcome over it by change the question uh...huh or may be put the question in another way uh...huh or you can ask in another way” (Sudanese 2).

In this extract, the Sudanese learner indicated that when he misses a word in conversations with English native speakers, he employs circumlocution strategy to overcome the communication difficulties. He negotiates the meaning of the word through various ways, for example, he can ask his interlocutor, neglects the difficult word by changing the whole question, put his question or asks in another way until he comes to a shared understanding with his interlocutor.

“Yes, to move around and you can use questions uh...huh or something like that, so it is easy uh...huh and the other side can understand what you mean or uh...huh if he does not understand you, he may automatically change or put in another easy way” (Sudanese 2).

Similarly, in the above extract, the Sudanese learner noted that when he faces a communication difficulty during interaction with English native speakers, he moves around a long way until he comes to a shared meaning with his interlocutor. Also, in turn, he noted that his interlocutors usually do the same and change a word or put it in a different context so that they come to a mutual understanding.

“Yeah. I think uh...huh I mean ... It will be uh...huh it is something to explore more uh...huh I use descriptions like ... just instead of having that fake ... describe that specific term, I have to use lots of words to describe that one thing” (Sudanese 13).

Also, in the above extract, the Sudanese learner noted that when he encounters a communication difficulty with his English native interlocutor, he starts talking a long way and moves around the term using, for example, descriptions of things or words. Also, he noted that he can use many words instead to describe the term until they come to a shared meaning with his interlocutor.

### **5.8.7 Message abandonment**

“But sometimes you can change the direction of the speech or topic itself uh...huh until you come to a mutual understanding” (Sudanese 12).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner noted that when he faces a communication difficulty during conversations with English native speakers, he uses many strategies to overcome the difficulty. One of these strategies that he uses, he changes the direction of the conversation to a different message or topic to push forward the conversation.

“In this case, uh...huh it is better to stop, stop the conversation because uh...huh or otherwise you could give an answer uh...huh an answer that uh...huh or a reply in a wrong direction uh...huh it means it could be do something ... or say something is not acceptable” (Sudanese 2).

Similarly, in the above extract, the Sudanese learner noted that when he encounters a communication difficulty during interaction with English native speakers and fails to overcome it, he stops the



conversation because he may give a wrong answer to the question of his English interlocutor if he continues the conversation with him in this situation. In addition, the answer he gives may not be acceptable or the correct answer because it may mislead his interlocutor.

### **5.8.8 Appeal for literal translation**

“Uh...huh new words uh...huh you need to explain ... by something and people uh...huh as I said they come from different background uh...huh they name some material also Uh...huh I look my phone or dictionary Yeah, to translate” (Sudanese 3).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner reported that he mostly encounters a difficulty of communication with new vocabulary that he does not understand. In this situation, he noted that he looks for a dictionary or uses his phone number to translate the new words into his mother tongue language to overcome this communication difficulty and continue his conversation with his English interlocutor.

“... and when sometimes it is difficult for me to understand it, I will be forced to pick out the phone to translate the words uh...huh I normally recourse to this option uh...huh I always became when I go back home, I try to read or prepare my speech before I ...” (Sudanese 10).

Also, in the above extract, the Sudanese learner noted that when he encounters new or difficult words that he does not understand during conversations with English native speakers, he picks out his phone and translates the words into his mother tongue language. In this way, he helps to overcome the communication difficulty and pushes forward his conversation with his other interlocutor.

### 5.8.9 Preparatory strategy

“Uh...huh actually I have already prepared for the conversation before, because when I go to the doctor, I will uh...huh I become prepared to explain some symptoms, so, I prepared before I go to the ... and actually doctors, they do not like to give some complicated conversation, they only ask for specific information, so, it is easy for me to understand” (Sudanese 5).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner indicated that it is normally difficult to interact with doctors who are English native speakers because they use technical terms such as those used to describe symptoms of diseases. In this situation, if he has an appointment with the doctor, he usually prepares in advance the technical words for symptoms and names of diseases which the doctor asks him about. He may look for a dictionary or ask friends of his to help him. In this way, he helps to reduce the potential communication difficulties with doctors and facilitates his conversation with them.

“Uh...huh if I have a meeting with the GP, I study the case that I am going to complain about: the symptoms or something like that. I bring a piece of paper and summarise the all the complaint and then I go to the meeting with GP and talk with him. The things that I cannot tell them to the doctor, I talk with the people in the hospital to help me” (Sudanese 10).

Also, in the above extract, another Sudanese learner noted that when he has an appointment with the GP, he prepares the technical terms he uses before he meets the doctor. For example, he looks for information about the disease, its symptoms and write them on a piece of paper to help him in the conversation with his GP during the meeting.

“Uh...huh the train stations uh...huh as I told you before when I want to go to ... I do effort to understand the topic ..., for instance, about going to the train station, I check some information: the conversation I am going to do there, do I need to confirm ... or something like that. So, I keep by heart these sentences; and after that I go to the train stations that I want a ticket uh...huh then I demand it and then he will give me the ticket” (Sudanese 11).

Likewise, in the above extract, the Sudanese learner noted that he regularly studies and learns some information about the places he goes to. For example, before going to the train stations, he checks the information about what to ask for and practises it before visiting the train station to reduce the potential communication difficulties and push forward conversations with English speakers.

“Uh...huh at the beginning, for knowing the names of the stuff, before you go for shopping, you identify the things you need. After that you translate them into English, and you take the paper to show it to someone in the store. If you look for them and you do not find them, you ask someone inside the store, and he will come to show you the stuff you need” (Sudanese 15).

Similarly, in the above extract, the Sudanese learner noted that before going shopping, for example, he identifies the items he wants to buy from the store, translates them from Arabic into English and takes the paper with him to the staff members in the store. This strategy helps him to reduce the potential communication difficulties with English native speakers and maintains their mutual conversations.

“Uh...huh in most cases, when one of us is going somewhere, he prepares. For instance, you try as far as possible to prepare something to do your job. For instance, if I want to go to the GP or going shopping, or even to study, I prepare certain points so that when I go there, I will be able to talk. These are the solutions we used to do that before you go your destination, you must prepare yourself. If I am going shopping, I write my stuff; and if I am going to the train stations, I prepare how to buy a ticket” (Sudanese 15).

Also, in the above extract, another Sudanese learner noted that he usually prepares the information he wants to ask about before going to the given location. For example, if he wants to go to the GP or go shopping, he looks for information that can help him to carry out his conversation successfully with English native interlocutors: he writes down the information about items, tickets, and train stations.

### **5.8.10      Guessing**

“Uh...huh sometimes I pretend that I understand uh...huh sometimes, really. When the situation does not need or is not urgent, I pretend that I understand. I feel uh...huh impressed, you know. When I could not understand many times, so, I pretend uh...huh I try to guess what they said, really” (Sudanese 5).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner noted that when he encounters a communication difficulty during conversations with English native speakers, he pretends that he understands their speech. As a result, he tries to guess what his interlocutor says, especially if the topic they talk about is not urgent and the situation in which they talk with the English native interlocutor is not formal or serious.

“... As we are talking now, you can guess some words, I just said the verb and I need to speak the syllable, I need to give you full grammar, you can guess from that. I cannot give you specific sentence, but you can guess from that while we are talking, doing this interview” (Sudanese 8).

Also, in the above extract, another Sudanese learner noted that when he encounters a communication difficulty with an English native speaker interlocutor, he guesses meanings of some words to

overcome the communication difficulty and continues the conversation.

Taken all together, there are several previous empirical studies conducted in research among various cohort indicated the importance of employing communication strategies either to overcome communication difficulties or to facilitate the mutual conversations between interlocutors (Sato, 2008; Morris-Adams; 2008; Salahshoor & Asl, 2009; Kirkpatrick, 2010; Abdullah & Enim, 2010; Matsumoto, 2011; Zhao & Intraprasert, 2013; Wang et al., 2015; Toomnan & Intaraprasert, 2015; Yanagi & Baker, 2016; Bijani & Sedaghat, 2016; Demir et al., 2018; Manzano, 2018; Park et al., 2017). It is important to note that the essential difference between this study and those studies is that this study focuses exclusively on employing communication strategies by interlocutors interacting in informal contexts in the free social space. Therefore, the cohort in this study may have not been taught communication strategies.

Moreover, there are some previous empirical studies (Lam, 2010; Rabab'ah, 2015; Saeidi & Farshchi, 2015; Kuen et al., 2017; Doost et al., 2017) conducted surveys through experimental groups and control groups to test the effect of communication strategy teaching on learners' proficiency. The students in the experimental groups were taught different types of communication strategies and trained how to use the strategies, whereas the students in the control groups

received no strategy teaching and training. At the end, it was discovered clearly that the proficiency of the students in the experimental groups was developed compared to the students in the control groups. This means that developing the strategic competence of language learners helps to develop their communicative competence.

## **5.9 Discussion of CSs reported by English native speakers**

In this sub-section, I presented a discussion of communication strategies adopted by English native speakers to overcome the communication difficulties encountered during their conversations with Sudanese learners. Each communication strategy is presented with various extracts and a discussion for each extract. Finally, an overall comment was provided for all strategies reported by the English native speakers.

### **5.9.1 Appeal for assistance**

“I can guess what the word is they trying to say, and we just must give up if we did not ... or we try to find somebody else to translate for them” (English 2).

In the above extract, the English native speaker indicated that when he faces a communication difficulty during conversations with a Sudanese speaker of English, he adopts several strategies to continue the conversation with him such as guessing and message abandonment. Alternatively, he can appeal for assistance from someone else to interpret for the Sudanese speaker.

“I would see if the speaker’s language were quite bad, I would ask for interpreter” (English 4).

Also, in the above extract, the English native speaker noted that if the language of his interlocutor is not proficient, he asks for an interpreter to assist for continuation of the conversation.

“... but I mean ... there have been very ... very few occasions where I have kind of ... to go and say I am sorry; I do not understand. If somebody else is close by, I may try to, may be, look to them for help ...huh I think now in the day of the mobile phone because ... through a part of Google image searching or something from them to show me, then there are very few situations, especially with technology effect that we cannot come to some conclusion” (English 7).

Similarly, in the above extract, the English native speaker noted that when he encounters communication difficulties during conversations with Sudanese learners, he sometimes looks for assistance from someone else. Also, he noted that he can use his phone or Google images to help him find the correct information to overcome the communication problem.

“Uh...huh trying to find somebody who, who, maybe, look around and see if anyone passing uh...huh I would say, could you help this, I'm sorry I'm having in trouble understanding what this person is saying, could you speak to them and maybe that they could translate for me or take them out of central police station or some other place where, uh...huh, you know, it could be interpreted” (English 16).

Also, in the above extract, the English native speaker indicated that when interacting with a Sudanese learner, for example, in the street, and encounters a communication difficulty during the conversation, he usually looks for assistance from someone else. Specifically, he noted that he looks around if he can see someone passing besides

them to ask him to interpret for him what was said by the Sudanese speaker.

### **5.9.2 Asking for repetition**

“Uh...huh I think it is important, to be honest, and say I am sorry, I did not catch that and ... you either could you repeat it” (English 2).

In the above extract, the English native speaker noted that when encountering a communication difficulty during a conversation with Sudanese learner, he apologises and explains that he does not catch his words. As a result, he asks him for a repetition to overcome the difficulty and continue the conversation with him.

“Uh...huh I think I would ask them to repeat it ... ask them to repeat the word again” (English 2).

Similarly, in the extract above, another English native speaker reported that when he faces a communication difficulty during conversations with Sudanese learners, he often asks for repetition of what was said.

“Right. Uh...huh I think I would be honest and say I am sorry, I find it difficult to understand you, can you repeat it? I think that is the only thing you can do, really ...you ask them to repeat what they said or put it in a different way to make it easier to understand it” (English 2).

Also, in the above extract, another English native speaker reported that when facing a difficulty in communication during interactions with Sudanese learners, he honestly asks his interlocutor for a repetition of his words. He explains to him that it was difficult that he



does not understand him. Then, he asks him to repeat and that is the only thing he can do in this situation to solve the difficulty.

### **5.9.3 Body language**

“Uh...huh then I use body language as well. If you come in face-to-face contact, then body language sometimes helps, particularly in asking directions, I would point in the right direction because pointing ... if I would say turn right, then I will point to the right; and left, I point to the left” (English 2).

In the above extract, the English native speaker reported that when encountering a communication difficulty, he uses body language if he is in face-to-face contact with his interlocutors. He noted that body language such as facial expressions and hand gestures can help to facilitate the communication between interlocutors, especially when asking for directions. In the case of showing directions, he can use hand gestures to point to the direction whether for the left or right.

“Well, that can be a common ... I would ... if the problem is to order the food, I would point to the menu, I point to the item in the menu” (English 4).

Likewise, in the above extract, the English native speaker reported that when interacting with Sudanese learners in cafes or restaurants, he usually uses his hands to point to the food or the menu to show what he wants to order. In such locations, it is the best way to use body language to maintain successful communication with Sudanese interlocutors.

“I would sometimes use mime. If I am trying to say ..., would you like to go and have lunch to somebody; and maybe I am not uh...huh getting the message across, I may do that and say ... So, I would use mime as well as the uh...huh the words uh...huh yah” (English 11).

Similarly, in the same way another English native speaker reported that when facing a communication difficulty during conversations with Sudanese learners in the restaurants, he uses body language to overcome the potential difficulties of communication.

“If it's a call try a video call, so there can be a kind of face-to-face interaction and ... when speaking with people face to face uh...huh ...it is ... try to make efforts like make sure that there's appropriate contact to make sure that I am moving my lips. You know enough making sure I am not mumbling, not eating my words, uh...huh even sometimes, hand gestures uh...huh I don't tend to use hand gestures a lot, but sometimes it can also help to make a point you know even if it's something as placing emphasis say you know one two three you know when lifting a few points uh...huh, it can make it clear for both of you know myself and for the other person I am speaking with” (English 15).

Also, in the above extract, the English native speaker noted that when he interacts with L2 speakers like Sudanese learners, he usually facilitates his verbal communication by body language. For example, when in face-to-face interactions, he articulates words clearly, avoids mumbling, uses hand gestures and facial expressions to maintain successful communication.

#### **5.9.4 Clarification request**

“Uh...huh firstly, uh...huh given that you put some work into it; you may be changing your subject, maybe you ask politely uh...huh can you explain in another way to me ... you try to find a way” (English 3).

In the above extract, the English native speaker reported that when encountering a communication difficulty with Sudanese speakers of English, he adopts different strategies to overcome communication

difficulties and continue his conversation. For example, he asks for clarification of what his interlocutor previously said.

“Right. Uh...huh strategy I use that I have to listen more intently than I would normally, and I have to look straight at the person’s face as well to see the movement of the hips. Then I would, I would ask for a clarification, I would say I did not understand that” (English 8).

Also, in the above extract, the English native speaker reported that he adopts many strategies to carry out a successful communication such as listening carefully or body language. If that does not help, he looks straight at his interlocutor’s face and asks him for clarification to his speech.

“To try what you do to try and resolve this issue here to find, uh...huh usually trying to ask for clarification, ask them to explain what they mean by the phrase, do they know what it means, uh...huh do they mean it, in that way, uh...huh, yeah what was the attention by what they say” (English 15).

This extract indicates that the English native speakers normally adopt more than one strategy to overcome communication difficulties during conversation with L2 speakers like Sudanese learners. In this extract, he reported that when there is a difficulty, he attempts to solve it. If he fails, he asks his interlocutor for clarification or explanation for certain phrases and words.

### **5.9.5 Asking for lengthening of words**

“Yeah, I always try and slow down very much what I am saying to get the other person; and tend to understand each word so that they can know the fluency of each other” (English 9).

In the above extract, the English native speaker reported that when he interacts with L2 speakers like Sudanese learners, he usually avoids speaking fast, speaks slowly, and stresses each word he says so that his interlocutor catches his words.

“Yeah, ... people ... you just need to speak slower, uh...huh speak more slowly, speaking very uh...huh short simple sentences ... maybe you will write ... write what your ... write it down for them if you have got a pen or paper with you” (English 16).

Also, in the above extract, the English native speaker reported that when interacting with L2 speakers such as Sudanese learners he adopts the strategy of talking to them slowly in short simple sentences to help them catch his words. Producing speech in this way by English native speakers provides Sudanese learners with enough time to receive the speech, process it and understand it.

“Uh...huh I would just say I am having difficulty understanding your accent, could you speak slowly, could you speak more slowly, if you can because you may be right down uh...huh what is this you are trying to uh...huh to say to me” (English 16)

Similarly, in the above extract, the English native speaker reported that when he encounters a difficulty of communication with a Sudanese speaker of English with unfamiliar accent, he asks him to speak slowly and lengthen the articulation of words to overcome potential threats to communication.

### **5.9.6 Circumlocution**

“Yes, ... well. I just tried randomly to understand what he was saying ... such and such ... I suppose I had been cooperative to ... even though that I could not make him understand; I just cooperating with her ...” (English 5).

In the above extract, the English native speaker reported that, based on his experience in conversations with Sudanese interlocutors, they encountered a communication difficulty during their conversations, and he cooperated with them to overcome the difficulty and continued the conversation. He reported indirectly that he adopted circumlocution strategy to maintain successful communication together. He started talking to him a long way around to find a shared meaning, but he failed at the end.

“Uh...huh well, we will not cut it, you know, stay with it; try to understand each other; and ... because I cannot completely understand you at first, I am not going to say this is not going to work, end of ... you know, let work on it, let us try and build a communication between us; we can do that” (English 10).

Similarly, in the above extract, the English native speaker reported that when encountering a communication difficulty, he usually does not end the communication and move away. He reported that he cooperates with his interlocutor to continue the conversation. For example, he stays with him and attempts to move a long way around to negotiate the meaning to find a mutual understanding to continue their conversation.

### **5.9.7 Guessing**

“Uh...huh it is not a problem uh...huh it is better ... if it is within a context ... then you can guess uh...huh if you do not understand the word, as long as it is with a context of the sentence and you know what the time for say, then you can guess what that word you did not hear clearly” (English 2).

In the above extract, the English native speaker reported that when encountering a communication difficulty of vocabulary use, he attempts to adopt the strategy of guessing the meaning of the word based on the context. Also, he indicated that he could guess the meaning of the word within the structure of the sentence; and then he continues the conversation with the other interlocutor.

“There is nothing else I can do either ... there is nothing, I do not think there is else I can do if I ask them to repeat it and I still do not understand. I can try guessing what they say and ask them to confirm if that what they said ... I guess what they say and ask them to confirm it” (English 2).

Also, in the above extract, the English native speaker reported that when encountering a communication difficulty during conversations with Sudanese L2 speakers, he asks for repetition. If he does not understand after repetition, he will guess the meaning of their speech and asks his interlocutor to confirm. He adds that there is nothing else he can do in this situation but adopts the strategy of guessing.

“You, ... you sometimes it is difficult because you do not want to offend the other person; and you do not want to be saying all the time ‘Please repeat what you said, please repeat what you said, it will be embarrassing. So, you try to guess what it means” (English 2).

Similarly, in the above extract, the English native speaker reported that when encountering a communication difficulty, he guesses the meaning of his interlocutor’s speech to avoid embarrassing him. He adds that he cannot continue asking his interlocutor continuously for

repetition because he does not want to offend him. In addition, if he continues asking for repetition, it may be considered as rude practice.

