English as a Second Language in Relation with Verbal Fluency in SBK Women University Quetta

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Abstract

Problems of feeling inexpressive in target language are commonly expressed by majority of second language learners in learning to speak a second language. These problems are always considered to hinder the communication in the target language. This paper most commonly highlight the struggles that students of Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University Quetta make during the process of learning English as a second language. It brings forward to limelight the ways in which lack of fluency in English complicates the process of learning and also negatively affects their academic growth.

Major focus is on the inadequate input of language rules i.e. grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation which leads to poor production of fluent oral speech full of mistakes and pauses due to hesitation. This paper also attempts to bring forward the reasons that why students are unable to use automatic, smooth and rapid language production.

This study uses a qualitative interview approach which is later on turned into quantitative format of data. The data collection is done through simple random sampling. The research participants consist of total fifty students, randomly selected from each department of the University. The findings suggests that verbal fluency is always correlated and affected by the components of oral proficiency i.e. grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. The greater number of students in SBK Women University believes that the production of their fluent oral speech is dependent upon their knowledge of grammar of the target language; many others believe that it depends upon vocabulary and very few thinks that it is related with the pronunciation.

Keywords: Second Language, Lack of Fluency, Academic Growth, Language Rules

Introduction

It is considered highly essential to know the language for communicative purposes. In general, the most popular language is English, which has attained the status of a global language. It plays a role of second language for those who learn it after their mother tongue and plays a role of foreign language for those who migrate from their country to foreign country for purpose of studies or settlement.

One of the most challenging difficulties in learning a second language is finding ways to improve one's oral fluency. This is most commonly true in countries like Pakistan where the learners share a common mother tongue and have very little or no exposure to the second language outside the classroom.

Most of the linguists believe that language is just like a habit formation. In their view language is learnt through use and practice. According to them, the more one is exposed to the use of language, the better one learns.

In Pakistan though English is used with great emphasis in educational context but still within their institutions students have very limited understanding and exposure of English. As a result when they speak to express their thoughts they find it difficult to put their ideas into proper words and as a consequence produce influent speech embedded with mistakes and pauses.

This study will bring forward the causes that affect student's oral fluency in second language and will also consider the components of language which leads to fluent or influent production of speech. For this study SBK Women's University Quetta is taken as a research site.

Statement of the Problem

We live in an educational world where oral communication is seen as a necessary, positive personal characteristic (Daly, 1991, p.7). Due to its global status and worldwide expansion, English language has raised this demand to acquire good communication skills in English. However, most of the English language learners always express a feeling of being inexpressive due to lack of oral proficiency while learning to speak English. These learners of second language always wonder that why they cannot speak English well, because their compulsive efforts do not lead to their intended performance. This study focuses on the main causes that hinder the student's fluency level in second language. The study also aims to search out the language components that affect the oral fluency of speakers of second language.

Objectives of the Study

Language and communication are closely linked phenomenon in human life. One needs to have a proper understanding of a language for fluent speech production. This study attempts to find out the relationship between oral proficiency and verbal fluency so that it brings forward the areas that affect the oral production of speech. The major objective is to evaluate the verbal fluency of English language among students at Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University Quetta.

Research Questions

1. What are the causes that hinder the student's fluency level in second language?
2. How a language proficiency and oral fluency is affected in the university students?

Significance of the Study

This study will be of considerable interest for the new researchers and students not only because of the negative impact of limited oral proficiency over the verbal fluency, but also on the hindrances that students face while expressing their thoughts. This study is also

considerable with respect to its implication in the context where learners come from a wide range of linguistic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

The investigation of the speech production factors that arise while learning to communicate in the target language will hopefully increase the insight into the issue of language related problems and will guide teachers in making the classroom environment less stressful for second language learners.

Literature Review

Throughout the world and in developing countries no one can deny the spread and success of English language. For such purpose everyone is craving for the means to get proper command over this language and to gain the ability to use it properly just like its fluent native speakers. Baker & Westrup (2003) says that there is a need for people who speak English well not only throughout the world but also in the developing countries as well. In most of the countries college education is carried out in English. Employees who are fluent enough in English are high in demand. So it has become important for students to learn to speak English well, and for teachers to know how to teach the speaking skills very well.