### **5.9.8 Message abandonment**

“Uh...huh I think at the end of the day, I try to find the word ... I can guess what the word is they are trying to say, and we just must give up if we did not ...” (English 2).

In the above extract, the English native speaker reported from a previous experience of encountering a difficulty of vocabulary use during a conversation with Sudanese learner, he kept trying various ways to get around and continued the conversation with his interlocutor, but he failed at the end. In this situation, he adopted the strategy of message abandonment and moved away.

“Uh...huh not understanding what they say or being not understanding what I am saying I just apologise and move on: No, I do not continue. I just apologise and go away” (English 4).

Also, in the above extract, the English native speaker noted that when encountering a communication difficulty during conversations with Sudanese learners, he does not continue the conversation in vain. He reported that he apologises, abandons the message, and moves away.

“If it is professional, I would just keep struggling through and try and ask for clarification and ask for clarification. If it with someone while I am making a cup of tea in the office, I would just end the conversation early to not make a fool of myself” (English 12).

Similarly, in the above extract, the English native speaker reported that when encountering a communication difficulty in interaction with Sudanese learners, he adopts various strategies to overcome

the difficulty and continue the conversation. For example, he can ask for clarification and struggle to find a way around to push forward the conversation. If he fails to overcome the problem, he just adopts the strategy of message abandonment and moves away to not embarrass himself.

### **5.9.9 Appeal for paraphrasing in standard English**

“It is a bit silly to use colloquial, colloquialisms, but if somebody is using ... what call it ... slang, you understand what slang is, yah, slang, if someone is using slang to someone use ... is not a native English speaker, it will be difficult for him to understand. I obviously use, use the proper vernacular, use the proper English with ...” (English 9).

In the above extract, the English native speaker reported that one of communication difficulties he encounters with L2 speakers is the use of colloquial or slang words. It is difficult for non-native speakers of English like Sudanese to understand local phrases. In this situation, when he interacts with such interlocutors, he appeals to paraphrasing his speech in standard English to carry out a successful communication.

“Uh...huh I would then ... if ... if I am using the language that they would not understand, I would try to go back to what would be seen out as the queen’s English ... what word would be in their English dictionary” (English 10).

Similarly, in the above extract, another English native speaker reported that to avoid communication breakdown with L2 speakers like Sudanese, he appeals to paraphrasing his speech in Queen’s English or standard English that is taught to non-native speakers in



schools because the vocabulary they use are available in the dictionary.

### **5.9.10 Asking for confirmation**

“Uh...huh I will say it again ... I suppose if I hear ... saying such and such and I try to keep what he said and say did you agree with that? If that make sense, I would ... if that is what he said, I would keep the conversation on what I heard and repeat what he has heard; just to check what if that is it” (English 5).

In the above extract, the English native speaker reported that when encountering a communication difficulty with Sudanese learners during conversations, he adopts various strategies to maintain a successful communication. For example, he can ask for repetition of his interlocutor’s speech or asks for confirmation for what he heard from his interlocutor. If his interlocutor confirms that, then he accepts it and continues the conversation with him based on that.

“Uh...huh I would just say I'm sorry I was having difficulty that understanding what you are meaning, uh...huh did you mean this? ask questions, ask questions: open questions, did you mean this or did you mean that or uh...huh what are you trying to uh...huh say to me uh...huh say what you think they said; and if they say no, I didn't mean that; I was able to say “Can you just tell me what it was that you wanted to uh...huh speak to me about?” (English 16).

Similarly, in the above extract, another English native speaker noted that when he encounters a communication difficulty, he can ask for confirmation from the other interlocutor. If his interlocutor confirms, he continues or he can ask different questions until they come to a shared meaning to continue the conversation.

### 5.9.11 Longer-term developing communication strategy

“Uh...huh I think ... part of the difficulty is improved how you get more familiar with somebody’s accent ... if somebody have a very strong accent, sometimes it is difficult to understand what they are saying. Uh...huh the far you to get used to the accent, you become more familiar with it; and you can understand more easily what they are saying. Does that make sense?” (English 2).

In the above extract, the English native speaker reported that he was able to facilitate some of the difficulties in interaction with non-native speakers of English like Sudanese learners by improving his communication with them in the long term. For example, he reported that he did that by getting familiar with those speakers of unfamiliar accents that is difficult for him to understand. In this way, he has adopted the strategy of longer-term developing of his communicative competence to facilitate communication with speakers of other accents and dialects like Sudanese. Hence, he did this in a pre-communication phase before the communication takes place with Sudanese learners.

“Uh...huh again, I think it is just trying to become familiar with the accent. So, you understand it in certain letters said in a certain different way; and then, once you understand that, then you know what the best way one is trying to say” (English 2).

Additionally, in the above extract, the same English native speaker reported the way in which he gets familiar with the accent of Sudanese learners to facilitate his communication with them. He noted that he focuses on certain letters to see how they say them; and

once he understands the way they say it, he can push forward the conversation with them.

“Uh...huh yes, it is just getting used to ... to somebody’s speak and uh...huh yes, it is all freezing, is not it ... while somebody speak the accent and the grammar, there is things ... you need to listen very carefully, so you become more familiar with the way they used to say something; and so, it is easy to understand” (English 2).

Also, in the above extract, he noted that he develops a strategy of becoming familiar with the way the Sudanese learners speak and the way they make sentence structure and use of grammar. So, once he becomes familiar with the way they produce these things, he can easily understand them.

Overall, in the above three extracts, the English native speaker reported that to overcome the communication difficulties with non-native speakers of English like Sudanese to maintain successful conversations you can adopt the strategy of longer-term developing communication strategy. In this strategy, you try to get familiar with other interlocutors’ accents by becoming familiar with their tone or pronunciation of words and by listening carefully to what they say. So, by becoming familiar with their accents, you will gradually develop your ability to understand them and reduce any potential difficulties of communication that may arise during mutual conversations.

Taken together all the above communication strategies employed by English native speakers, there are many previous empirical studies that indicated that there are many L2 learners employ strategies

during mutual conversations when they encounter communication difficulties. Similarly, there are also several studies indicated the influence of the strategic competence in the development of the L2 learners' communicative competence (See Section 2.8.3).

## **6 Chapter 6: Conclusion**

This study was designed to address important gaps in the research on Sudanese migrant learners' everyday communication difficulties, and their personal choice of solutions to these difficulties during their informal interaction with English native speakers in the free social space in the UK. It hopefully filled the gaps with Sudanese learners' daily experiences of interaction that illustrated their difficulties and strategies in informal social contexts, which are rarely explored in the research literature.

The study explored informal communication issues from interpretivist approach. Unlike many previous studies using surveys that supposed or indicated what difficulties might be, this study examined Sudanese learners' experiences of communication difficulties from the views of the interlocutors' reports on their daily interactions. To address the credibility of the data, this study employed an approach triangulating personal reports of both Sudanese learners and their peer English native speakers on the same social phenomenon. To the best of my knowledge, triangulation of methods and participants' views on the

same social phenomenon in research is very rare in the field of formal and informal conversations.

The reported difficulties were analysed based on the thematic analysis (TA) that focuses directly on the themes relevant to communication difficulties and strategies. The thematic analysis enables the researcher to explore latent themes about communication difficulties and strategies to help in the interpretation of the data. In this study, the key findings of communication difficulties that were reported by Sudanese learners that they encounter during interaction with English native speakers were phonological variation of accent, regional dialects variations, perceived speech rate, limited vocabulary size, technical vocabulary, and phrasal vocabulary. On the other hand, English native speakers reported the following communication difficulties in their interaction with Sudanese learners: regional dialects variations, limited vocabulary size, phrasal vocabulary, suprasegmental features, inappropriate vocabulary use and cross-cultural variations.

Both Sudanese learners and English native speakers reported that they adopt a variety of communication strategies to overcome the communication difficulties that they encounter in their mutual conversations. Also, some of the participants reported that they sometimes employ communication strategies to enhance their performance during conversations. In addition, both Sudanese

learners and English native speakers reported that they adopt pre-communication strategies to overcome the potential communication difficulties and facilitate their mutual conversations. While Sudanese learners reported that they employ preparatory strategy, the English native speakers reported that they employ longer-term developing communication strategy to overcome difficulties and push forward their shared daily conversations with Sudanese interlocutors.

It is undoubtedly that employing semi-structured interviews to collect data as a single research method in this study has some limitations relevant to the credibility of the data such as social prestige bias and fake answers provided by the respondents. However, I adopted some methods to mitigate these limitations such as triangulation of the participants' views. For further discussion to limitations and the different aspects of implications, you can see the last overall conclusion of the thesis at the end of this study

It is important to note that one of the themes that emerged from the findings of this study is the Sudanese learners' ability to use language appropriately within context. This theme which is indicated by English native speakers as a communication difficulty among the Sudanese learners necessitated that the researcher must explore deeply this theme in a second study to see how far the Sudanese learners can apply their linguistic knowledge practically and appropriately in

context. It is now timely to turn to the second study that explores the Sudanese learners' pragmatic competence.

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## **The second Study**

### **Examining the Sudanese learners' pragmatic competence through DCTs speech acts**

#### **1 Introduction**

It is worth noting that some of the themes that emerged from the interviews with Sudanese learners and English native speakers in the first study were related to the pragmatic competence of Sudanese participants. These new themes were introduced as problems of inappropriate vocabulary use and cross-cultural variations on the sides of both interlocutors. Consequently, the emergence of those themes led to the generation of some new focused questions that were posed to examine the Sudanese learners' pragmatic competence in this second study.

Pragmatic competence in research is defined from two perspectives: knowledge and ability (Li et al., 2015; See Section 2.2). It is typically

defined as the ability to use language effectively to achieve a specific target and to understand language in context (Li et al., 2015). Within this study, I am intending to explore the importance of how far these participants can appropriately complete tasks in the way that English native speakers would expect or accept in the target language.

To suit its purpose, this study adopts the discourse completion task (DCT) scenarios as a research method to test the Sudanese participants' pragmatic competence when using a language in communicative situations in their daily lives in the UK. The following chapter presents a sample of analysis to responses of 20 Sudanese participants to twelve communicative situations with different functions to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Sudanese learners realise speech acts in communicative situations in English?
2. What types of communication difficulties do English native speakers highlight when they are exposed to Sudanese learners' speech acts in English?
3. What communication strategies do Sudanese learners use when they encounter communication difficulties during their realisation of speech acts in English?

## **2 An overview of DCT Situations**



I decided to adopt the discourse completion task (DCT) method to test the Sudanese learners' pragmatic competence through different scenarios of speech acts given to Sudanese learners (Hu, 2014). The data of the speech acts produced by Sudanese learners was then exposed to English native speakers to evaluate it and highlight the communication difficulties manifested by Sudanese learners during the production of the speech acts in communicative situations. Before explaining the procedures of the DCT situations, I provided a review of the literature about the discourse completion task method in the following sub-sections. The review will define the DCT method, provide a background to it, review its advantages and limitations in research as well as providing samples of speech acts to Sudanese learners.

## **2.1 General background**

Researchers regularly indicate that there is a significant dilemma in sociolinguistic research around the methods used to collect data, the validity of various types of data and their adequacy to approximate the authentic performance of linguistic action (Billmyer & Varghese, 2000). However, a researcher indicates that the approaches to study language can be divided with reference to its locations in which they are used. This breaks down into there are armchair, field and laboratory methods (Cyluk, 2013).

Among these methods, the laboratory method is the method that investigates language use through experiments carried out in a laboratory. It employs an elicitation technique to produce utterances that contain a speech act under investigation. As accurately as possible, the informants must imagine communicative situations and say how they or their interlocutors would respond to these situations; and this method is represented by the technique of discourse completion task (Cyluk, 2013).

Due to legal and ethical constraints, as well as the logistical difficulties of regularly employing the field methods that involve observation of naturally occurring conversations that are produced irrespective of the research project, researchers in pragmatics adopted DCT as one of the alternative methods to elicit speech act data (Cyluk, 2013).

### **2.1.1 A review of discourse completion tasks (DCTs)**

There are many definitions of the discourse completion task in research, though they typically coalesce around the same key points, but relatively most of them look similar. Woodfield (2008) provides the following definition of DCT: it is a written questionnaire including several brief situational descriptions followed by a short dialogue with an empty slot for the speech act under study; and participants are asked to fill in a response that they think fits into the given context. Similarly, other researchers define discourse completion task as “A projective measure of speaking, and so the cognitive processes

involved in producing utterances in response to this elicitation device, may not truly reflect those used when having to speak relatively naturally” (Woodfield, 2008, p. 47). The only difference between this definition and the former of discourse completion task is that this definition indicates that the data produced via discourse completion task is not the same as that spoken in the naturally occurring context.

To suit the purpose of this study, I adopted the following definition of discourse completion task: it is any pragmatic instrument that requires the students to read or listen to a written description of a situation and asks them to respond with what they would say in that situation (Cyluk, 2013). Based on this definition, the situations in the questionnaires are designed in a way that a specific communicative act such as compliment, apology, invitation, thanking, request, refusal is elicited.

I employed discourse completion task method in this study for the following reasons. Firstly, it enables me to gather a large amount of data about speech events in a variety of situations within relatively a short period of time (Cyluk, 2013). Secondly, it provides an opportunity to obtain information about communication difficulties and the kinds of strategies that Sudanese participants employ to produce speech acts (Byon, 2006). Thirdly, discourse completion tasks provide a flexible method that enables me to avoid what participants consider to be socially and culturally inappropriate responses in any

given context (Byon, 2006). Hence, I designed speech acts that do not include sensitive issues.

However, there are many limitations regarding discourse completion tasks mentioned in the research literature. To some researchers, discourse completion tasks have been criticised for creating discrepancies between data elicited through this method and the raw data because they use written data which cannot be expected to precisely represent natural speech (Cyluk, 2013)). This limitation of DCT was mitigated by audio-recording speech act scenarios and playing them to the fluent participants. Also, other researchers indicate that in the naturally occurring contexts, participants have the option of 'opting out', whereas DCT method requires participants to perform linguistically even when they would normally keep silent (Byon, 2006). This limitation was also mitigated by giving participants the freedom to opt out whenever needed. In addition, some research indicated that speech acts can put the informants into roles in which they are unfamiliar and accordingly, they may create unnatural utterances (Cyluk, 2013). He adds that undoubtedly, interpersonal and contextual details have an impact on the speakers' utterances, and DCT is lacking in these (e.g., non-verbal features like gestures, posture, facial expression) and paralinguistic elements (e.g., pitch, intonation). However, this limitation was mitigated by selecting contexts familiar to Sudanese participants with which they are likely to engage.

Based on the different advantages of DCT in research, Woodfield (2008) indicates that DCTs have frequently been used in pragmatics research as a key research instrument in eliciting the production of speech acts by second language learners while incorporating verbal reports. In line with this, I employed the DCT method to examine the Sudanese learners' pragmatic competence while carrying out communicative actions. In research, the pragmatic competence is defined as the ability of a second language learner or a foreign language learner to use the target language appropriately in certain social contexts (Hu, 2014). However, some researchers divide pragmatics into 'pragma-linguistics' and 'socio-pragmatics'. According to them, pragma-linguistics is the ability to use appropriate linguistic devices to perform a particular speech act, whereas socio-pragmatics is the ability to perform a speech act in a particular situation or context (Birjandi & Rezaei, 2010). In this study, I will focus on socio-pragmatics because through discourse completion task I am intending to examine the Sudanese participants' ability to use language appropriately in each context.

It is worth noting that over the last two decades empirical studies measuring second language learners' pragmatic competence have frequently used DCTs to elicit speech act production (Woodfield, 2008). In line with this, I exposed Sudanese learners to different speech acts scenarios in an open-ended questionnaire. Depending on

the purpose of this study, participants must provide one or two verbal responses to the situation in the case of open-ended questionnaires (Cyluk, 2013).

### **2.1.2 Speech act theory**

In research, the speech acts theory is rooted in the early 1960s; and has subsequently become a prevailing method to examine language learners' ability. Speech acts include language functions such as apologising, complaining, giving advice, requesting and refusing things (Birjandi & Rezaei, 2010). According to some researchers, speech acts can be classified into five groups: (1) directive, in which speakers try to get their listeners to do something such as begging, commanding and requesting, (2) commissive, in which speakers commit themselves to a future course of action such as promising or guaranteeing, (3) expressive, in which speakers express their feelings such as apologising, (4) declarative, in which the speakers' utterance brings about a change such as baptism and marriage, and (5) representative, in which speakers convey their beliefs about the truth of a proposition such as asserting and hypothesising (Birjandi & Rezaei, 2010).

The data for this study was collected through twelve communicative situations which participants are likely to meet in an informal real-life context in the free social space. The situations were chosen from previous empirical studies from a

variety of open-ended questions for participants to answer or complete aimed at drawing out the participants' personal responses to these situations. The selection of these situations was mostly governed by two criteria: (1) they are likely to be informal situations where the informal language use is likely to occur, and (2) to include a variety of language functions that are likely to be met by Sudanese participants in the informal situations in their daily lives.

The participants were free to answer or complete these situations by providing any information from their own language learning experiences that were relevant. The total twelve situations were designed to express different functions encountered in the daily lives of the participants to test the level of their pragmatic competence in different contexts. Then, the participants' responses were exposed to English native speakers for rating.

### **3 Methodology**

Specifically, this section provided a detailed description of the research population, participants (both the Sudanese learners and English native speakers), sample size and sampling strategy, rating and rating scale, instrument design, procedures, data analysis and ethical approval.

### **3.1 Participants**

The populations from which the sample size of this study was selected includes both the immigrant Sudanese community members and their peer English native speaker interlocutors in the United Kingdom. Below, I provided a description of the populations and participants for both the Sudanese learners and the English native speakers and their sampling strategies.

#### **3.1.1 The Sudanese Learners**

The population from which I selected the sample size of the participants in this study is the immigrant Sudanese community members in the UK. The sample size that was selected to respond to the discourse completion task (DCT) situations comprises of twenty Sudanese learners. It is worth noting that these twenty Sudanese learners who participated in this second study were completely different from those participated in the first study. All participants speak English as a foreign language to some level, migrated from Sudan for a range of reasons and settled in various cities and towns in the UK. Nineteen of these participants are males, whereas there is a single female (there is sensitivity towards approaching females among Sudanese community members for religious and social reasons). Their ages range between 30 and 45 years and they have settled in the UK for 10



to 15 years. Therefore, they must have arrived in the UK between 20 and 30 years of age. It is also imperative to note that few of these participants have settled in a single city since they arrived in the UK, whereas most of them have moved from one city to another for a variety of reasons. Also, there are 18 of these participants who reported that they joined ESOL classes for 1 to 3 years, whereas the other two participants had not joined any ESOL classes.