Hartmann & Stork (1976) states that a person is considered to be a fluent speaker of a language when he is able to use its structures accurately whilst concentrating on the content rather than form, using the units and patterns automatically at normal conversational speed when they are required.

Koponen & Riggenbach (2000, p.6) define fluency as a performance based phenomenon which is related to the flow, continuity, automaticity or smoothness of the speech.
  Fillmore's (1979, p.93) establishes four abilities that might be embodied under the term fluency, the first is the ability to talk at length with few pauses. The other three abilities are to talk on coherent, reasoned, and semantically dense sentences, the ability to have appropriate things to say in a wide range of context and the ability of being creative and imaginative in use of a language.

Dimitra Hartas (2005, p.27) in his book Language and Communication Difficulties emphasized upon children's need to acquire both linguistic and social knowledge in order to become effective communicators. He was of the view that childrens understanding of the context and the connections between the context and speech is important for making meaning. For example, a child might focus his/her attention on an element of the environment to which a word refers. These acts helps to find words that correspond to this element. Ideally, both the child and his/her caregiver will direct their attention to the same object or event and make the connection between what they see and the speech they hear. He further explains that children with language and communication difficulties, mostly experience problems with the form of language (sounds, grammar and syntax); the content of language (semantic or meaning); and the social function of language (pragmatics or communication) in any combination and in terms of expressive and receptive aspects of the language.

Receptive and expressive aspect of English language is related with many problems of second language learner. Islam (2004) states that most of the books at the university level are written in English and students cannot comprehend them. The spoken English is even in worse

condition. Further pointing out the cause of low English language proficiency he says that in twelve years of their education before university "the students in Bangladesh generally memories everything including grammar, composition, letter, applications, essays and so on and therefore do not learn the language" Islam also points out three reasons behind the weak English among the students entering the universities in Bangladesh. The first reason he explained is that students do not need English outside their classroom in the real life and most of the students come from the background where they do not need English to learn other subjects resulting in lack of practice second reason is lack of trained teachers and thirdly the examination system is below ideal.

Alison d' Anglejan (1978) is of the view that cognitively mature learners want to comprehend and express ideas which need a wide range of syntactic structures, verb tenses, or vocabulary. Their communicative requirements will quite likely not concur with the programmed presentation given by the instructional materials or syllabus. Furthermore, the limited exposure to native speaker's spontaneous speech in the classroom setting give little opportunity for the formation and testing of hypotheses necessary for the induction of syntactic and morphological rules.

Dewey (1956, p.75) express his view from the standpoint of the child that the great waste in school comes from student's inability to utilize the experiences he gets from outside of the school in a complete and free way; while, on the other hand, in daily life he is unable to apply what he is learning at school.

The law about special education needs (SEN, 1996 sec.312) states somewhat the same view that a learner should not be taken as having a learning difficulty solely because the language (or form of the language) in which he is now, or will be, taught is different from a language (or form of the language) which has at any time been spoken in his home.

Porter & Grant's (1992, p.225) in their book has considered few aspects more important and useful to help second language speakers in order to gain proficiency in speaking and listening. The authors state that students can best learn communication skills by extensive practice. By adopting interactive, experimental approach to learning, they emphasize the activities that promote learner involvement and interaction. They also stressed on student's practicing skills which are supposed to be learnt rather than just talking and hearing about them.

Cucchiarini et al. (2000) cites Lennon (1990) who says that in our effort to define the temporal aspect of fluency, it has always been assumed that the main goal in language learning consists of producing the speech at the tempo of the native speakers, which should be unimpeded by silent pauses and hesitations, and filled pauses. Hence, fluency is not an absolute value learners posses or not rather it is a degree-based characteristics: all learners should achieve some degree of fluency.

Porter & Grant (1992) believe that as situation warrants it is important to vary one's speech rate. According to them the second language speakers worry that they lack fluency in English and may speak quickly in order to make up for it. The authors believe that such solution is not sound. By speeding up their speech without adequate knowledge know-how, non-native speakers make it harder for native listeners to comprehend them. The two researchers say

that the second language learners striving to speak correctly to listen to their professors when giving lectures or assignments. In such situations the teachers tend to use the spoken language which is mainly for transactional function- communicating a message- where key words are emphasized more and are said more slowly. Porter & Grant suggest that this is not like interactional function, where the spoken language is speeded up in conversations of social nature.

Palvenko (2001) believes that in an unfamiliar linguistic and social environment individuals may feel identity vulnerability whereas in conversational interaction satisfactory identity negotiation result. Which in turn give them a feeling of being understood, valued, supported, and respected.

MacKay (2002) is of the view that full of speech acts that do not act, do not mean anything. A great responsibility lies on the shoulders of Policy makers who need to provide second language speakers special consideration as Hautka (1994) suggests and Thomas(1996) quotes that we can give our attention to more substantive problems that how to provide language minority students with an equal and beneficial opportunity to learn challenging content and high level skills.

Zamel (1998, p.254) quotes few of the thought provoking lines from the journal of immigrant students who had limited knowledge of target language and its fluency. These lines resonate the same point,
"I would like them to know that we are very responsible and we know why we come to college: to learn. We are learning English as well as the major of our choice. It is very hard sometimes and we do not need professors who claimed that they do not understand us. The effort is double. We are very intelligent people. We deserve better consideration……. We made a step to college. Please make a step to meet us."

Hable (2005) also brings forward a case study of one of the Indian student in a comprehensive high school in California. The author tells in detail that how that learner was painfully conscious of her limited English proficiency and hence, she never talked in the class with her fellows and teacher so as to avoid any embarrassing episode and was actually afraid of being made fun of by her classmates. The author also tells about the pity that the teachers felt for her but could not do much to resolve the situation.

Many studies (Upshur, 1968; Mason, 1971; Saegert, scott, Perkins, and Tucker, 1975) cited by Alison d' Anglejan (1978) appear to indicate that the number of hours, or years which are spent on formal second language study is not in itself a strong predictor of second language achievement as measured by proficiency tests, particularly ones measuring oral fluency. He further says that the words and structures learned in the classroom may be sometimes unrecognizable when they occur in the normal discourse of native speakers. This lack of transferability of classroom learning to unstructured situation is one of the prime criticisms of second language instruction. By quoting the linguistic situation in Quebec, he says that after getting twelve years of formal instruction in French, many high school graduates are able to pass written examinations in French language and literature, but they show a limited level of oral fluency in interactions with native speakers and a tendency to retreat from situations in which they might be called upon to speak French. He points out, if students have

not attained functional oral fluency after many years of formal study, then there is a need to look elsewhere for opportunities to develop this skill.

Alison d' Anglejan (1978) tells more in the context of verbal fluency and communicative needs of second language learners by quoting the views cited from (Spilka, 1976; Selinker, Swain, and Dumas, 1975) by saying that the immersion situations where the teacher is the sole native speaker of the language and where the native or the first language L1 of the learner is homogenous, the prolonged absence and limited contact with a target language peer group, or significant intercultural contact, leads to the development of a somewhat pidginized form of the language. Learners do sometime become able to express themselves _some with greater ease than others but their syntax shows evidence of simplification and frequent reliance on the rule system of the mother tongue. One can say that native language acquisition appears to confirm remarkably closely to the principles of informal learning. It is embedded in a context of social interaction. It does not involve the formal articulation of a set of rules. It results from the opportunity for sustained verbal exchange with a model with whom the learner identifies closely who provides a tractable input of the target language and feedback about the appropriateness of the learner's utterances. In the typical second language program, most, if not all, of these principles are violated. Students who follow these programs do in many instances successfully acquire reasonably good literacy skills, such as those which the child in his mother tongue learns at school. However, it is in the area of verbal fluency that the results tend to be disappointing.

Methodology of the Study

For the purpose of capturing diverse range of student's experiences, a qualitative approach was considered an appropriate strategy as "it begins with individuals and sets out to understand and interpret their experiences of a particular phenomenon" (Cohen et al., 2000: p.23). In this study recordings of students were done by the author and a quantitative approach was utilized in counting the number of mistakes committed by students while testing their oral fluency. How students experience the problems related to verbal fluency and what they think are the main causes of these experiences were investigated through using qualitative research strategy. The nature of the study is exploratory, which is tested empirically by the researcher. Simple random sampling technique has been utilized for this study. The main reason behind choosing Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University was that the students from different linguistic, social and cultural backgrounds come to take admission in this University where English plays a role of their second language. So this was an ideal universe for the researcher to check out the verbal fluency of students, speaking different mother tongues but learn English as a second language with equal efforts. The fifty students were taken as respondents. These students were of BS programme and M.A from each department of the University. Very few of them had English Proficiency and most of them were influent due to which they were reluctant to give their view. Keeping in mind the objective of the study it was considered more appropriate and useful to carry out recordings of a short interview question. Furthermore to reach the core of the matter the researcher selected the instrument of recording so that actual results could be achieved in actual situation.