### **3.1.2 Sampling strategy**

The research population dealt with in this study is the Sudanese immigrants' community in the UK. To select the sample size from this population, I used a flexible approach which is the most appropriate for this population to gain the trust of potential participants. Therefore, I adopted a combination of sampling strategies: "convenient sampling" and "snowballing". These strategies were chosen because by necessity, these participants are classified as "hard-to-reach" and potentially they are vulnerable sections of society (Bengry-Howell & Griffin, 2012). Furthermore, they are often reluctant to engage with research and even actively resist attempts to recruit them. Also, the size of the population in the UK is small: the number of Sudanese migrants in the UK is estimated to be 35,000 according to the Office for National Statistics (2020). To facilitate approaching them, both convenient and snowballing strategies are reliance on

participants who are readily available and accessible to me (Abrams, 2010). Practically, they are least costly to the researcher in terms of time, effort, and money (Gray, 2018) under the present situations of Covid-19 restrictions. Additionally, as a native of Sudan, I have access to a wide informal network of friends and acquaintances in the UK, and some assisted in actively recruiting further participant (Dornyei, 2008).

### **3.2 English Native speakers**

The population from which I selected the English native speakers to rate the Sudanese participants' responses are the members of the British community in the UK. It is important to note that the English native speakers who volunteered to participate in this second study were completely different from those who participated in the first study. Also, they have never reported that they met the twenty Sudanese participants under study, but they reported their communication difficulties based on their previous experiences of interacting with Sudanese cohort in the UK.

Despite this, their opinions about highlighting Sudanese learners' communication difficulties in this study are relevant and important because when they, for example, evaluate a specific response of a Sudanese learner to a given situation as socially and culturally unacceptable, it is interesting to ask them to explain the reason for this unacceptability of the response. Also, the Sudanese learners, for

reasons related to their linguistic inability, might not be aware of the communication difficulties they encounter during mutual conversations with English native speakers.

The participants are 8 English native speakers who are currently students at the University of York. I selected them based on the definition of the English native speaker that I identified in the literature review (See section 2.14) who is fluent native speaker and speaks English as his mother-tongue from his birth. Therefore, I checked this clearly upon accepting the participation in this study. There are 7 of these participants who are undergraduate, whereas the other one is a postgraduate (working towards the completion of an MA degree in Business Administration). Their ages mostly range between 18 to 25 years. The group comprises of 4 females and 4 males. All reported that they are from different cities in the UK.

### **3.2.1 Sampling strategy**

As stated above, I adopted a combination of the convenient and snowballing sampling strategies to rate the Sudanese responses because they are hard-to-reach and reluctant participants (Abrams, 2010). Therefore, a notice was posted on the Facebook group of the University of York's postgraduate website asking for participants. Also, those who agreed to participate in the survey were asked to identify further colleagues from the same population (Dornyei, 2008).

### 3.3 Ethical approval

Before contacting the participants, I applied to obtain ethical approval from the University of York with the assistance of my supervisor. A few weeks later, I was given ethical approval to collect the data through DCT situations.

### 3.4 Instruments design

In this sub-section below, I provided a detailed description of the instrument design, the procedures of the DCT situations and where they were taken from, what their language functions are and why they were selected to be responded to in this study.

Broadly, these situations and their functions were taken from the works of a range of researchers (Hu, 2014; Woodfield, 2008; Birjandi & Rezaei, 2010; Aufa, 2011; Cyluk, 2013; Kanik, 2013). For clarity, it is important to note that the source of each situation is identified clearly at the end of it in the table below.

**Table 14. DCT situations and functions given to Sudanese participants.**

Situations	Speech act scenarios	Functions
1	"A friend invites you to go to the cinema on weekend. Yet you must do some revision for the exam. Then you will say ..." (Hu, 2014, p. 394).	Apology 1
2	"You knew that you need an important book for your essay. The book is not available in the library. You know your lecturer has	Request 1

	a copy of the book you need. Ask to borrow the book” (Woodfield, 2008, p. 48).	
3	“Your friend asks you to lend him some money, and he promises to return it to you in two weeks. You do not want to lend him. Then, you will say ...” (Hu, 2014, p. 394).	Refusal
4	“You are newly appointed as sales manager. Your employees had a party for you in a pub. You want to invite a close friend of yours to this party. How can you invite him?” (Hu, 2014, p. 395).	Invitation
5	“A friend of yours is in a daydreaming and lose track or following of what the teacher has said. At once, he asks you to review the lesson for him outside the classroom. What would you say to him?” (Birjandi & Rezaei, 2010, p. 48).	Offer
6	“You went to a restaurant to have lunch there. You felt disappointed when you tasted the food because the food tastes bad and there is much salt in it. How do you report this to the manager?” (Aufa, 2011, p. 40).	Complaint
7	“Your British boss asks you to work overtime today. Yet you do not want to do any extra work. Then you will say ...” (Hu, 2014, p. 394).	Regret 1
8	“It is your birthday; you are having a few friends over for dinner. A friend brings you a present. You unwrap it and find it a blue sweater. You say ...” (Cyluk, 2013, p. 103).	Compliment
9	“A student has borrowed a book from her teacher, which she promised to return today. When meeting her teacher, she realized that she forgot to bring it along. She says ...” (Cyluk, 2013, p. 103).	Regret 2

10	“Your car has broken down and you would like someone to drive you home from the supermarket. There are no buses that go to your home. You see some people who live in your street standing near the exit. How can you ask them to drive you home?” (Woodfield, 2008, p. 47).	Request 2
11	“You meet a friend whom you are not very close with in campus. He likes to go shopping and buy expensive things. You really know that he does not need them. What suggestion would you make for him in this situation?” (Aufa, 2011, p. 40).	Suggestion
12	“During dinner with a friend’s family in the host community, you accidentally spill your glass of red wine on the tablecloth. How do you apologize?” (Kanik, 2013, p. 621).	Apology 2

### 3.4.1 The DCTs procedures

First, I sent text messages to more than 20 Sudanese learners from friends of mine and acquaintances in different cities in the UK during June and July, 2021 asking them to participate in my project. After that, those who agreed to take part were sent the consent forms to sign to confirm their agreement, and then the prospective participants sent it back to me. Those who agreed to participate were told that their responses and personal information will be confidential; and their participation is voluntary, so that they can withdraw at any time from the survey.

The procedures for the 20 participants were employed through the phone calls. During the employment of these procedures, I

read the 12 situations aloud one-by-one to each individual participant; and at the end I waited for the participant to respond to the situation. All the DCT situations responses provided by participants were audiotaped.

The DCT situations took between ten to twelve minutes for each individual participant to complete. The entirety of the responses provided by the 20 Sudanese learners were then transcribed for analysis, including their accompanying situations.

### **3.4.2 Rating**

In the following sub-section, I explained the procedure for rating the learners' production in the DCT situations step by step. Before starting the rating, English native speakers were given consent forms to fill in and they were told that their participation is voluntary, and their information will be confidential.

Secondly, I told each English participant that he will be asked to rate the responses of five Sudanese participants and that it may take around 60 minutes. Then, I played the audiotape and asked the English native speaker to listen to it carefully (the situations were recorded in my voice). After each situation and its response, I stopped the audiotape and asked the English native speaker to rate the response in relation to the situation as to whether it was acceptable or unacceptable, and what their justification was. To confirm accuracy,

when the English native speaker identified a response as unacceptable, I asked what the communication difficulty was whenever it was necessary. Also, I did the same when rating responses with acceptable to double check his evaluation.

This rating procedure took place during September and October 2021 inside the University of York library. The responses of the 20 Sudanese learners were classified into four groups in which each group includes five participants. I selected eight English native speakers for rating the responses in which each group of five Sudanese participants were double rated by two English native speakers to address the data validity. At the end, the entire rating of the data was transcribed for analysis.

### **3.4.3 Rating scale**

The rating-scale that I gave to the English native speakers to rate the Sudanese participants' responses is a two-rating scale: acceptable or unacceptable. This rating scale was taken from previous empirical studies that dealt with the same theme of the present study: examining learners' pragmatic competence (Taguchi, Xiao, & Li, 2016; Hu, 2014). I used this two-rating scale because it suits the nature of the present study. It is not reasonable or appropriate to decide the degree of acceptability in multi-rating scale in a way or another and ask the respondents to choose and justify that scale. In this case, the participants may likely tend to random choice which is not justifiable.



So, it is better to make the participants justify their choice than to force them decide the degree of acceptability and justify it to avoid the random choice. Also, this will lead to focus on the main purpose of the study: testing the Sudanese learners' pragmatic competence and highlighting their communication problems. Based on that, I gave the following questions schedule to the English native speakers to rate the Sudanese learners' responses to DCT situations: the first question is to identify the acceptability/unacceptability of the given Sudanese learners' responses in relation to the given DCT situations; and the second question is to identify the communication difficulties highlighted by the English native speakers.

1. Are the following responses by Sudanese participants acceptable or not acceptable?
2. Why did you give the participant's response this rating? What is the communication problem?

### **3.5 Data transcription**

There are different styles of transcription in research which suit different analytic methods. I adopted the audio transcription method called 'orthographic' or 'verbatim' because it focuses on transcribing spoken words and other sounds in recorded data (Braun & Clarke, 2013) which is appropriate to this study: the focus is on words, lexicalised and non-lexicalised fillers in

Sudanese learners' responses and English native speakers' ratings. Unlike audio transcription style which comprises more 'phonetic' such as paralinguistic features, orthographic transcription focuses more on what was said (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

In this section, the verbal data obtained through responses to DCT scenarios and ratings was transcribed in writing to conduct the data analysis. I used the standard orthography used in research and previous empirical studies. The symbols I have used include (...) for silent pauses (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Manzano, 2018) and mumble "uh...huh" (Bernard, 2013) for voiced pauses. For ethical considerations, in this study the participants' real names were anonymised, and pseudonyms were used instead.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

In the following sub-section, I explained how the data of the DCT responses and ratings was analysed. The section included a sample of coding scheme to DCT responses used in the empirical studies outlined below, and the communication difficulties that were highlighted by English native speakers: when the English native speaker rated a response of a Sudanese learner as unacceptable response, I asked him to explain what the communication difficulty

was. At First, the data was presented in statistical descriptions, and then the discussion of the results followed.

### 3.6.1 DCT situations analysis

The method used to analyse the data in this study was taken from a combination of empirical studies (Hu, 2014; Woodfield, 2008; Birjandi & Rezaei, 2010; Afa, 2011; Cyluk, 2013; Kanik, 2013). This was done because they dealt with the same purpose and theme of the present study: the DCT situations and the appropriate responses to match these situations to test learners' pragmatic competence. Therefore, the coding scheme for both the situations and the participants' responses to these situations was taken and matched with the purpose of this study from these previous empirical studies. The situations used in this study were coded according to their functions (See Table 15). Below, I provided a sample of codes for the DCT situations and their appropriate responses from these previous studies.

**Table 15. Codes for DCT situations and the appropriate responses that match them.**

Codes of DCT situations	Codes of responses
- Invitation	→ Accept/reject
- Offer	→ assert/refuse/elicit thank
- Suggestion	→ Give advice/offer alternative
- Complain	→ Express regret/elicit apology
- Request	→ deflect/evade

- Apology → Elicit apology
- Compliment → Elicit thank
- Refusal → Elicit apology/giving alternative
- Regret → Express empathy

The data obtained via DCT situations from the 20 Sudanese participants were coded in semantic formulas that were taken from the previous empirical studies (Takhash & Beebe, 1987; Li et al., 2015) using the same method of research. Hence, the following codes were exclusively taken from the two empirical studies about discourse completion task situations mentioned earlier; and matched with the responses of the participants in this study:

**Table 16. Selected codes to match the Sudanese participants responses.**

Expression of regret	Empathy
Excuse	Suggestion
Offer of alternative	Invitation
Apology	Request
Expression of gratitude	Refusal
Acceptance	Giving reason
Explanation	Promise
Begging	Thanking

### 3.7 Ratings procedures

The data for this study was summarised statistically at the beginning in four figures in the following sections. Firstly, it was presented in the

statistical description to display the frequency of ratings provided by English native speakers to Sudanese learners' responses for each situation across the 20 learners (See Figure 1). Secondly, I presented another figure to display the mean, min, and max for the total ratings across the Sudanese learners (See Figure 2). Thirdly, I presented another figure to display statistical description of the communication difficulties and their frequencies across each situation (See Figure 3). Finally, I presented a last figure to display the high and low proficiency learners across the 12 situations (See Figure 4).

### **3.7.1 Justification of ratings**

To analyse the data in this study, I used a coding scheme for both the functions of situations and the Sudanese learners' responses obtained from different previous relevant empirical studies (See Table 15), because it is appropriate for the purpose of this study which may help to better analyse the data and report useful findings. This coding scheme was summarised within previous sections in this study (See Tables 15 & 16). For coding communication strategies to answer the third research question in this study, I used the same strategies in the section of proposing a taxonomy of communication strategies in the first study (See Table 7) because it includes interactional communication strategies that suit this study and focuses on the informal interaction between Sudanese learners and English native speakers in informal contexts.

### **3.7.2 Rater agreement**

It is important to note that to set up a rater agreement and to calculate the number and frequency of acceptable responses of the Sudanese learners, I classified the English native speaker ratings to the Sudanese responses into three columns across each situation: agreement on acceptability (the two raters agreed that the response of the participant to a given situation is acceptable), agreement on the unacceptability (the two raters agreed that the response of the participant to a given situation is unacceptable), and the disagreement on a participant's response to a given situation (One of the raters gave acceptability to a response of a given situation, whereas the other one gave unacceptability and vice versa). After that, I presented the number and frequency of acceptable responses in Figure 1.

Based on this rater agreement, I calculated the level and the frequency with which the raters agreed on the acceptability of the responses is 66.67%, which is adequate to summarise the data across raters' reflections on the Sudanese learners' responses to DCT situations (See Figure 1).

## **4 Results**

In the following sub-section, I presented several figures to display statistical description for the data. I then explained how I checked the level of the raters' agreement on the Sudanese responses as well as

providing the level of the rater agreement; and to state whether this level of agreement is adequate to infer findings across raters' responses

#### 4.1 Descriptive statistics

Below are some of the figures presenting statistical data: in Figure 1, there are 20 Sudanese learners; and their responses were double rated by English native speakers for each situation. The total number of ratings for each situation across the participants equals 40 ratings. In the figures below, I have calculated the number of the ratings for each situation out of 40. In Figure 1, there are 20 Sudanese learners, and each learner has answered 12 situations. Then, the answers of each Sudanese learner were double rated by two English native speakers. Therefore, the whole ratings for each Sudanese learner across the 12 situations equal 24 ratings. Therefore, in Figure 3, I calculated the number and frequency of acceptable responses for each Sudanese participant across the 12 situations to identify the high-proficiency and the low-proficiency learners for comparison.

**Figure 1. Statistical description displaying the frequency of the ratings of English native speakers for each situation across the 20 Sudanese participants (a display of acceptable responses and their frequencies out of the total number of the ratings).**

Functions of situations	No. of acceptable ratings	Frequency
Apology 1	38	7.91%

Request 1	26	5.41%
Refusal	35	7.29%
Invitation	30	6.25%
Offer	32	6.66%
Complain	33	6.87%
Regret 1	35	7.29%
Compliment	38	7.91%
Regret 2	30	6.25%
Request 2	29	6.04%
Suggestion	25	5.20%
Apology 2	29	6.04%
Total	380	79.1666667%

**Figure 2. Statistical description displaying the mean, minimum and maximum for all ratings across the Sudanese participants.**

Mean	19
Min	11 (participant 1)
Max	23 (participant 8, p12, p14, p15 & p20)

**Figure 3. Statistical display showing high and low proficiency ratings for Sudanese participants across the situations.**

No. of participants	High proficiency learners	Low proficiency learners	Frequency
1		11	45.83%
2		12	50%
3	18		75%
4		14	58.33%
5		16	66.66%
6		13	54.16%



7	22		91.66%
8	23		95.83%
9	22		91.66%
10	22		91.66%
11	20		83.33%
12	23		95.83%
13	20		83.33%
14	23		95.83%
15	23		95.83%
16	20		83.33%
17	19		79.16%
18		15	62.5%
19	21		87.5%
20	23		95.83%

## 4.2 Findings and common communication difficulties

To answer the first research question:

RQ1: How do Sudanese learners realise speech acts in communicative situations in English?

The overall view of the Sudanese participants' responses as displayed in Figure 1, reveals that they are mostly able to produce relatively appropriate language in context; and their overall pragmatic competence is more than satisfactory to be able to apply their linguistic knowledge to the real situations effectively. The Sudanese participants in nearly half of the speech acts functions exhibited a high level of pragmatic competence by

giving acceptable answers to most of the DCT scenarios (See Figure 1).

To support this claim from the statistics, we need to look at the summary of both acceptable and unacceptable ratings provided by English native speakers to the entirety of the responses of the 20 Sudanese participants in Figure 1. In this table, there are 380 acceptable responses versus 100 unacceptable responses given to the whole of (480 ratings by 8 English native speakers) Sudanese participants' responses to the 12 DCT situations. This indicates that the acceptable responses equal approximately 79.17% versus 20.83% for the unacceptable responses given by the Sudanese participants.

To answer the second research question:

RQ2: What types of communication difficulties do English native speakers highlight when they are exposed to Sudanese learners' speech acts?

In the following sub-section, I reported the communication difficulties experienced by Sudanese learners when realising DCT communicative situations as reported by English native speakers when rating the Sudanese learners' responses to DCT situations. First, I coded the justifications of ratings provided by the English native speakers, supported them with extracts, and discussed the extracts. The

discussion will be presented at the end of each extract. For better organisation of the section, each communication difficulty was reported in a separate sub-section below:

**Figure 4. Statistical display for the communication difficulties and their frequencies across each situation.**

Situations	Functions	Communication difficulties	Frequency
1	Apology 1	Insufficient explanation	1
		Inappropriate lexical use	1
2	Request 1	Absence of explanation	1
		Irrelevant response to situation	6
		Insufficient explanation	4
		Inappropriate lexical use	1
		Incomprehensive response	2
3	Refusal	Inconsistent content	1
		Absence of explanation	1
		Insufficient explanation	2
		Irrelevant response to context	2
		Irrelevant response to situation	1
4	Invitation	Absence of explanation	1
		Incomprehensive response	3
		Insufficient explanation	1
		Irrelevant response to the given situation	3
		Irrelevant response to context	2

5	Offer	Insufficient explanation	2
		Incomprehensive response	3
		Inappropriate explanation	2
		Irrelevant response to the given situation	2
6	Complain	Insufficient explanation	1
		Irrelevant response to context	2
		Incomprehensive response	1
		Irrelevant response to the given situation	1
		Inconsistent content	1
		Inappropriate lexical use	1
7	Regret 1	Absence of explanation	2
		Inappropriate explanation	1
		Insufficient explanation	1
		Inappropriate lexical use	1
		Inconsistent content	1
8	Compliment	Insufficient explanation	1
		Incomprehensive response	1
9	Regret 2	Irrelevant response to the given situation	2
		Insufficient explanation	6
		Unfamiliar pronunciation	1
10	Request 2	Absence of explanation	2
		Incomprehensive response	1
		Insufficient explanation	5
		Irrelevant response to the given situation	3
11	Suggestion	Irrelevant response to context	9

		Incomprehensive response	4
		Irrelevant response to the given situation	2
12	Apology 2	Incomprehensive response	1
		Insufficient explanation	5
		Irrelevant response to the given situation	2

#### 4.2.1 Difficulty 1: Insufficient explanation

One of the most frequent difficulties that was reported by English native speakers was that the Sudanese learners do not provide a sufficient explanation when responding to situations with functions such as giving apology, declining an offer of invitation, asking for help, etc. Below are some extracts from the data provided by some English native speakers:

“Uh...huh I say maybe that one is uh...huh more into was, not acceptable, so many that there was like, there was not much detail, I think, in answer to uh...huh that preposition, I think that is a bit more about, you know, uh...huh he might say yeah we can meet at some point I can tell, I can show you my notes uh...huh or the teacher said everything and explain that more, yeah that one needs more” (English native speaker 1).

In this example, the Sudanese learner was asked how he can help a friend of his who was in a daydream inside the classroom and accordingly, he lost tracking the lesson, and then he asked him to review the lesson for him outside the classroom. He just said he will do his best to give him the information if he understands the lesson. Accordingly, the English native speaker rated his response as unacceptable because he did not give more information such as

accepting the offer from the beginning. Then he did not explain to him how he can help him such as telling him to meet somewhere, offering him his notes or explaining the lesson to him afterwards.

“Uh...huh I would say it was unacceptable because he did not ... he did not apologize first, I think if he said like if they were expecting the book back that specific day and he did not bring it, I would first say, I am sorry, I did not bring the book, I forgot, I need more time, can I bring it to you on tomorrow or a different day, I think it was unacceptable in that sense because he did not apologize; and if I remember, he did not, then I can give him more time frame so that you can give it back, so that it was unacceptable” (English native speaker 2).

In this example, the Sudanese learner, as indicated by the English rater did not apologise first, whereas he had to do this from the beginning because he was in a situation of regret that necessitates doing this: the first thing that the Sudanese learner had to do was to express his regret or apology. Then he can also give his justification why he did not bring the book, such as that he forgot the book at home; and that he would promise to bring it next time.

“Uh...huh it is fine, I probably say that one not acceptable because he has not said he has forgot the book, you know, he just said ... I mean it is fine, I just think uh...huh if it has been conspicuous in terms of asking, you need to say hello sir, by the way, I know I have to bring it today, but I had not got it, I am sorry, but do not worry, I just forgot it. He did not explain he did not have the book and did not bring it today, that what I would say” (English 1).

According to the English native rater, the Sudanese learner should have begun by explaining to his teacher why he did not bring the book that day. Then, he must apologise and say that he has forgotten it and that he will bring it next time. However, he just said sorry, and that he would bring the book tomorrow without any explanation of why he

did not bring it that day. Therefore, the response he provided was not sufficient and he should have given more information.

#### **4.2.2 Difficulty 2: Irrelevant response to the given situation**

Also, one of the common communication problems reported by English raters was that Sudanese speakers of English commonly provide irrelevant or incongruous answers in relation to the situation given. Here are two extracts as examples of these irrelevant responses:

“Uh...huh not acceptable really because uh...huh you are asking in a question, you are asking how you would ask the teacher for a book and jumped straight away to say uh...huh he did not really explain how he will ask for the book, he just jumped straight away or he does not have the book h...huh so, it is not acceptable” (English 1).

The Sudanese learner in this example did not respond directly to the situation. His response was irrelevant. As indicated by the rater, the situation was about how he can ask to borrow the book from his teacher, but he veered away and talked about finding the book on the Internet or buying it from Amazon or Facebook. It seems that he did not understand the situation and therefore, he attempted to provide any answer to opt out of the critical situation.

“Uh...huh I think it was unacceptable, I think it is a bit uh...huh a bit a strange response, I think if he just said sorry, I spilled it and I will clean it up and do whatever, and carry on, then I think it was fine, I think it was a bit strange response to say no I would not drink anything, I think it was quite strange, I think it was unacceptable” (English 1).

Also, in the above extract, the Sudanese speaker's response was irrelevant to the situation, because the situation was that he spilled his glass of wine on the tablecloth where he was sitting with family members who invited him for dinner in a restaurant. It is fine that he apologised, but the rest of his response was quite strange and irrelevant to the situation to say he does not drink alcohol. In this situation, he should apologize to his friend's family first, and then he should clean it up or do something further to ameliorate the situation. Also, it seems that he did not understand the situation and tried to provide an answer anyway.

#### **4.2.3 Difficulty 3: Inappropriate explanation**

In addition, the English native speakers highlighted that one of the communication difficulties that Sudanese learners encounter was that they provide an inappropriate explanation when, for instance, declining an offer or refusing an invitation. They attempt to provide an explanation for their decision, but from the view of English native speakers it was not appropriate. Below are various extracts from the data highlighting this communication difficulty.

"Uh...huh I think unacceptable uh...huh because the way ... the way he said it was a very sort of ... it was a very quick response, he was asked by his boss "Can you do this work, oh, no, sorry, some of it was sounded like a lie, like an excuse, so, it was unacceptable for the way that he said it, what he said was fine, but given that the way he said it, made it unacceptable" (English 2).

According to the English rater, the Sudanese learner's response to this situation was fine because he apologised and declined the offer and



gave a reason that he has a programme with his family. But, based on the way he said it made it an unacceptable response because he said it very quickly and straightforward, even without thinking which made it sounds like a lie or excuse. Also, when talking to his boss he should give a more and acceptable excuse for not doing extra work.

“Did he say he would change the day of the exam, probably it is not ideal because the exam tend to be not to change, yeah, not acceptable because the exam tend to best set scenarios I would say. He said he could change the date of the exam which it tends to be he will not be able to do. So, I think not acceptable, yeah” (English 6).

According to the English native rater, the Sudanese learner’s response to the situation was not acceptable. The communication difficulty here is that he said he would change the day of the exam and go with his friend to the cinema. This response is not ideal in this situation, because he cannot change the day of the exam which was set by his school or college and not the student and, accordingly, he cannot change it. Therefore, his response was not appropriate in relation to the scenario.

“Uh...huh I would say not acceptable because it might not be his fault that he lost track, and he might have hearing issues or struggling something, so, it might not be his fault he lost track. So, instead of saying like saying you should keep track or concentrate, maybe ask why he is struggling something instead of just assuming that he is not concentrating” (English 6).

In this extract, the English native speaker rated the Sudanese response as unacceptable in relation to the situation given. Although he was daydreaming, maybe he has other problems such as hearing issues or experiencing some other problems that may distract him from

tracking the lessons. So, instead of advising him to concentrate inside the classroom, assuming that he was not concentrating, he should have found out what the real reasons are for why he lost track of the lesson. Accordingly, his response was not appropriate and the explanation for that is also inappropriate.

#### **4.2.4 Difficulty 4: Absence of explanation**

Additionally, one of the common communication difficulties highlighted by English native speakers among Sudanese learners in their response was the absence of providing an explanation in their responses. In this case, they attempt to decline an offer or an invitation, but they do not provide an explanation for doing so. Here are several extracts to show this communication difficulty.

“Uh...huh no really, not acceptable uh...huh I mean ... to be fair, if the boss asks him to do overtime you are not apply to do, but I think uh...uh he has to explain to boss , may be, because it is the boss asking that because he often needs it quite a lot, but you are not apply to do it, so you can say, yeah you need to explain I am really very sorry, I have, you know, uh...huh some other things or I am just really very tired, yeah, I think he can give a bit more detail like in that situation” (English 1).

Based on the above extract, the English rater indicated that the Sudanese learner’s response is not acceptable in relation to the situation. According to him, the Sudanese learner declined the offer to do extra work, but he did not provide any explanation for his boss for declining the offer. He should apologise to his boss and provide specific reasons for his refusal such as that he is tired or has any other issues.

“Uh...huh I probably say not acceptable for that one I think uh...huh there is first thing, I do not think uh...huh there is just match, but I think emergency sounds like uh...huh dramatic thing for that situation to say that uh...huh and just the way he described was not very clear I think, he could just said he did not explain that there is no buses, he could say there are no buses home, I am really sorry, I know it is a lot to ask, but would you mind drop me home on your way, something like that yeah” (English 1).

Also, in relation to the situation as the above extract indicated, the Sudanese learner’s response was unacceptable. The main communication difficulty here is that the Sudanese learner did not provide an explanation in his response. He just said he had an emergency and hence, he asked for a lift back home. According to the English rater, there is no match between the response and the situation. For example, he could say I am sorry, I know it is difficult to ask and that his car broke down and that there were no buses he could take back home, and, for this reason, he can ask them politely for a lift back home in their car. Therefore, there is absence of explanation to the demand.

“Uh...huh so, I said that was not acceptable because he did not explain to them the situation that his car has broken down, and then he could not get the bus, it is good he said he was thinking if they could not have a space, he can call a friend, but I say it is not acceptable because he did not explain the situation about why he needed a lift, do you know what I mean, so, yeah, that is my answer” (English 1).

According to the above extract, the English rater indicated that the response to the situation was unacceptable. The main communication difficulty here is that there was no explanation in the response. The Sudanese speaker of English just said in a straightforward manner that

he was going to ask the people for a lift, or he would call a friend or a taxi. It is good that he said he would ask them if they had a space, but he did not explain the reason for asking them for a lift. For example, he could say that his car had broken down and that there were no buses to get him back home and then he can politely ask for a lift. So, the response in relation to the scenario was unacceptable because of absence of an explanation for asking for a lift, which is the basic communication difficulty.

#### **4.2.5 Difficulty 5: Incomprehensive response**

Further common communication difficulty experienced by Sudanese learners during responding to the DCT situations was providing incomprehensible content. To English native speakers, some of the Sudanese learners' responses were incomprehensible. It is possible that the pronunciation is unfamiliar or that the structure of the content is not standard. Below, there are many extracts from the data highlighting this communication difficulty.

"Uh...huh I do not understand ... I would say it was unacceptable because I do not understand the response he has given, I think, yeah, it is just does not make sense, I do not understand his response. I do not understand what he said as he asked, "Can he see his friend, yeah I do not understand his response". Uh...huh I think he might understood the question, I think I am not sure, I would say it was unacceptable because I think he misunderstood the question, you said that he wants to invite his friend, so he would ... this man must invite his friend, he has to ask this person if he could invite his friend, but he has just asked his friend to see him at the pub at this time, so, I think he misunderstood the question, so, it is unacceptable" (English 2).

In the above extract, the English native speaker rated the Sudanese learner's response as unacceptable because he did not understand the

response in relation to the given situation. Therefore, the main communication difficulty is that the meaning of the response is incomprehensible. According to him, the Sudanese learner might not have understood the situation and hence, he produced an incomprehensible response. This might have contributed to the whole structure of the sentence not being understood.

“I did not ... he said something about the lesson, again, I did not quite catch what he said. Uh...huh I would say that would not be acceptable because he can just teach him the lesson, he needs to like ... it works, but it does not properly work if you know what I mean. I am like ... he can teach him the lesson, he needs to give him the notes or helps him with it, he cannot just ... like that teaches him the lesson” (English 6).

According to the above extract, the English native speaker rated the Sudanese learner’s response as unacceptable because he did not understand the response. So, the main communication difficulty here was that the content of the response was incomprehensible due, perhaps, to the disorganised structure of the response in relation to the given situation.

“Uh...huh it is difficult one, I would probably say it was not acceptable because I did not quite hear the first have of it, and I understood the second half. Yes, he says could you lend me the book for a day or a short time, I understood that it was slight difficult at the beginning that I was not quite sure about. So, I would probably ... if I were in a conversation, I would probably ask him to repeat it again just to make sure. Uh...huh probably not acceptable because I just could not understand that sort of second sentence. So, I would guess he was asking a question and I heard that second half just, but it would take a bit for me to work it out, and I would probably ask him to repeat” (English 7).

According to the above extract, the response is unacceptable because the English native speaker did not understand the content of the response. The problem may be attributed to two things: (1) the

unfamiliar pronunciation of the Sudanese learner to the beginning of his response and (2) the structure of the sentence not being the proper one in standard English. Therefore, the main communication problem is the incomprehensibility of the response.

“Uh...huh I would probably say not acceptable, I got a little bit lost uh...huh was he talking about an English proverb or something? Uh...huh I did not quite understand what he was trying to say really, I could not hear him very well, but there was a bit good about his values, he was advising him not to buy it, I understood that, but there was quite a lot, I did not really ... I did not really catch it. I did not understand what he really said, I think so, yeah, he used the English proverb stuff, yeah, I did not really know where he was going either uh...huh but that was just probably just me” (English 7).

According to the above extract, the English native speaker rated the Sudanese learner’s response as unacceptable because he could not understand what the response was. The main communication difficulty here is that the content of the response is incomprehensible. The justification given by the English native speaker was that he got lost in the content of the response and the structure of the response could not be clearly understood.

Similarly, there are many previous empirical studies about speech production reported that there are many linguistic variables influence speech intelligibility during mutual interactions. For example, in a study addressing phonological factors in interlanguage talk, a researcher reported that pronunciation issues form the biggest source of loss of comprehensibility or intelligibility (Pickering, 2006). Also, in another empirical study conducted to test the communication breakdowns in mutual conversations between native and non-native

speakers of English reported that phonology, accented speech, lexical stress, rounded vowels, and grammar were the main linguistic variables that formed barriers to intelligibility (Pickering, 2006; Munro & Derwing, 1995; See Section 2.5.1).

#### **4.2.6 Difficulty 6: Inconsistent content**

In addition, the English native speakers highlighted that sometimes the Sudanese learners provided contradictory content that was difficult to understand. For instance, they say something at the beginning of their response which is sometimes opposite to what they said at the end and vice versa. Here are some extracts from the data to highlight this difficulty.

“Uh...huh I probably say not acceptable because he specifically said on the question that he does not have enough money and this time he said he will ask him what the money for, if so, then it is fine, so, not acceptable” (English 1).

According to the English rater in the above extract, the Sudanese learner’s response was not acceptable because it contained contradictory information. At the beginning, he said that he did not have enough money to lend his friend, and at the end he said that he would ask his friend what he needed the money for. Hence, if his friend needed the money for something valuable, he would give him the money, otherwise he would apologise for him. Therefore, this response is inconsistent within the information it contains.

“Uh...huh probably ... it is difficult, maybe not acceptable because he did say that it was nice, and then ... but there is needed salt, and so, he is kind of sort of saying nice but, he is also complaining. So, the

problem is ... well, I do not know because he just has been a bit polite, just saying it was nice, but there was no salt, but uh...huh maybe I change, so, it is acceptable, yeah, because he told the manager what the problem was, yeah, that is why he tried to communicate” (English 7).

In the above extract, the English rater seems to be hesitant about the evaluation of the Sudanese learner’s response. At the beginning, he said it was difficult, but it might not be acceptable and at the end he said that it was acceptable because the Sudanese learner told the manager what the problem was. The communication difficulty he highlighted in this response was that it contained contradictory information: at the beginning, the Sudanese learner said that the food was nice, but after that he said it needs an important thing which is the salt.

“Uh...huh so, probably not acceptable because he kind of ... the question ... well, he was asking you to turn down overtime, and then he kind of accepted it, but then would say ... then if I cannot, then I cannot. So, he was giving two opposite answers, and then because he said yes, and then he said no as well, so, probably not acceptable, yeah, because the question was to say no to overtime, was not it, and then he said yes. So, the problem is he kind of gave two answers, and one of them was not the correct to the question has been asking him to say uh...huh yeah, but the question was asking him to say no, whereas he said yes, and then no, he gave two opposite questions” (English 7).

According to the above extract, the Sudanese learner’s response contains contradictory content and therefore, it is not acceptable in relation to the given situation. So, the main communication difficulty was that it was inconsistent content. The reasons he provided were that the Sudanese learner provided two opposite answers: first he said yes, and then said no when he was asked to do extra work.



#### 4.2.7 Difficulty 7: Irrelevant response to context

A further common communication difficulty highlighted by the English native speakers among Sudanese learners was that they sometimes provided responses irrelevant to the context in which they talked, due to either the social relationship with their interlocutors or other peripheral circumstances. Here are some extracts from the data highlighting this difficulty.

“Uh...huh I can ... I think it would be somewhat unacceptable uh...huh unacceptable, yeah, because ... again it just seems to be a bit abrupt, a bit rude in the sense I think if he ... did so a bit differently, then it will be more polite, and a sort of made it very bluntly, then he said this is a problem I will fix next time, but I think he must made it more politely in that sense that I felt a bit too salty, you know for your information, next time you may want to do it a bit differently, so, I think it is a bit too blunt” (English 2).

Based on the above extract, the English native speaker rated the Sudanese learner's response as unacceptable. The main communication difficulty was that the response is irrelevant to the context of the situation. The Sudanese learner said that he would speak directly to the manager of the restaurant and tell him that there was too much salt and that he would ask him to solve this problem. According to the English native speaker, the way the response was given in relation to the situation did not consider the context and it came across as rude because it was an impolite way of dealing with the manager and it should not have been done in that way. For example, he could ask the waiter politely at the beginning and, if he

did not attend to the problem, then he could ask him politely to speak to the manager.

“Uh...huh again, I would say unacceptable, I think if they said they are not good friends, they are not very close, so I would shop with someone who I was not very close with; and then may turn around and say you do not need it, save your money, I would be quite like ... quite shocked to think how ... you do not really know me, how can you say that, so to me I would say it is unacceptable, again they are not very close, I think, yeah” (English 2).

According to the above extract, the Sudanese learner’s response was unacceptable in relation to the given situation. The communication problem here was that the content of the Sudanese response was irrelevant or appropriate to the context. The reason was that the nature of the social relationship between them did not qualify the Sudanese learner to give some advice to that friend because he was not a close friend to him. So, based on their relationship, he was not entitled to say to him, for example, “Do not buy this stuff and you must save your money for something else”.

“Uh...huh I would say it was unacceptable, again I think he made it more friendly by calling him “brother”, he made it more ... more ... what is the word, less harsh in a sense that he do not want to spend more money; and then he gave him an alternative, but again I think because he does not have that close relationship, I think he came across quite rude, so, I say it was unacceptable” (English 2).

According to the extract, the English native speaker rated the Sudanese learner’s response as unacceptable. According to him, the main communication difficulty was that the Sudanese learner’s response was inappropriate or irrelevant in relation to the given situation and to the social relationship between the two interlocutors.

The main justification was that that person was not a close friend to him and, accordingly, he should not have called him “brother”. Therefore, his response was a little rude and he should not have intruded to advise him or give him an alternative.

“Uh...huh again, I would say it was unacceptable, again because they were not so close, I think he was ... he was ... he came across a bit of ... a bit of judgemental in that he ... again because they were not so close, I think if someone said that to me, and I was not very close to them, I think that was sort of ... it can be offended, I guess for someone to tell me what to do with my own money, it would be a bit rude, so it is was unacceptable” (English 2).

According to the English native speaker, that Sudanese learner’s response was unacceptable because it was irrelevant to the context. Also, the Sudanese learner was not entitled to judge the needs of that person and identify whether he needed those items nor because he was not a close friend of him. Therefore, his response came across as an impolite one, because it was a kind of interference into the others’ personal affairs.

“Uh...huh I think that I would say that was unacceptable. Again, I think ... I think it is quite rude to sort of oppose ... to sort of ... to ask ... if someone wants to borrow money, to ask them why they want to spend that money, I think ... yeah, if it came from a family member, if that are my parents to ask for some money, then they can ask me why, it will be fine, but I think that if asking a friend, and then they did not want to give me based on how they saw me spent that money or something like that, I think that it came across quite rude, I think that was unacceptable” (English 2).