The primary goal of this study was to explore the causes that hinder verbal fluency, recording seemed appropriate as a means to understand in detail the experiences of students and to

analyze the grammatical, vocabulary and pronunciation mistakes from their verbal speech while they were giving answer for the single question asked by the researcher.

Results of Study

A qualitative approach was considered suitable for the purpose of collecting wide range of student's problems related to verbal fluency. The main objective of the researcher in this chapter was to analyze the data in detail collected through simple random sampling. For such purpose the researcher was supposed to ask one question from the participant and the answer given by the participant was recorded.

Due to the time constraint 50 students were selected as participants for this study which is a reasonable population for conducting a research. These 50 participants were selected randomly by the researcher from each department of the University. Recording was considered as the best suitable tool for data collection and for measuring the results in order to make it valid by nature.

All recordings which were done by the researcher later on went through a complex procedure of analysis. The researcher gave ear to all the recordings in two sessions. In the first session the researcher was supposed to listen each recording 3 times so that the number of mistakes committed by students in three categories i.e. grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation could be noted down separately. In the second session, the researcher listened the same recording 2 times in order to get the minimum accurate number of pauses and word repetition done by the student.

The researcher had selected such procedure in order to get into the core of the matter. If questionnaire would have been selected as a tool for data collection the student would have given biased reply with respect to their oral performance. So finally a proper personal contact was preferred. Selection of any other tool would have prohibited the verification of verbal fluency which could only be analyzed properly through verbal speech of the participants.

Through the recordings one can easily observe the common problems of the speakers of second language. Which they not only have confessed through sharing their experiences but also come up with a proof of it by committing mistakes while speaking in the second language. One can notice easily that most of the speakers are not fluent enough in their second language i.e. English. The reasons behind it which they themselves have confessed in the recordings are almost the same and in some ways different from the others. Few of the participants blame their school teachers for their poor command over English. Some of them think that lack of exposure and practice causes the poor production of fluent speech. Few consider that their limited knowledge of Grammar is the biggest problem which hinders their speech fluency. Few think that lack of vocabulary make them search for a word which could properly express their idea and if they are not provided with a proper word in the mean time they use a simple word or a substitute which didn't express their thought as clearly as they wanted to rather it create a vague image in the mind of the listener who didn't comprehend the incomplete expression.

The researcher also observed a case where fluency wasn't dependent over the proficiency of a language rules. One of the participants spoke so fluently that the researcher that the

researcher thought this recording will be deprived of mistakes of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. This was proved wrong when the recording listened by the researcher in two sessions. The participant in spite of being fluent has also committed almost the same number of mistakes as the other participants have done who are not fluent enough in their oral speech. In few other cases the researcher has observed that in spite of the presence of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation mistakes, the participants have done whether very few or no pauses in their oral speech.

Table 1:
Number of Mistakes Committed by Second Language Speakers in English

No of students	Language Proficiency			Language Fluency	
	Grammar Mistakes	Vocabulary Mistakes	Pronunciation Mistakes	Pauses due to Hesitation	Word Repetition
1	6	5	2	7	3
2	5	5	1	9	9
3	4	3	3	3	3
4	2	4	0	16	7
5	2	4	2	2	3
6	6	4	2	3	3
7	3	3	1	2	2
8	2	2	2	3	2
9	1	3	1	5	5
10	7	6	1	3	6
11	4	4	3	4	5
12	7	4	2	2	5
13	4	3	3	6	1
14	3	5	1	5	4
15	2	4	2	2	3
16	10	5	4	5	3
17	8	5	3	5	4
18	2	3	0	6	1
19	4	3	1	3	3
20	2	2	1	1	2
21	3	4	1	3	2
22	4	4	1	4	5
23	2	3	2	3	1
24	2	2	2	2	1
25	2	3	2	6	3
26	8	3	2	4	5
27	4	3	2	3	1
28	4	4	2	5	4
29	3	2	1	2	2
30	3	1	2	0	0
31	2	2	0	5	2