Based on the extract above, the English native speaker rated the Sudanese response as unacceptable because it was irrelevant to context. The main communication difficulty was because the response did not consider the social relationship between the two interlocutors.

According to the English native speaker, if a friend asked you to lend him some money, it would be unreasonable to ask you to lend him some money. But if it comes from a family member or parents, it can be contextually acceptable. However, it is unacceptable from a friend based on his reasons for asking the money to see whether they are reasonable or not. Therefore, it will be unacceptable, quite rude, and incongruent with context.

“ Uh...huh I think it was unacceptable, again, I think he said that he was giving him advice which is fine, but I think he was sort of ... again, he was to tell him how he should use his money rather than just saying giving him advice politely, I think it was too sort of too abrupt to direct someone who you are not very close with trying to tell him what he had to do with money, yeah, I think it was too abrupt” (English 2).

According to the above extract, the Sudanese learner’s response would have been acceptable if it was just to give advice to his friend. But to tell him how to use that money rather than just giving some advice, this is considered as an unacceptable response in this specific context. The reason was that his social relationship with his friend does not qualify him to interfere in the way he did. Therefore, the main communication difficulty here is that the response was irrelevant to context.

“Again, I would not say that particularly work because he is trying to tell the manager to taste the food, he would need to say what wrong with it, complain to suppose just taste this, I would say. Yeah, unacceptable, I would say because he said he would tell the manager to taste the food as supposed to say what was wrong with it what would normally do. So, he supposed to say what wrong with the food” (English 6).

According to the extract above, the English native speaker rated the Sudanese learner's response as unacceptable in relation to the context. The main communication difficulties here were that the response was irrelevant to the context, and it cannot work as a response to the given scenario. In his response, the Sudanese learner said that to solve the problem of having too much salt in the food, he would take the food to the manager and ask him to taste the food. In relation to the social norms of life in the UK, it was not reasonable to do this, but he was supposed to just say what was wrong with the food and make a complaint in that situation.

Similarly, from previous empirical studies, research states that speech intelligibility is not speaker or listener-centred, but it is interactional process between both, and being intelligible means being understood by an interlocutor at a given time in each situation. Hence, this links speech comprehensibility to context of use that includes the participants, social context, and the environment (Pickering, 2006; See Section 2.5.1). Therefore, to produce intelligible speech, the speaker should regard the appropriate context besides other linguistic variables.

#### **4.2.8 Difficulty 8: Inappropriate lexical use**

In addition, the Sudanese learners sometimes have trouble with the inappropriate use of vocabulary in context. Below are some examples

highlighting these communication difficulties as indicated by English native speakers.

“I would say no, not acceptable because he did ... it works as a response because he said he has to revise, he cannot come, but revise his study, it does not really, you do not revise for a study, but for an exam, revise a study, it did not really work like that. He said study instead of exam whereas to be an exam or test, but you revise or study for it, you do not revise for study” (English 6).

In the above extract, the English native speaker rated the Sudanese learner’s response as an unacceptable response. According to him, the main communication difficulty here was that it was an inappropriate use of vocabulary for the word ‘study’ in relation to meaning and context. It is true that it may work as a response to a situation, but in terms of vocabulary used within an appropriate context it does not work. He apologised for his friend because he wanted to revise for his study, whereas people usually revise for an exam, not for studying. Therefore, there is a problem of inappropriate vocabulary use here.

“Again, it is a clear response you can tell what he was saying, but can you borrow me that book, he is borrowing it? So, you can understand what he was saying, but it is not quite acceptable because he said can you borrow me that book? Whereas he borrows the book, he borrowed the book, so, it is not appropriate here, he can say lend me the book instead of borrow it” (English 6).

According to the extract above, the Sudanese learner’s response was unacceptable. Also, the main communication difficulty here is the inappropriate use of vocabulary within the sentence structure, context and meaning. His response was clear, and it can work as a response to a situation, but within the general linguistic meaning the vocabulary used was inappropriate. The Sudanese learner said, “Can

you borrow me that book?” whereas he should say “Can you lend me the book?” For this reason, his response is unacceptable.

“Uh...huh probably not acceptable because he said that uh...huh he was ... that he was weak which it did not make too much sense, I do not know really, I do not think I would say that ... it does not make sense to say that I am weak, maybe I am tired or you know something like that would make more, more sense, yeah, so, yeah, probably unacceptable. The problem, I guess, it is just that word of weak, I think weak maybe is a sort of ill or something, yeah, like that” (English 7).

According to the extract above, there is also a problem with inappropriate use of vocabulary. The communication difficulty was that the Sudanese learner in his response to the situation was polite that he apparently apologised to decline the offer and provided his justification for that. But within the rest of his speech, his main communication problem was that he failed to use the appropriate vocabulary within the context. So, instead of saying that he was tired or exhausted and that he could not do the extra work, he said he was weak which was inappropriate in this situation.

“Uh...huh maybe not acceptable, just because he was talking about the salt that harming him, and that would not be like a normal response to say too much salt, I do not think you would say it will harm you, really because that implies like hate or injury or, but the rest is OK, but he just lost the last, maybe I say not acceptable” (English 7).

According to the English native speaker, the communication difficulty in the Sudanese learner’s response was the inappropriate use of vocabulary. He said there was too much salt and that was going to harm him. It is not a normal response to say the salt will harm someone which looks like injury or something dangerous.

“Uh...huh I probably say it is not acceptable, his answer is quite unclear there uh...huh he said his nephew where he talked of his neighbour, so uh...huh then he said can you pick me up? You are asking him if he could like calling his nephew to pick him up, but I supposed uh...huh because he is not picking him up, he is just there wants someone to bring him home, yeah, it is not acceptable for that one” (English 1).

According to the above extract, the Sudanese learner’s response was unacceptable. The main communication difficulty was that the Sudanese learner used the word nephew instead of neighbour because the scenario was about how to ask your neighbours to drive you back home. Therefore, this inappropriate use of vocabulary changed the whole response to be incomprehensible for the English native speaker.

Similarly, in a previous empirical study, a researcher reported that lexical variation is likely to impede comprehension in the form of variety specific idioms or in the use of localised vocabulary or vocabulary that is unknown to one another of the interlocutors in the field of English as a lingua franca interaction (Pickering, 2006). Also, in a previous empirical study of English-accented German, a researcher found that vocabulary errors within a given context influenced listening comprehension most significantly, followed by grammar and then by pronunciation (Munro & Derwing, 1995; See Section 2.5.1).

#### **4.2.9 Difficulty 9: Unfamiliar pronunciation**

One of the communication difficulties highlighted by the English native speakers among the Sudanese learners that influences their



comprehension of their responses was the unfamiliar pronunciation. Accordingly, English native speakers sometimes did not know how to identify what they meant. Here are some extracts from the data explaining this difficulty.

“Uh...huh not acceptable, I think he could not really understand it. I think he might need to talk a bit slower. The problem is that I could not hear the words he said. Let us try to listen again. Uh...huh I still say not acceptable because he did not uh...huh talk about the book specifically, he just said his stuff uh...huh so, it maybe a little bit vague, and maybe he needs to speak a little bit slower” (English 7).

In the above extract, the English native speaker rated the Sudanese learner’s response as unacceptable because he could not understand the meaning of the response. The communication difficulty that he highlighted here was that the Sudanese learner’s pronunciation was not clear to him, so that he could understand his response. Therefore, he suggested that the Sudanese learner needed to speak a bit slower than the way he spoke in this response. Also, he said that the Sudanese learner did not talk about the book, but maybe about something else. But the main difficulty was that he could not identify what was being said.

In line with this, a researcher analyses conversational and information gap task data collected from L2 mixed-language dyads, and after an examination of all instances of communication breakdowns, he discovered that pronunciation issues were the basic reason for the loss of speech comprehensibility. Similarly, in another previous empirical study conducted among undergraduate Singaporean students listening to a non-standard British English variety, a

researcher identified pronunciation problems in several segmental issues such as ‘th fronting’, glottalisation of medial ‘h’ and fronting of the high, back and rounded vowel as main barriers to speech comprehensibility (Pickering, 2006; See Section 2.5.1).

### **4.3 Communication strategies**

To answer the third research question:

RQ3: What communication strategies do Sudanese learners use when they encounter communication difficulties during their realisation of speech acts in English?

To realise the speech acts, the Sudanese participants used a variety of communication strategies when encountering communication difficulties during their realisation of speech acts in English that are presented in the table below. It is important to note that the communication strategies employed by Sudanese learners were coded according to the proposed typology of communication strategies presented in a previous section within the literature review of the first study (See Section 2.8.7). Firstly, the communication strategies were presented in the table below, followed by extracts from the data and a discussion.

**Table 17. Communication strategies used by Sudanese participants when realising DCT situations.**

No. of strategies	Target strategies
1	- Comprehension check
2	- Self-correction
3	- Clarification request
4	- Asking for confirmation
5	- Asking for repetition
6	- Lexicalised fillers
7	- Non-lexicalised fillers
8	- Silent pausing
9	- Hesitation devices

### 4.3.1 Comprehension check

“Sorry, sorry, my, my ... deeming or reeling? Dream? OK. I did not catch the word dreaming. What do you mean by this word? Dreiling? I did not catch that word. No, I did not catch that ... I did not know what that mean. Can you explain it? What you mean by that? OK, so, my friend dreaming ... the meaning of what you said is my friend is dreaming or outside the class and then I joined the class, when I finished, you asked ... he asked me to review the lesson, is that right? Yeah, I said clear I can do it, I can, I can review it to you by the same way the teacher has said it uh...huh I try to do my best to teach you” (Sudanese 10).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner employed a strategy of comprehension check to realise his speech act in response to the given situation. For example, he repeated the word ‘dreaming’ many times to check that it was the correct word. Also, he indicated that he did not catch the word, and accordingly, he asked for the meaning of it to continue his response to the situation.

“A blue ... what? OK, I would say to him, oh, that is kind of you uh...huh so much and thank you very much; uh...huh this is what I wanted” (Sudanese 8).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner adopted the comprehension check strategy to realise his speech acts situation. For example, he repeated the first word that he heard, and then asked with 'what ...' to check the correct word so that he could continue his response.

#### **4.3.2 Self-correction**

"Uh...huh I am very sorry, I cannot ... I could ... I could not go to uh...huh go to that cinema because I had my exam due, and I have to make revision, I am very sorry, and also, I have many things to do so as to go ..." (Sudanese 12).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner adopted self-correction strategy to respond to the DCT situation. At the beginning, he used false start to begin his response to give himself time to process the information. He repeated many words until he employed the right word to begin his response to the situation.

"I am ready ... really, I am ... I have uh...huh I am not ready to uh...huh to work because uh...huh I did not prepare myself for today any overtime, and just maybe I have some friends I want to see them" (Sudanese 18).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner adopted a strategy of self-positive correction to realise his speech act. He starts correcting himself the time he understood that he made a mistake in vocabulary use. So, he started with ready, then corrected to say 'really'.

#### **4.3.3 Clarification request**

"I found it what, sorry. OK, uh...huh thank you, apologies, you say thank you to anyone who brought something that is kind of them ..." (Sudanese 7).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner adopted a strategy of asking for clarification to realise his speech act. It seemed that he did not catch some words when listening to the DCT situation. Therefore, he asked for a clarification so that he could respond to the situation.

#### **4.3.4 Asking for confirmation**

“Are you asking question, or you need me to tell you what I am going to do?” (Sudanese 9).

In this extract, the Sudanese learner asked for confirmation to respond to the DCT situation. He wanted to know whether the situation was a question or statement so that he could start his response. Also, he repeated a sentence he heard and asked for confirmation of it.

“Could you say the question again, please! First, I will ... get permission from my employer to let me get my friend” (Sudanese 9).

Similarly, in this extract, the Sudanese learner repeated part of the situation that he heard and asked for confirmation of it.

#### **4.3.5 Asking for repetition**

“I do not understand exactly, can you repeat this?” “I did not understand that, can you repeat that again?” (Sudanese 1).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner reported that he did not understand the DCT situation. Accordingly, he adopted the strategy of asking for repetition so that he could continue realising the DCT speech situation.

“Uh...huh again say that repeat ... say that again, please. Uh...huh I say OK uh...huh when I am going to uh...huh my, my, my bedroom, when I need reading and writing, coming to whether uh...huh about one hour or two hours” (Sudanese 6).

Also, in the above extracts the Sudanese learner employed more than one strategy to realise the speech situation. At the beginning, he asked for a repetition so that he could be able to respond to the situation. Then, he continued his response to the situation.

“Sorry, say that again, how do you ...? What is the other part of the question? I would, I would send the lecturer an email, and ask him gently can I have a copy, a copy of this book” (Sudanese 15).

In the above extracts, the Sudanese learners might have not caught the meaning of the DCT situation, or they have not heard it clearly. Therefore, they clearly asked their interlocutor to repeat the speech so that they could catch it and push forward the conversation.

#### **4.3.6 Lexicalised fillers**

“Oh, I am sorry, I will clean it by myself, can you give me some tissue to train ... to clean this uh...huh” (Sudanese 1).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner employed a strategy of lexicalised filler to gain time to think of the information or words to say. At the beginning, he said ‘Oh’ as a lexicalised filler to support realisation of DCT situation throughout.

“Sorry, can you say that again. Uh...huh this I do not understand, but uh...huh I say uh...huh this, I take my train uh...huh no problem for nice uh...huh food or nice uh...huh crops or something like that but maybe I call him I have something problem, something like that” (Sudanese 6).

In the above extract, there are many lexicalised fillers that the Sudanese learner used to overcome a communication difficulty and

enhance his performance to realise the DCT speech act. For example, he used lexicalised fillers such as ‘no problem’, something like that, maybe, etc.

“Uh...huh I say Oh, thank you uh...huh for bring for me blue jacket or close and uh...huh I happy for that and ... give you later when your ... any day happy for you, thank you” (Sudanese 6).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner adopted a strategy of lexicalised fillers to gain time to maintain his response to DCT situation. For instance, he used lexicalised fillers such as ‘oh’ and ‘I say’ to gain time to process the information and continue his response to DCT situation.

#### **4.3.7 Non-lexicalised fillers**

“Uh...huh I am very sorry uh...huh I am very sorry my friend uh...huh I am very destitute;” (Sudanese 10).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learners employed a strategy of non-lexicalised filler ‘uh...huh’ three times to gain time to recall the information or words needed to push forward his response to DCT situation.

“Uh...huh ask if you can uh...huh if, if, if uh...huh if not can have this book uh...huh can ... I ask when I can find, if they tell me by the Internet ... say the eBay or Amazon uh...huh anybody sell using book in the Facebook and website using book” (Sudanese 5).

In the above extract, the Sudanese learner employed a strategy of non-lexicalised filler ‘uh...huh’ continuously to respond to the DCT situation. He employed this a strategy to gain time to process the information and push forward his response to DCT situation.

### **4.3.8 Silent pausing**

“Uh...huh ... Uh...huh I can, I can give him, you know, direct, a direct advice about that because he is not a close friend, but I can suggest him to ... for example, to watch uh...huh some program uh...huh you know, in the uh...huh” (Sudanese 13).

In the above extract, to realise the DCT speech act, the Sudanese learner employed more than a strategy to do that. At the beginning, he employed the strategy of the silent pausing more than once to gain time to allow his mind to process the information he received.

### **4.3.9 Hesitation devices**

“Uh...huh actually, I would say uh...huh I am sorry, I have uh...huh I have to revise uh...huh for my exam” (Sudanese 1).

“Uh...huh teacher, uh...huh can I have a book for one day because I have to uh...huh get some information from it, please?” (Sudanese 1).

“Uh...huh I think time really ... I cannot do this uh...huh overtime, so, I will excuse” (Sudanese 1).

In the above extracts, the Sudanese learners hesitated constantly because they were likely faced with a communicative difficulty that may prevent their realisation of speech acts while responding to a DCT situation. By doing so, they could overcome the communication difficulty or give themselves time to think so that they could push forward the speech performance.

## **5 Discussion**

In relation to the study research questions, the study highlighted three main findings: (1) the study findings show that the overall



pragmatic competence of Sudanese learners when responding to DCT scenarios is of a high level in the different functions. Specifically, the Sudanese learners' responses to DCT situations that were rated as acceptable responses by English native speakers were 380 versus 100 unacceptable responses (the total ratings for the situations across 20 Sudanese participants are 400 ratings), that is 79.17% (See Figure 1).

The above findings indicate that the Sudanese learners can apply their linguistic knowledge appropriately in different situations in interaction with English native speakers in informal contexts in the UK. So, their pragmatic competence is more than satisfactory to immerse themselves in the British society and contribute to different activities in it.

In line with this study's research findings, discourse completion task (DCT) is now probably the most widely used instrument to collect data in cross-cultural pragmatics (an inquiry method comparing different speech acts across languages and cultures) and in interlanguage pragmatics that examines learners' pragmatic competence and proficiency development (Ogiermann, 2018). For example, there are many empirical studies that discussed various features of DCT design and used them to examine the pragmatic competence of different learners and elicited a large amount of rich speech act data (Ogiermann,

2018; Li et al., 2015; Isyaku, 2016; Taguchi, 2018; Golato, 2003; Abarghoui, 2012; Byon, 2009; Nugroho & Rikha, 2020; Allami & Naeimi, 2011).

The findings of those studies indicated different levels of pragmatic competence to different participants: high proficient, low proficient, etc. Also, some of these studies have examined the learners' pragmatic competence by employing several functions of DCT situations, whereas some of them have focussed on a single function or more functions of DCT speech acts. For instance, Isyaku (2016) employed DCT method to investigate how Nigerian, Chinese and Iraqi learners adopted the strategy of thanking in response to an offer, whereas Golato (2003) focussed on compliment responses and Taguchi (2020) focused on request to test the Indonesian EFL learners' pragmatic competence. It is important to note that one of the main differences between those studies and this study is that they are employed in formal context with learners enrolled in classrooms, whereas this study is targeting the informal interaction within informal context in the free social space.

(2) The study findings indicate that when the Sudanese learners' responses were exposed to English native speakers for rating, they highlighted several communication difficulties encountered by Sudanese learners when employing DCT speech acts:

insufficient explanation, irrelevant response to the given situation, inappropriate explanation, absence of explanation, incomprehensible response, inconsistent content, irrelevant response to context, inappropriate lexical use and unfamiliar pronunciation.

This finding regarding the communication difficulties that were highlighted by English native speakers is supported by evidence from the research literature. It is confirmed that the cross-cultural pragmatics and discourse, by its nature, includes great potential factors for miscommunication and/or misperceptions because the interlocutors belong to different speech communities, and they possess different levels of interactional competence (Rozina, 2011). Hence, this is most likely happening when two or more interlocutors belong to at least two different cultures. The reason is that, since the structure of concepts varies across cultures, the interlocutors are expected to possess the ability to display the linguistic behaviour that is adequate and appropriate to the communicative event (Rozina, 2011). This is most likely applicable in the case of the informal interaction between Sudanese learners and English native speakers. Moreover, the misunderstanding in such situations can be manifested in various ways: (1) overt, which is immediately recognized and can immediately be repaired, (2) covert, which

occurs when interlocutors recognize it gradually and, in turn, can repair it gradually, or continue it until it comes to obstruct the conversation and (3) latent which occurs without reason and sometimes remains unresolved although the interlocutors are aware of it (Rozina, 2011). Therefore, miscommunication can happen even among people from the same social and cultural background, but it becomes more difficult when interlocutors come from different backgrounds. Also, there are many previous empirical studies that confirm the same phenomenon (Ogierman, 2018; Isyaku, 2016; Abourghoui, 2012).

Specifically, the study findings indicated that sometimes some Sudanese participants encountered a communication difficulty of using language appropriately within the social context. Therefore, some of their responses were highlighted by English native speakers as irrelevant to context. According to research, this inappropriacy of using language in context is mostly determined by the social variables such as the social distance, social power, the degree of imposition, sex and age (Ogierman, 2018). Social distance and power define the relationship between two interlocutors. The social distance is the symmetrical variable that indicates the degree of familiarity and frequency of interaction between two interlocutors: this is whether interlocutors are strangers, acquaintances or friends

(Ogierman, 2018). For example, when Sudanese learners were told to complain to the problem of food in a restaurant, their responses that were employed by some of them by talking directly to the manager, were considered as irrelevant to context because of the social distance between the manager of the restaurant and the customers. The social power is defined as a symmetrical variable that indicates the degree to which a speaker can impose his or her will on their interlocutor (Ogierman, 2018). For example, when declining an offer for the British boss by some employees, the responses provided to the situation by some Sudanese participants were considered as irrelevant to context by English native speakers because of the social power which indicates inequality of status between the boss and the employees.

As discussed above, this finding showed that Sudanese learners with different levels of English proficiency potentially face various communication difficulties in interaction in informal contexts with English native speakers. This necessitates that both Sudanese learners and ESOL tutors must consider the linguistic factors that lead to creating these difficulties to push further the pragmatic competence for these learners.

In addition, the study's findings showed that the degree of pragmatic competence of Sudanese learners when responding to

various functions of DCT situations is diverse. Hence, the Sudanese learners can be classified as high proficiency learners, learners of medium proficiency and low proficiency learners. According to the ratings of the English native speakers to the Sudanese learners' responses, the high proficient learners were those who were given a high number of acceptable responses out of 24 responses: (of which there are 12 out of 20 Sudanese participants) 20 (83.33%), 20 (83.33%), 20 (83.33%), 21 (87.5%), 22 (91.66%), 22 (91.66%), 22 (91.66%), 23 (95.83%), 23 (95.83%), 23 (95.83%), 23 (95.83%), 23 (95.83%) out of 24 as the total ratings to the 12 DCT situations. The medium proficiency learners were 2 participants out of 20, and the number of the acceptable responses that were given were 18 (75%) and 19 (79.16%). The low proficient learners were 6 out of 20, and the number of acceptable responses that they gave were 11 (45.83%), 12 (50%), 13 (54.16%), 14 (58.33%), 15 (62.5%), and 16 (66.66%; See Figure 3).

The above findings indicate that the Sudanese learners' pragmatic competence differs from each single participant to another. Based on the convenience and snowballing strategies that were adopted in this study, the participants ranged between the highly proficient to low proficient learners, depending on the

level of linguistic knowledge, the degree of practice and exposure to interaction with English native speakers in the UK.

Also, the study findings show that the best performance of Sudanese learners that obtained a high number of acceptable responses from the English native speakers was their responses to DCT situation functions of apology 1 and compliment (38 out of 40 as the total response (7.91%; See Figure 1). This indicates that the Sudanese learners can better perform their pragmatic competence in specific DCT situations than others, depending on the nature of the function of the DCT situation.

Finally, this study findings show that the most common communication difficulties highlighted by the English native speakers among the Sudanese learners when responding to DCT situations were insufficient explanation which was highlighted 29 times in the data, irrelevant response to situation which was highlighted 22 times in the data, incomprehensible response which was highlighted 16 times in the data, and irrelevant response to context which was highlighted 15 times in the data( See Figure 4). This indicates that the Sudanese learners' fluency is limited, and they cannot provide ample information in most functions of DCT situations. This maybe attributable to their insufficient vocabulary and limited linguistic knowledge.

(3) One of the main findings that the study indicated was that when Sudanese learners encounter a communication difficulty during DCT speech acts, they adopt a variety of communication strategies to continue their performance to complete the DCT scenarios: comprehension check, self-correction, clarification request, asking for confirmation, asking for repetition, appeal for assistance, lexicalised fillers, non-lexicalised fillers, conversation gambits and hesitation devices.

In research, there are many previous empirical studies indicated that there are many L2 learners use variety of communication strategies, either to overcome communication difficulties or to enhance their performance during conversations (Sato, 2008; Lam, 2010; Kirkpatrick, 2010; Nakatani, 2010; Abdullah & Enim, 2011; Matsumoto, 2011; Zhao & Intaraprasert, 2013; Wang et al., 2014; Saeidi & Farshchi, 2015).

Also, in line with that in research, there are several studies that support this finding of using communication strategies that are used to overcome a communication difficulty during the interaction or to push forward the conversations between different interlocutors (See Section 2.6.8) (Sato, 2008; Cook, 2012; Barkaoui et al., 2013). Moreover, it is important to note that the most frequent communication strategies employed by Sudanese participants during realisation of DCT situations were



lexicalised fillers, non-lexicalised fillers, hesitation devices and asking for repetition.

The above finding indicates that Sudanese learners can practically employ communication strategies as either to overcome a communication difficulty or to enhance their pragmatic competence to push forward their informal conversations with English native speakers. This may necessitate that the Sudanese learners should be made aware of the communication strategies to raise their strategic competence through education and practice.

Moreover, there are different aspects in the data: some of the findings support the existing ideas of intercultural communication, whereas there are other findings support the new ideas of speech intelligibility.

For example, some of the communication difficulties reported by English native speakers and Sudanese learners such as inappropriate vocabulary use (See Section 5.7.6), cross-cultural variations (See Section 5.7.7), inappropriate explanation (See Section 4.2.1), irrelevant response to context (See Section 4.2.7) and inappropriate lexical use (See Section 4.2.8) support the existing ideas of intercultural communication. The intercultural communication approach focuses on the communicative

practices of distinct different cultural groups during their interaction with each other (Baker, 2009). It assumes that there are cultural groupings, and individuals in different cultural groupings are synonymous and have different characterisations of culture with clear boundaries between different named cultures and languages (Baker, 2009; See Section 2.3.5). Therefore, to carry out a successful communication to achieve a communicative goal, the individuals of those cultural groupings should be aware of each other's cultural perceptions and evaluations of things to maintain successful communications (See Section 2.3.1). Accordingly, in this study the Sudanese participants sometimes failed to understand the different perceptions and values of English native speakers in the UK and hence, encountered communication difficulties during mutual conversations with them.

On the other hand, there are some features in the data reflect the new ideas of speech intelligibility. For example, the Sudanese participants reported and manifested some of the communication difficulties that are attributable to linguistic variables that generate lack of speech intelligibility and comprehensibility (Pickering, 2006; See Section 2.51.) such as phonological variation of accent (See Section 5.2), regional

dialects variations (See Section 5.3), phrasal vocabulary (See Section 5.7), unfamiliar pronunciation (See Section 4.2.9), etc.

Taking together the findings of both studies, it is important to comment on whether the findings of these studies are exclusively about language use or about language as a proxy or mask for other types of social judgements. To address this, we need to look at the findings about communication difficulties in both studies, previous relevant empirical studies, and research literature.

By looking at these sources, it is clear to indicate that most of the findings about communication difficulties reported and encountered by the Sudanese cohort can be attributed to language use, whereas there are few of them can be attributed to types of social judgements and cultural differences. For example, some of the communication difficulties reported by Sudanese participants in the first study as findings indicated can be attributed to language use such as limited vocabulary size, variation of accents, technical vocabulary, etc. (See Table 10 in the first study). Likewise, English native speakers reported actual language use communication difficulties such as phrasal vocabulary, limited vocabulary size, suprasegmental features, etc. (See Table 11 in the first study). However, in the first study English native speakers reported communication difficulties

encountered during mutual conversations that they may not be attributed to linguistic variables, but there the language may represent a proxy to other types of social judgements such as inappropriate vocabulary use (the influence of context) and cross-cultural variations (the influence of cultural backgrounds; See Table 11 in the first study).

Also, in the second study where Sudanese learners' pragmatic competence was examined during their realisation of speech acts, English native speakers highlighted some of the communication difficulties manifested by Sudanese learners that may either be attributed to language use such as unfamiliar pronunciation (See Section 4.2.9) and incomprehensive response (See Section 4.2.5) or may be attributed to language use as a proxy to other types of social judgments such as irrelevant response to context (See Section 4.2.7), inappropriate lexical use (See Section 4.2.8), inconsistent content (See Section 4.2.6), inappropriate explanation (See Section 4.2.3), etc.

For example, there were two responses of Sudanese learners evaluated as unacceptable responses by English native speakers in the second study. In both responses, the Sudanese participants did not consider the nature of their social relationships with their interlocutors. In the first situation, the Sudanese learner said that he would talk to the manager of the restaurant and complain

about finding too much salt in his food and would ask him to solve this problem, whereas he should first report this to a waiter in the restaurant.

Likewise, in the same situation, another Sudanese participant said that he would take the food directly to the manager and ask him to taste it, and hence, he would place his complaint and ask the manager to change the food (See Section 4.2.7). Also, in another response, the Sudanese learner said that he would talk to a person who was not a close friend to him to advise him not to buy an expensive item and alternatively, he would advise him that he must keep his money for something else. According to the English native speaker, this response was socially not acceptable because the Sudanese learner should not interfere into others' personal affairs since they were not close friends of him (See Section 4.2.7). Hence, these are not linguistic communication difficulties, but communication difficulties resulted from cultural differences and social judgements in which language represents a proxy for these social judgements.

Moreover, in some previous empirical studies (Zulkurnain & Kaur, 2014; Sato, 2008; Gan, 2012; Gan, 2013; Yanagi & Baker, 2016; Park et al., 2017; Yang, 2016) and research literature (See Section 2.2; Section 2.4; Section 2.5.1; Section 2.7; Section 2.8.3) it is clearly indicated that the communication difficulties are

either attributed to actual language use or to language as a proxy for cultural differences and social judgements (See Section 1.2).

Regarding generalisability of the data, the findings of this study might translate to immigrants to the UK from other countries of non-western cultures that are similar to the situation of the Sudanese cohort in terms of language, culture and trajectory upon their settlement in the UK (See Section 2.13).

Specifically, these findings can be transferred to those populations who share the same characteristics with Sudanese cohort: (1) they speak English as a foreign language in non-institutionalised settings in their home countries besides their mother tongues: these are the people from Arab countries (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, etc.), some African countries (Egypt, Kenya, Ethiopia, etc.) and may be some Asian countries (Iran, Turkey, Malaysia, etc.). (2) Additionally, the participants from Arab countries speak Arabic as their mother tongue and use it in their daily conversations as the official language. (3) The participants from these populations migrate to the UK for many reasons. Descriptively, they may share the same personal characteristics of the Sudanese cohort under study: they are mostly from different backgrounds, different ages, different level of English language proficiency and some of them may have received formal English language tutoring in classrooms,

whereas some of them may have not received any formal English language tutoring in classrooms. Upon their arrival and settlement in the UK, they are mostly sent to ESOL classes to develop their communicative competence based on the government policy towards migrants mentioned before. Based on these similarities with Sudanese cohort, the findings of this study might be transferred to those participants.

## **6 Overall conclusion**

This is an overall conclusion for the whole thesis that includes the two studies: (1) the first study that investigated the communication difficulties and strategies among the Sudanese learners and their peer English native speakers in the UK; and (2) the second study that investigated the Sudanese learners' pragmatic competence during their realisation of DCTs situations. I explained what research I did in both studies and how they were designed to build on one another. In addition, I summarised the key findings across both studies, limitations and future research, different aspects of implications and final remarks.

### **6.1 Summary of the study**

This thesis presented findings of a case study exploring whether the Sudanese learners as EFL speakers and prospective British citizens encounter communication difficulties during informal conversations

with English native speakers in the UK. Also, the study investigated the communication strategies employed by both Sudanese learners and their peer English native speakers to overcome their mutual communication difficulties and maintain successful conversations.

After the completion of exploring communication difficulties and strategies in the first study, new themes emerged from within the analysis of the data such as the Sudanese learners' ability to use language appropriately within context. Likewise, difficulties of communication relevant to interaction problems encountered by interlocutors from different backgrounds such as the cross-cultural variations difficulties were pointed out by English native participants. Both themes have inspired and stimulated the researcher to go forward and explore these difficulties in depth in a second study. It is hoped that the findings of both studies may lead to fill in the gap on the informal communication difficulties, strategies and pragmatic competence between a migrant group and English native speakers in research literature.

Initially, the study adopted a full interpretive approach to explore this social phenomenon. The first study employed semi-structured interviews to investigate communication problems and strategies among the Sudanese participants. But since issues of data credibility are always raised in research, the study shared views on communication problems among both Sudanese learners and English



native speakers (Robson, 2016; Hammersley, 2008). Therefore, twenty Sudanese participants and twenty English native speakers were interviewed during June and July 2020.

Unlike many previous studies using surveys that supposed or indicated what difficulties might be, this study examined Sudanese learners' experiences of communication difficulties from the views of the interlocutors' reports on their daily interactions. To address the credibility of the data, the study employed an approach triangulating personal reports of both Sudanese learners and their peer English native speakers on the same social phenomenon. To the best of my knowledge, triangulation of methods in research is very rare in the field of formal and informal conversations studies. The utilisation of these interviews on both participants on the same social phenomenon has produced rich data which was analysed through thematic analysis (TA).

In the second study, the purpose of conducting it is to examine the Sudanese learners' pragmatic competence when realising DCTs situations with variety of functions in informal context in the free social space. To do so, I exposed 20 Sudanese learners to 12 DCT situations to respond to them (See Table 14). Upon finalising that, I took their responses and double-rated them by 8 English native speakers from the University of York to see whether their responses

were acceptable to English native speakers or not. Then, I presented the data in statistical tables for qualitative analysis.

## **6.2 Summary of the findings**

The key findings of the first study include exploring the communication difficulties and strategies according to the informal interactions through semi-structured interviews provided ample information to research on these problems. The findings of this study (the first study) go in line with previous research that explored communication difficulties in language and culture (Zulkurnaian & Kaur, 2014; Sato, 2008; Morris-Adams, 2008; Gan, 2012; Gan, 2013). Likewise, the findings of the second study that explored the Sudanese learners' pragmatic competence via the rating of their responses by English native speakers also, go in line with those studies in research (Hu, 2014; Birjandi & Rezaei, 2010; Byon, 2006; Aufa, 2011; Han & Tazegul, 2016) that explored various learners' pragmatic competence with a variety of functions worldwide.

### **6.2.1 Main communication difficulties**

The Sudanese learners reported that their major challenges in interaction with English native speakers arise from phonological variation of the British accent, the various regional dialects variations and the huge rate of the perceived speech in various social contexts in the free social space. It was explored that the Sudanese learners are

strongly aware of the difficulties that summoned their adaptation, continuous learning, and practice for the necessities of living in the UK. Based on their reports during interviews, the Sudanese learners indicated that they are highly motivated to develop their communicative competence to solve these communication difficulties when interacting with English native speakers.

The Sudanese learners reported that they encountered considerable number of linguistic difficulties in communication, especially during their first few months after their arrival in the UK. The findings revealed that the Sudanese learners encountered major difficulties in distinguishing and understanding meanings in informal contexts, especially when meeting someone for the first time. In addition, the Sudanese learners reported that they encountered major difficulties to understand a considerable number of English vocabularies, especially when they meet their GPs or visit hospitals where specialised or technical vocabulary is normally spoken. Moreover, the use of local phrases by most English native speakers in the informal social contexts was a common difficulty reported nearly by all Sudanese learners in the data.

On the other hand, English native speakers reported that they encountered significant number of linguistic difficulties in interaction with Sudanese learners. Comparing their views with those reported by Sudanese learners, English native speakers reported that the limited

vocabulary size of their interlocutors was always a major threat to their mutual conversations. Also, they reported that Sudanese learners' lack of knowledge of technical vocabulary and regional local phrases, exclusively, were also major difficulties in their mutual conversations. It is important to note that the agreement of opinions of both Sudanese learners and English native speakers on the same communication difficulties (limited vocabulary size, phrasal vocabulary and regional dialects variations) contributes to raise the rate of credibility of the findings of this study about communication difficulties (See Table 11).

In contrast, the English native speakers particularly indicated communication difficulties that were not reported by Sudanese learners maybe because Sudanese learners are not aware of them. Specifically, English native speakers reported that one of the major difficulties of communication with Sudanese learners were the suprasegmental features such stress, intonation, and rhythm of words. They noted that the Sudanese learners mostly do not put the stress on the correct syllable of the word which sometimes leads to difficulty of understanding them. In addition, they indicated that the Sudanese learners encounter a difficulty of using vocabulary appropriately within given contexts. Also, the communication difficulties related to cross-cultural variations was a common theme reported by many English native speakers.

Although the number of previous studies about communication difficulties was immense, most of the linguistic communication problems remain without solutions. However, these studies attempt to mitigate these problems through employment of communication strategies that many of Sudanese learners may not be aware of. For example, the Sudanese learners reported that when they encounter a communication problem with a new word, they could look it up in the dictionary or check it online. But, for example, among the meanings of words in context, the Sudanese learners may not be able to process the word out within a particular context.

As for the key findings in the second study which is about examining the Sudanese learners' pragmatic competence, findings revealed that the Sudanese learners are satisfactorily able to employ their language knowledge appropriately in different contexts (79.17% of their responses were rated acceptable by English native speakers, and 66.66% were rated acceptable with the agreement of acceptability by both English raters (See Figures 1, 2 & 3). However, the English raters highlighted some of communication difficulties manifested by the Sudanese learners when realising DCT situations such as insufficient explanation, irrelevant response to the given context, inappropriate explanation, absence of explanation, incomprehensive response, inconsistent content, irrelevant response to context, inappropriate lexical use and unfamiliar pronunciation (See Figure 4).

### **6.2.2 Main communication strategies**

Despite the problems indicated above, both Sudanese learners and English native speakers reported that when encountering a communication difficulty during shared conversations, they mostly struggle to employ various communication strategies to overcome the communication difficulty or to push forward the conversation. However, there were few times where some participants from both Sudanese learners and English native speakers reported that they stop the communication when they fail to overcome the communication difficulty.

The common communication strategies reported by many Sudanese learners to maintain their conversations with English native speakers were appeal for assistance, asking for repetition, clarification request, asking for lengthening of words, body language, circumlocution and message abandonment. It is seldom found that Sudanese learners reported employment of strategies such as guessing or recast to overcome communication problems.

On the other hand, English native speakers reported that they employ a considerable number of strategies to carry out a successful communication with Sudanese learners. For example, they frequently reported that they maintain their communication with strategies such as appeal for assistance, asking for repetition, body language, clarification request, asking for lengthening of words, circumlocution,

guessing, message abandonment and appeal for paraphrasing in standard English.

Unlike their reports on communication difficulties, both Sudanese learners and English native speakers reported that they employ nearly similar communication strategies to overcome communication difficulties or to enhance their mutual conversations. For example, the most frequent communication strategies reported by both Sudanese learners and English native speakers were appeal for assistance, asking for repetition, clarification request, asking for lengthening of words, body language, circumlocution and message abandonment (See Tables 12 & 13).

However, while Sudanese learners reported that they rarely employ guessing to overcome communication difficulties, a considerable number of English native speakers reported that they employ guessing regularly to maintain their conversations with Sudanese learners. Also, a considerable number of English native speakers reported that they appeal for paraphrasing in standard English when they encounter a difficulty of communication during interaction with Sudanese learners.

It is important to note, the findings of this study provided a novel contribution in research in the field of communication strategies (See Section 2.8.7.6) that went beyond what is known about communication strategy in research. There are two new strategies

that emerged out of the analysis of the interviews data in which both Sudanese learners and English native speakers employ pre-communication strategies to develop their communicative competence and overcome the potential difficulties they are likely expecting to encounter during an appointment with peer interlocutors. For this reason, the new strategy employed by Sudanese learners is called the preparatory strategy in this study. For the other strategy that is employed by English native speakers, it is called longer-term developing communication strategies (See Section 2.8.7.6). In longer-term developing communication strategy, the English native speakers reported that they continuously develop their communicative competence and make themselves familiar with the accent of Sudanese speakers of English. Hence, this is the novel contribution for this study in research.

As for the second study, when Sudanese learners encountered difficulties during realisation of DCTs situations, they employed a variety of strategies to overcome the communication difficulties and push forward the completion of their DCTs situation. For example, they employed the following communication strategies to realise their DCTs situations: comprehension check, self-correction, clarification request, asking for confirmation, lexicalised fillers, non-lexicalised fillers, asking for repetition, silent pausing and hesitation devices (See Table 17). Hence, this necessitates the importance of teaching the



communication strategies to Sudanese learners in ESOL classes to help develop their communicative competence.

### **6.3 Limitations and future research:**

In this section, I discussed the limitations of the interviews employed to collect the data in the first study and how they were mitigated. Then, I explained the primary research design that I planned to employ and how I was forced to use a non-optimal approach due to the pandemic. In fact, the data collection was due to take place when the pandemic hit the UK. As a result, I used an alternative approach although it is not the best approach for the study. This approach was explained in details after the discussion of limitations in this section.

The limitations of the first study that employed semi-structured interviews arise from some of the participants' inability to report their communication problems, the self-deception of self-report data and maybe the potential low generalisability of its data to wider contexts.

Also, one of the limitations of this study, especially the first one that adopted the semi-structured interviews, can be attributed to the participants' insufficient ability and knowledge about their language problems that influence their communication with English native speakers. Participants' ability and knowledge can be perceived with regard to their different levels of English language proficiency and education as the study has adopted the convenient and snowballing

strategy to nominate its participants where low and high proficient learners are included. Therefore, the findings of the first study indicated that some of the Sudanese learners were not well aware of all communication difficulties that they encounter during interactions with their peer English native speakers such as suprasegmental features, inappropriate vocabulary use within context and cross-cultural variations problems that were indicated by English native speakers.

Also, for the purpose of the social prestige bias, some of the Sudanese participants may feel shameful or embarrassed to agree and honestly report that they encounter communication difficulties in interaction with English native speakers after they have stayed for several years in the UK. Hence, these participants may not respond accurately and willingly to the survey questions, while others may provide answers anyhow or answers for the sake of answers (Kuen et al., 2017).

Overall, the second study was conducted to overcome the limitations of the first study through employment of DCTs to see what communication difficulties that English native speakers highlight about Sudanese participants during their realisation of DCTs situations. Therefore, in the second study which is about examining the Sudanese cohort's pragmatic competence, English native speakers indicated many communication difficulties that Sudanese learners manifested during their realisation of DCTs situations (See Figure 4).

To avoid this limitation of self-report through semi-structured interviews from the beginning, I planned to do tasks observation as a primary research method in this study. Below is an explanation to the first research design for collecting data in this study. I explained what I initially intended to do and why. Then, I explained what I alternatively did and why.

To address the validity of the data, I decided to use a combination of methods: task observation, stimulated recall interviews and follow-up semi-structured interviews for the following reasons: Firstly, to avoid many limitations of self-reported data such as questionnaires and interviews in which the social prestige bias and halo-effect influences are expected. Also, to avoid other limitations where respondents may not respond accurately and willingly, respondents are also free to answer certain questions and neglect others and sometimes some respondents may provide answers anyhow or answers for the sake of answers (Kuen et al., 2017).

To avoid the previous limitations, I planned to employ communicative task observation as a primary research method at the first stage of the survey. Secondly, to address the credibility of the data that I obtained through tasks, I planned to employ stimulated recall interviews to check the task data; and then, I check the data of both tasks and stimulated recall interviews by employing follow-up semi-structured interviews. In this way, the study hoped to obtain more objective and

rich credible data for this project (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008; Hammersley, 2008).

These research methods were planned to be employed sequentially in the following way: Firstly, I carry out twenty task sessions for both Sudanese learners and English native speakers in a mutual activity in which each single Sudanese participant is placed versus a single English native speaker. During the task, I observe their performance for the task and audio-record it. At the end of the task, within a short memory period, I immediately employ the stimulated recall interviews for both participants by stimulating their memory by listening to the audiotape that will be put in front of them. I ask them to play the audiotape, listen carefully and stop the audiotape whenever they feel that there is a communication difficulty during their conversation. Then, I ask them about the nature of this difficulty and what strategy or strategies they employed to overcome it. Finally, I employ follow-up semi-structured interviews to check the data that I observed during both task interactions and stimulated recall interviews.

The tasks that were proposed in this design were of communicative nature that enable both participants to interact. The types that were created were either two-way tasks, convergent tasks, or divergent tasks. The two-way tasks, impose on the participants to exchange the information if they are to complete the task successfully (Long, 1990). The convergent tasks which are also known as the consensus tasks,

require the participants to agree on a single solution or outcome for a problem, whereas in the divergent tasks the participants are required to disagree and provide multiple solutions to the problem (Nunan, 2004). Hence, I generated four types of tasks: (1) asking the participants to show the differences between two pictures, (2) making consensus about a university in which participants nominate a university to a student from various universities, (3) going shopping to bring certain items and ask for a discount to others and (4) showing differences and similarities between two different maps.

It is important to note that these research instruments were piloted by the end of 2019 to test their feasibility and practise them to improve their procedures during the main study. But they were not possible to conduct during the main study due to the pandemic of Covid-19. Moreover, the participants encountered difficulties with using technological devices as a solution. So, when the pandemic broke out at the beginning of 2020 and the UK government announced the lockdown procedures such as the social distancing, I understood that doing task interaction sessions in face-to-face meeting was not possible. Alternatively, I decided to conduct initial interviews for both Sudanese learners and English native speakers through the phone calls to report their views about communication difficulties and strategies during their mutual conversations.

During interviews, many participants reported that they had no access to the use of technological devices and some of them reported that their personal skills to use these devices were limited. Therefore, I discovered that even employing task interactions through Zoom or Google hangout was not possible. It is important to note that employing DCTs as an alternative method in this study is limited for obtaining data in comparison to the task-based approach method that I had originally planned to employ because the task-based method is relatively similar to the naturally occurring interactions and hence, it also helps to obtain rich and more objective data than DCTs.

However, the study attempted to mitigate its limitations through various ways such as triangulation of different views and the researcher's attempts as far as he could to reduce the influence of his presence on the participants and remain non-judgemental (See Section 3. 9).

For future research and to avoid or mitigate the self-report bias and the participants' insufficient knowledge and ability to report their oral communication difficulties, researchers might need to conduct tasks observation with an audio/video recording of the Sudanese participants' informal interactions with English native speakers in particular communicative situations to obtain original and objective information of what actually happens to these participants.

#### **6.4 Implications**

Despite limitations indicated, this study made a novel contribution and provided thick description so that researchers as well as educators could decide whether they could extend its findings to their studies or practices. So, researchers, ESOL tutors and syllabus designers could benefit from its findings to develop further policies to address migrants' communication difficulties and raise their strategic competence to develop their linguistic knowledge and communicative competence.

From this study, researchers, educators and even international students could learn that the difficulties of studying and staying abroad may not simply be linguistic, but they can be cultural as the cultural background also influences communication.

Also, the importance of studying and understanding teaching ESOL courses to immigrant learners in the United Kingdom invites educators and syllabus designers in the UK to benefit from the findings of this study. The necessity of considering these findings of the study stems from the process of enrollment of migrants like Sudanese on the ongoing policy of educating them English language in real world ESOL classes (See Section 1.1). Hence, educators and researchers could provide useful suggestions for immigrant learners and design more appropriate language teaching materials in workshops and tutorials about target language learning and cultural adaptation.

Also, by highlighting the communication strategies adopted by Sudanese learners to overcome their communication difficulties encountered in interaction with English native speakers, educators and syllabus designers were made aware of these efforts to employ strategies and hence, they can plan the most effective methods to teach these communication strategies to Sudanese learners to raise their strategic competence.

Lastly but not least, this study made several significant contributions in the field of applied linguistics research on communication and its various aspects. If applied linguistics can be defined as “The theoretical and empirical investigation of real-world problems in which language is the central issue” (Baker, 2009, p. 9), this study made a novel contribution to the field of research in theory, practice, and policy in the field of communication difficulties, strategies, and pragmatic competence.

Firstly, there has been little or no research about communication difficulties encountered by migrant groups in the state of longer-term settlement during their informal interactions with English native speakers in the free social space in the UK. Unlike previous studies that investigated language difficulties in formal contexts in classrooms, this study highlighted the difficulties of those groups intending to settle and integrate in the British society as potential British citizens. Secondly, this study proved that the difficulties encountered by these



groups are not only linguistic, but they are also attributed to cultural and other factors of social judgements. Thus, the findings of this study made a novel contribution to the theory about communication difficulties by providing empirical data reported and manifested by those participants in practice. Based on some of the practical data that reflected cultural and social judgements difficulties in communication, the findings of the study supported the existing theories of intercultural communication in which participants should be aware of the other interlocutors' cultural and social perceptions (Byram, 1997). Hence, in terms of policy and syllabus design, educators need to address issues relevant to cultural differences as well as regional dialect variations in ESOL classes.

Thirdly, this study sheds light on the efforts adopted by migrants to maintain conversations during their informal mutual conversations with English native speakers. This led to the discovery of new strategies reported by these migrant participants, that is, the preparatory strategy and longer-term developing communication strategy (See Section 5.8.9; Section 5.9.11). Hence, theoretically, the study contributes to the growing body of research into communication strategies by reviewing the definition of communication strategy to indicate not only the attempts taken by interlocutors during the communication, but also attempts taken by interlocutors before the communication takes place. Therefore, in

practice, the findings of the study suggested adding 'pre-communication strategies which are not included in the previous taxonomies of communication strategies. Hence, this suggests that, in terms of policy, educators should encourage teaching and learning communication strategies to raise strategic awareness for these migrants to maintain successful conversations with English native speakers in the real world.

### **6.5 Final remarks**

Although the Sudanese learners and their peer English native speakers of this study encountered various communication difficulties during their informal mutual conversations in the UK, most of the time they reported that they enjoyed their experiences of conducting the mutual conversations and were glad to encounter the challenges and attempts to overcome them through the employment of communication strategies. Despite encountering difficulties in interaction, both Sudanese learners and English native speakers expressed their willingness to interact with each other. They reported that through continuous practice of interaction, encountering difficulties and employing strategies to overcome them, their intercultural communicative competence will gradually develop.

Specifically, the Sudanese learners should remember that continuous interaction with English native speakers is indispensable, not only for developing their communicative competence, but also for raising the

level of their contribution of finding better opportunities in the UK. In fact, encountering communication difficulties in informal contexts is a challenge for most people. Therefore, raising the strategic competence to overcome communication difficulties is usually necessary in getting out of challenging circumstances. Therefore, researchers, educators and Sudanese learners in the UK are advised to be aware of both communication difficulties and the strategies employed to overcome them.

Lastly but not least, although the variables of age, gender, class and race were not considered as influential factors on communication difficulties and strategies between Sudanese learners and English native speakers in this study, the variable of age may play a role in the longer-term period such as developing a sense of familiarisation with the accent or dialect of the other, whereas the other variables may not play a direct role in encountering communication difficulties among various interlocutors.

Practically, to develop the communicative competence, Sudanese learners are advised to employ extracurricular authentic materials besides classroom teaching materials: (1) they are also advised to involve into regular debates and discussions with native speakers of English in a free situation, chatting and discussing various topics as much as they can. (2) They are as well advised to join the voluntary

associations and groups of native speakers in the UK like PIP and sport clubs in the real world.

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## Appendices:

### Appendix A. Summary of previous relevant empirical studies (2018-2008) in ascending chronological order.

Author	Date	Topic			Methods					Setting		Location	Participants			
		CSS	CSS & CC	CS	Qu es.	Interv iews	Obse rve.	Te st	Audio - recordings	For mal	Infor mal		M al.	Fem ale	Level	Populati on
Sato	2008	✓			✓	✓	✓			✓		Japan	32		Intermediate	University students.
Morris-Adams	2008	✓							✓		✓	Britain	2	8	intermediate	Undergraduate students in University.
Salahshoor & Asl	2009	✓				✓				✓		Iran	51		Low, moderate and high	BA students at Azarbaijan University
Lam	2010			✓		✓			✓	✓		Hong Kong	40		High and low-proficient ESL learners.	Secondary school students.
Kirkpatrick	2010	✓							✓	✓		Singapore	6	13	High proficient learner s.	Trainee teachers in ELT centre.
Nakatani	2010			✓	✓				✓	✓		Japan		62	Not identified.	Japanese college students.

Abdullah & Enim	2011	√			√				√	√		Australia	6		Not identified.	Students in a university.
Matsumoto	2011	√				√	√				√	USA	6		High proficient	Postgraduate students in graduate students' dormitory.
Gan	2012					√				√		Hong Kong	4	16	Intermediate	Students at a tertiary teacher training institute.
Gan	2013				√					√		China & Hong Kong	60	230	intermediate	BA students at two universities.
Zhao & Intaraprasert	2013	√			√					√		China	261	553	High, fair and low.	BA at six universities in China.
Razmjou & Ghazi	2013	√							√	√		Iran	11	23	High	Senior undergraduate translation major students at Islamic Azad University of Tabriz.

Zulkurnain & Kaur	2014	√			√	√				√		Malaysia	100		Not identified.	Undergraduate students studying Diploma in hotel management in a Malaysian university.
Wang, Lai & Leslie	2015	√				√	√			√		China	18	18	Not identified.	ESL BA students in a Chinese university.
Toomnan & Intaraprasert	2015	√			√	√				√		Thailand	94	9	Not identified.	Undergraduate students at nine universities in Thailand.
Saeidi & Farshchi	2015			√				√		√		Iran		60	Not identified.	They are ESL students in SAMA School, Islamic Azad University.
Rabab'ah	2015			√				√		√		Jordan	5	75	Not identified.	124 ESL students majoring in English in the Department of Linguistics, University of Jordan, Jordan.

Yanagi & Baker	20 16	√			√	√				√		Japan	12	21	Not identified	Undergraduate and postgraduate TESOL students from 18 Australian universities.
Bijani & Sedaghat	20 16	√			√					√		Iran	15	15	intermediate	Students at a language institute in Zanjan, Iran.
Kuen, Galea & Heng	20 17			√		√		√		√		Malaysia	54	34	Similar language proficiency, but not identified.	They are undergraduate students studying mechanical engineering at two polytechnic institutes.
Doost, Hashemifardnya & Panahi	20 17			√				√		√		Iran	60		intermediate	120 students from Parsyan English Language Institute.



Park, Klieve, Tsurutani & Harte	20 17	√	√	√					√		Austr alia	62	120	High proficie nt learner s.	They are undergra duate and postgrad uate students at three universiti es in Australia .
Demir, Mutlu & Sisman	20 18	√		√	√				√		Turke y	10 2	113	Not identifi ed.	Students studying in compuls ory English preparat ory program me in a state universit y in Turkey.
Manzano	20 18	√			√	√			√		Nepal		6	Interm ediate	Undergra duate students studying Commun ication Arts at a state universit y in Philippin es.

## Appendix B. Summary of previous relevant empirical studies in main trends.

Communication difficulties	Communication difficulties and strategies	Communication strategies	Communication strategies and communicative competence	Communication strategies teaching/training
-Gan, 2013 -Gan, 2012 -Morris-Adams, 2008	-Zulkurnain & Kaur, 2014 -Sato, 2008	-Manzano, 2018 -Demir, Mutlu, & Sisman, 2018 -Yanagi & Baker, 2016 -Bijani & Sedaghat, 2016 -Toomnan & Intaraprasert, 2015 -Wang, Lai, & Leslie, 2015 -Razmjou & Ghazi, 2013 -Zhao & Intaraprasert, 2013 -Matsumoto, 2011 -Abdullah & Enim, 2010 -Kirkpatrick, 2010	-Park, Klieve, Tsurutani, & Harte, 2017 -Nakatani, 2010	-Doost, Hahemifardnya, & Panahi, 2017 -Kuen, Galea, & Heng, 2017 -Saeidi & Farshchi, 2015 -Rabab'ah, 2015 -Lam, 2010

		-Salahshoor & Asl, 2009		
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**Appendix C. Information sheet for Sudanese learners during interviews in the first study.**



**Information sheet for Sudanese learners of English**

*Exploring communication difficulties and strategies among Sudanese learners of English and their English native speaker interlocutors.*

Dear participant,

Mukhtar Adam is currently carrying out a research project about communication difficulties and strategies among Sudanese learners of English and their English native speaker interlocutors. I would like to invite you to take part in this project.

Before agreeing to take part, please read this information sheet carefully and let me know if anything is unclear or you need further information. Also, please read the information about the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that is provided on a separate sheet.

**Purpose of the study:**

The present study is designed to investigate the communication difficulties encountered by Sudanese

learners of English in their interaction with native speakers of English in the UK. It also investigates the communication strategies used by these Sudanese learners and their English native interlocutors.

### **What would this mean for you?**

Should you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in the interviews which will be audio-recorded.

The task interaction session will take approximately 15 minutes. After that You will be asked about the communication difficulties you face when interacting with the native speaker of English, and communication strategies you use to overcome those difficulties during the task interaction session.

In the further interview, which will last around 15 minutes, you will be asked to reflect on the communication difficulties and the strategies you used to overcome those difficulties during your daily conversations with English native speakers in general.

### **Participation is voluntary:**

Participation in this research is optional. If you agree to take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet for your records and you will be asked to complete a consent form. If you change your mind at any point during the study and up to one week after the data collection, you will be able to withdraw from participation without having to provide a reason. To withdraw yourself and your data from the study, you should contact Mukhtar Adam ([maea500@york.ac.uk](mailto:maea500@york.ac.uk)).

### **Anonymity and confidentiality:**

The data that you provide in interviews will be stored by a code number. Any identifiable data will be anonymised at the latest four weeks after the end of data collection and any information that identifies you will be stored separately from the data. You will be free to withdraw from the study at any time during data collection and up to one week after the data is collected.

### **Storing and using your data:**

Data will be stored in secure filing cabinets and on a password protected computer. Only anonymised data in password protected files will be shared between the researcher and his supervisor in this study. The data collected for the present study will be stored and retained for up to ten years.

The data that I collect may be used in *anonymous* format in different ways. Please indicate on the consent form attached with an X if you are happy for this anonymised data to be used in the ways listed.

To request a written transcript of your interview data, contact Mukhtar Adam ([maea500@york.ac.uk](mailto:maea500@york.ac.uk)).

**Questions or concerns:**

If you have any questions about this participant information sheet or concerns about how your data is being processed, please feel free to contact Mukhtar Adam by email ([maea500@york.ac.uk](mailto:maea500@york.ac.uk)), or the Chair of Ethics Committee in the Education Department, University of York ([education-research-administrator@york.ac.uk](mailto:education-research-administrator@york.ac.uk)). If you are still dissatisfied, please contact the University of York Data Protection Officer at [dataprotection@york.ac.uk](mailto:dataprotection@york.ac.uk)

We hope that you will agree to take part in the study. If you are happy to participate, please complete the consent form attached and hand it in to the researcher of this study. Please keep this information sheet for your own records.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours sincerely,

Mukhtar Adam,

[maea500@york.ac.uk](mailto:maea500@york.ac.uk)

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**Appendix D. Information sheet for English native speakers during interviews in the first study.**



**Information sheet for native speakers of English**

**Exploring communication difficulties and strategies among Sudanese learners of English and their English native speaker interlocutors.**

Dear participant,

Mukhtar Adam is currently carrying out a research project about communication difficulties and strategies among Sudanese learners of English and their English native speaker interlocutors. I would like to invite you to take part in this project.

Before agreeing to take part, please read this information sheet carefully and let me know if anything is unclear or you need further information. Also, please read the information about the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that is provided on a separate sheet.

**Purpose of the study:**

The present study is designed to investigate the communication difficulties encountered by Sudanese

learners of English in their interaction with native speakers of English in the UK. It also investigates the communication strategies used by these Sudanese learners and their English native speaker interlocutors.

**What would this mean for you?**

Should you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in interviews which will be audio-recorded.

The task interaction session will take approximately 15 minutes. After that You will be asked about the communication difficulties you face when interacting with the Sudanese learner of English, and communication strategies you use to overcome those difficulties during the task interaction session.

In interview, which will last around 15 minutes, you will be asked to reflect on the communication difficulties and the strategies you used to overcome those difficulties during your daily conversations with Sudanese speakers of English in general.

**Participation is voluntary:**

Participation in this research is optional. If you agree to take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet for your records and you will be asked to complete a consent form. If you change your mind at any point during the study and up to one week after the data collection, you will be able to withdraw from participation without having to provide a reason. To withdraw yourself and your data from the study, you should contact Mukhtar Adam ([maea500@york.ac.uk](mailto:maea500@york.ac.uk)).

**Anonymity and confidentiality:**

The data that you provide in interviews will be stored by a code number. Any identifiable data will be anonymised at the latest four weeks after the end of data collection and any information that identifies you will be stored separately from the data. You will be free to withdraw from the study at any time during data collection and up to one week after the data is collected.

**Storing and using your data:**



Data will be stored in secure filing cabinets and on a password protected computer. Only anonymised data in password protected files will be shared between the researcher and his supervisor in this study. The data collected for the present study will be stored and retained for up to ten years.

The data that I collect may be used in *anonymous* format in different ways. Please indicate on the consent form attached with an X if you are happy for this anonymised data to be used in the ways listed.

To request a written transcript of your interview data, contact Mukhtar Adam ([maea500@york.ac.uk](mailto:maea500@york.ac.uk)).

**Questions or concerns:**

If you have any questions about this participant information sheet or concerns about how your data is being processed, please feel free to contact Mukhtar Adam by email ([maea500@york.ac.uk](mailto:maea500@york.ac.uk)), or the Chair of Ethics Committee in the Education Department, University of York ([education-research-administrator@york.ac.uk](mailto:education-research-administrator@york.ac.uk)). If you are still dissatisfied, please contact the University of York Data Protection Officer at [dataprotection@york.ac.uk](mailto:dataprotection@york.ac.uk)

We hope that you will agree to take part in the study. If you are happy to participate, please complete the consent form attached and hand it in to the researcher of this study. Please keep this information sheet for your own records.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours sincerely,

Mukhtar Adam,

[maea500@york.ac.uk](mailto:maea500@york.ac.uk)

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**Appendix E. Sample of agreement to participate in the survey by an English native speaker.**

**Exploring communication difficulties and strategies among Sudanese learners of English and their native speaker interlocutors.**

**Consent Form**

**Please tick each box if you are happy to take part in this research.**

I confirm that I have read and understood the information given to me about the above-named research project and I understand that this will involve me taking part as described above.	Yes
I understand that participation in this study is voluntary.	Yes
I understand that my data will not be identifiable, and the data may be used anonymously in publications, presentations and online.	Yes
I confirm that I have read the information about GDPR	Yes

NAME\_\_Victoria Watson\_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE\_\_\_\_VWatson\_\_\_\_\_

DATE\_\_\_\_02/09/21\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix F. Information sheet for Sudanese learners during DCT situations employment in the second study.**



**Information sheet for Sudanese learners of English**

*Exploring communication difficulties and strategies among Sudanese learners of English and their English native speaker interlocutors.*

Dear participant,

Mukhtar Adam is currently carrying out a research project about communication difficulties and strategies among Sudanese learners of English and their English native speaker interlocutors. I would like to invite you to take part in this project.

Before agreeing to take part, please read this information sheet carefully and let me know if anything is unclear or you need further information. Also, please read the information about the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that is provided on a separate sheet.

**Purpose of the study:**

The present study is designed to explore the communication difficulties and strategies among the

Sudanese learners of English in their interaction with their peer native speakers of English in the UK.

**What would this mean for you?**

Should you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in which I will present scenarios of some situations and ask you to respond to these situations to produce speech, all of which will be audio recorded. The session of each situation scenario will take approximately 15 minutes.

**Participation is voluntary:**

Participation in this research is optional. If you agree to take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet for your records and you will be asked to complete a consent form. If you change your mind at any point during the study and up to one week after the data collection, you will be able to withdraw from participation without having to provide a reason. To withdraw yourself and your data from the study, you should contact Mukhtar Adam (maea500@york.ac.uk).

**Anonymity and confidentiality:**

The data that you provide in the sessions of these situations' scenarios will be stored by a code number. Any identifiable data will be anonymised at the latest four weeks after the end of data collection and any information that identifies you will be stored separately from the data. You will be free to withdraw from the study at any time during data collection and up to one week after the data is collected.

**Storing and using your data:**

During the study, the data will be stored in my password protected computer. Only anonymised data in password protected files will be shared between the researcher and his supervisor in this study. The data collected for the present study will be stored and retained for up to ten years.

The data that I collect may be used in *anonymous* format in different ways. Please indicate on the consent form attached with an X if you are happy for this anonymised data to be used in the ways listed.

To request a written transcript of your recorded responses to situations, contact Mukhtar Adam (maea500@york.ac.uk).

**Questions or concerns:**

If you have any questions about this participant information sheet or concerns about how your data is being processed, please feel free to contact Mukhtar Adam by email (maea500@york.ac.uk), or the Chair of Ethics Committee in the Education Department, University of York ([education-research-administrator@york.ac.uk](mailto:education-research-administrator@york.ac.uk)). If you are still dissatisfied, please contact the University of York Data Protection Officer at [dataprotection@york.ac.uk](mailto:dataprotection@york.ac.uk)

We hope that you will agree to take part in the study. If you are happy to participate, please complete the consent form attached and hand it in to the researcher of this study. Please keep this information sheet for your own records.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours sincerely,

Mukhtar Adam,

[maea500@york.ac.uk](mailto:maea500@york.ac.uk)

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**Appendix G. Information sheet for English native speakers during DCT situations employment in the second study.**

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

**Information sheet for native speakers of English**

**Exploring communication difficulties and strategies among Sudanese learners of English and their English native speaker interlocutors.**

Dear participant,

Mukhtar Adam is currently carrying out a research project about communication difficulties and strategies among Sudanese learners of English and their English native speaker interlocutors. I would like to invite you to take part in this project.

Before agreeing to take part, please read this information sheet carefully and let me know if anything is unclear or you need further information. Also, please read the information about the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that is provided on a separate sheet.

**Purpose of the study:**

The present study is designed to explore the communication difficulties and strategies among the

Sudanese learners of English in their interaction with native speakers of English in the UK.

**What would this mean for you?**

Should you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to listen to audiotapes of Sudanese learners' responses to some situations, then you will be asked to rate their responses and explain these responses; all of which will be audio recorded. The task of rating and highlighting the Sudanese speech acts session will take approximately 40 minutes.

**Participation is voluntary:**

Participation in this research is optional. If you agree to take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet for your records and you will be asked to complete a consent form. If you change your mind at any point during the study and up to one week after the data collection, you will be able to withdraw from participation without having to provide a reason. To withdraw yourself and your data from the study, you should contact Mukhtar Adam (maea500@york.ac.uk).

**Anonymity and confidentiality:**

The data that you provide about rating the audiotapes of Sudanese speech acts and the justification of your ratings will be stored by a code number. Any identifiable data will be anonymised at the latest four weeks after the end of data collection and any information that identifies you will be stored separately from the data. You will be free to withdraw from the study at any time during data collection and up to one week after the data is collected.

**Storing and using your data:**

During the study, the data will be stored in secure filing and on a password protected computer. Only anonymised data in password protected files will be shared between the researcher and his supervisor in this study. The data collected for the present study will be stored and retained for up to ten years.



The data that I collect may be used in *anonymous* format in different ways. Please indicate on the consent form attached with an X if you are happy for this anonymised data to be used in the ways listed.

To request a written transcript of your rating of Sudanese learners' responses data, contact Mukhtar Adam ([maea500@york.ac.uk](mailto:maea500@york.ac.uk)).

**Questions or concerns:**

If you have any questions about this participant information sheet or concerns about how your data is being processed, please feel free to contact Mukhtar Adam by email ([maea500@york.ac.uk](mailto:maea500@york.ac.uk)), or the Chair of Ethics Committee in the Education Department, University of York ([education-research-administrator@york.ac.uk](mailto:education-research-administrator@york.ac.uk)). If you are still dissatisfied, please contact the University of York Data Protection Officer at [dataprotection@york.ac.uk](mailto:dataprotection@york.ac.uk)

We hope that you will agree to take part in the study. If you are happy to participate, please complete the consent form attached and hand it in to the researcher of this study. Please keep this information sheet for your own records.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours sincerely,

Mukhtar Adam,

[maea500@york.ac.uk](mailto:maea500@york.ac.uk)

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## Appendix H. Consent form to Sudanese learners during DCT situations employment

Exploring communication difficulties and strategies among Sudanese learners of English and their native speaker interlocutors.

### Consent Form

Please tick each box if you are happy to take part in this research.

Statement of consent	Tick each box
I confirm that I have read and understood the information given to me about the above-named research project and I understand that this will involve me taking part as described above.	
I understand that participation in this study is voluntary and that if I wish to withdraw, I can do so at any time during data collection and up to one week after the data is collected.	
I understand that my data will not be identifiable, and the data may be used anonymously in publications, presentations and online.	
I confirm that I have read the information about GDPR.	

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix I. Invitation to English native speakers to participate in the survey**

Dear native speakers of English,

My name is Mukhtar Adam. Originally from Sudan and living in Liverpool for the last eight years. I am currently studying for PhD degree at the University of York. My study is investigating communication problems and strategies between Sudanese community members as non-native speakers of English and their peer English native speakers in the United Kingdom.

At present, I am collecting data for my project through interviews and task interaction sessions. Now I am interviewing participants from Sudan and English native speakers to report the communication problems they encounter in their mutual conversations, as well as the strategies they use to overcome these problems.

I have attached an information sheet and consent form. I appreciate it, in case of acceptance to participate, if you would print your name and date it, before sending back to me.

Thank you and kind regards,

Mukhtar Adam

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## **Appendix J. Interview guide employed during the pilot study**

What have you done today/yesterday? Where did you go yesterday?  
Who did you talk to?

What communication difficulties did you face? What did you do to  
continue your conversation?

When did you go hospital? How did you find that? How did you  
manage your conversation with doctors?

What kind of problems did you find there?

Where do you normally do your shopping? How do you do that? Do  
you face any problems? What kind of problems do you find? What  
strategies do you follow to do your shopping?

How often do you talk to English native speakers? Where do you see  
them? How are your conversations with them? How do you keep your  
conversation continue? Are there any problems to talk to native  
speakers? How do you overcome them? What other places or  
situations do you talk to English native speakers? What difference do  
you find?

**Appendix K. A sample of initial codes for communication difficulties in this study**

Extracts	Initial codes
"It is OK uh...huh sometime uh...huh language Scouse uh...huh is different uh...huh, but I understand ..." (Sudanese 1).	Dialect
"They uh...huh the local language is different" (Sudanese 1).	Local phrases
"Uh...huh they are speaking fast uh...huh but generally when the language uh...huh it is not a common language" (Sudanese 2).	Speech pace
"The problem uh...huh, sometimes when you ask about new words or something like that ..." (Sudanese 3).	Unfamiliar words
"Uh...huh we pronounce some letters totally different from this country" (Sudanese 5).	Unfamiliar pronunciation
"Uh...huh understanding language when they talk with me uh...huh the understanding is the problem" (Sudanese 6).	Misunderstanding
"Uh...huh you can uh...huh in England you can get more trouble if your English understanding is Scouse. You can get off the understanding and uh...huh foreigner coming in who is learning English, must be very careful about that" (English 1).	Dialect
"Uh...huh and more ... it is in the grammatical construction of things where ... in foreign language ... things would be diverse, you know, uh...huh and we have to use in English which qualify verbs that appear in other languages and they listen to them; and they do not happen, you know" (English 3).	Grammar
"And vary the pitch of the voice; sometimes if you are feeling uh...huh and they cool down to speaking, listening and ... sort of finding out about the person you are talking to and how they feel; and how you respond" (English 6).	Stress

<p>“OK. I would probably I have met certain words from uh...huh my conversation with them, words that I would be assume either rightly or wrongly would be more understood by local or native speakers” (English 7).</p>	<p>Unknown words</p>
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**Appendix L. A sample of initial codes for communication strategies in this study**

Extracts	Initial codes
"Uh...huh When you do not understand ... you ask him ... what you say ... What did you say?" (Sudanese 1)	Asking for explanation
"Uh...huh Actually, uh...huh unless you ask for a repeat... say it again uh...huh slow down please!" (Sudanese 2).	Asking for repetition
"The problem uh...huh, sometimes when you ask about new words or something like that, you need to identify by or look for a dictionary, or something" (Sudanese 3).	Appeal for assistance
"Uh...huh I talk to them to speak slowly" (Sudanese 4).	Asking for slowing down
"We use the gestures and uh...huh yah, sometimes" (Sudanese 5).	Body language
"Uh...huh at this point, you just leave him" (Sudanese 15).	Message abandonment
"Uh...huh well, I think the person would just say 'What did you mean or what did you say' uh...huh and then they have to repeat it and uh...huh presumably they may repeat it the same" (English 1).	Asking for explanation and repetition
"Uh...huh it is not a problem uh...huh it is better ... if it is within a context ... then you can guess uh...huh if you do not understand the word, as long as it is with a context of the sentence and you know what the time for say, then you can guess what that word you did not hear clearly" (English 2).	Guessing
"I am ... I ... it would depend on another body language would depend on how they adopt the conversation" (English 14).	Body language
"I will try and rephrase it. So, instead of repeating this straight back to them, I try and use different words or try to simplify the words that I used" (English 15).	Rephrasing



“... maybe you will write ... write what your ... write it down for them if you have got a pen or paper with you” (English 16).	Appeal for assistance
“It depends on why you want to communicate, if you want exchange information, you just keep going” (English 17).	Circumlocution

**Appendix M. A sample of candidate themes generated from the dataset in this study**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Deficit in general vocabulary</li> <li>-Lack of lexis</li> <li>-Lexical problems</li> <li>-Wrong pronunciation</li> <li>-Inappropriate vocabulary use</li> <li>-Contextual inappropriacy</li> <li>-fluency problem</li> <li>-Unshared background knowledge</li> <li>-Inconsistent content</li> <li>-Irrelevant content</li> <li>-Dysfluency</li> <li>-Culture-specific concepts</li> <li>-Culture-specific nature</li> <li>-Mispronunciation</li> <li>-Wrong grammar</li> <li>-Difficulty explaining L1 culture-specific concepts</li> <li>-Wrong word</li> <li>-Suprasegmental</li> <li>-Technical terms</li> <li>-Lack of vocabulary</li> <li>-Vocabulary range</li> <li>-Context-dependent nature</li> <li>-Flat intonation</li> <li>-Rising intonation</li> <li>-Phrase-level message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Limited English vocabulary</li> <li>-Sentence structure deficiency</li> <li>-Wrong construction of English sentences</li> <li>-Use of inappropriate words</li> <li>-Unfamiliar sophisticated words</li> <li>-Knowledge of idioms</li> <li>-Resource deficit</li> <li>-Unable to recall words</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Lexical difficulties</li> <li>-Phonological difficulties</li> <li>-new words or unfamiliar meaning of a word in particular context</li> <li>-Shortness of vocabulary</li> <li>-Insufficient vocabulary</li> <li>-Lack of vocabulary</li> <li>-Unfamiliar meaning of words</li> <li>-Terminology in Science and Mathematics</li> <li>-Accent and dialect difficulties</li> <li>-Unfamiliar ways of pronunciation</li> <li>-Understanding English accent</li> <li>-Cultural bias</li> <li>-Insufficient knowledge of the target culture</li> <li>-Cultural variety</li> <li>-Norms of the target culture</li> <li>-Contradictory content</li> <li>-Biased attitude</li> <li>-Meaning of words</li> </ul>
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<p>-Difficulty of expressing chunks</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Low English proficiency levels</li> <li>-Interlocutors' speed of speech</li> <li>-Speakers' accent</li> <li>-Misunderstanding of certain sentences in a text</li> <li>-Shortage of vocabulary</li> <li>-Unexpected use of an old word</li> <li>-Insufficient knowledge of British culture</li> <li>-Meaning in the target culture</li> <li>-New words</li> <li>-pronunciation of words</li> <li>-Intonation, stress and speaking too fast to follow</li> <li>-Vowels in some words like fair and fire</li> <li>-Speech production</li> </ul>
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## **Glossary**

- CC: Communicative competence
- CDs: Communication difficulties
- CSs: Communication strategies
- ICC: Intercultural communicative competence
- TCC Transcultural communication
- PC: Pragmatic competence
- CCP: Cross-cultural pragmatics
- ESL: English as a second language
- EFL: English as a foreign language
- EIL English as an international language
- ELF English as a lingua franca
- ESOL English for speakers of other languages
- NSs: Native speakers of English
- NNs: Non-native speakers of English
- RQs: Research questions
- TA: Thematic analysis
- DCTs: Discourse completion tasks

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