32	2	3	1	1	1
33	3	5	0	6	8
34	1	3	6	3	2
35	1	3	8	2	3
36	1	0	1	2	1
37	1	2	0	3	2
38	0	1	0	1	0
39	1	2	0	3	2
40	3	2	2	5	0
41	0	1	1	1	0
42	3	4	0	1	3
43	3	2	1	2	3
44	2	2	1	5	2
45	4	2	1	5	5
46	1	3	1	2	1
47	4	2	2	0	2
48	0	1	1	0	0
49	2	2	2	3	1
50	3	4	0	3	1
	156	152	80	177	137

Correlation results of dependent and independent variables

In the correlation study it is evident from the results that all independent variables have positive relation with dependent variables. This shows a directional relationship among those variables. As in the results two variables i.e. grammar and vocabulary are highly correlated with the pauses due to hesitation and word repetition and the remaining variables pronunciation is least correlated with the dependent variable.

It is therefore clearly understood that grammar and vocabulary is producing direct impact upon the dependent variables pauses due to hesitation and word repetition.

Table 2
Correlation results

| Variables	Correlation results	Strength
Grammar/Pauses due to hesitation	0.24	Weak
Grammar/repetition	0.54	Strong
Vocabulary/Pauses due to hesitation	0.46	Strong
Vocabulary/Word repetition	0.82	Strong
Pronunciation/Pauses due to hesitation	0.15	Weak
Pronunciation/Word repetition	0.2	Weak

Frequency distribution clearly shows that 40% of the population is facing oral fluency problems due to limited grammar and 39% is facing the problem due to lack of vocabulary and 20% are facing problem because of pronunciation.

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Grammar	156	40.20%
Vocabulary	152	39.10%
Pronunciation	80	20.60%
Total	388	100%
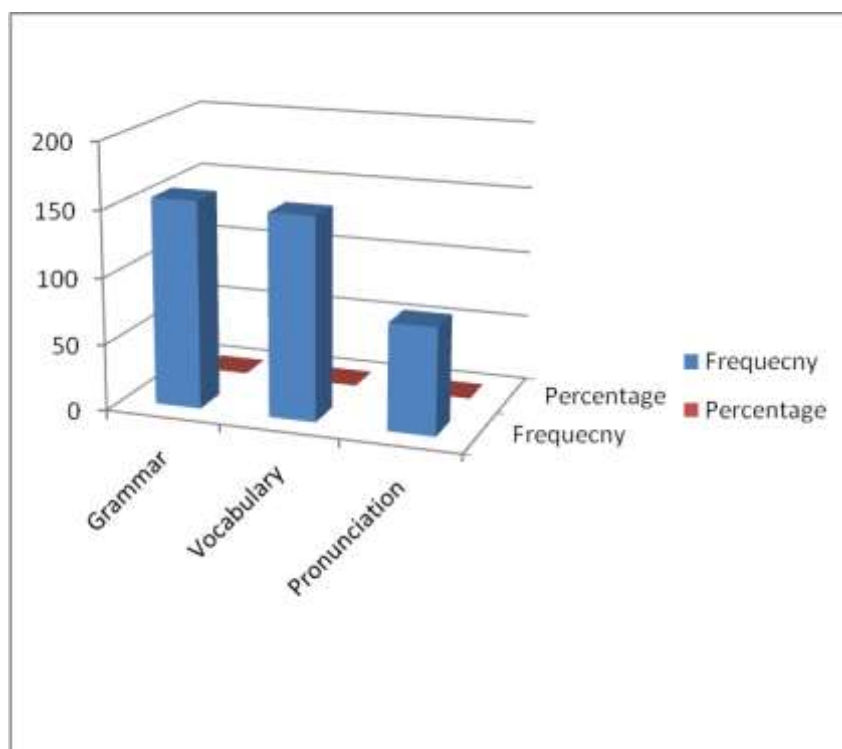
Graph presentation of overall results

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Pauses due to hesitation	177	56.30%
Word repetition	137	43.60%
Total	314	100%
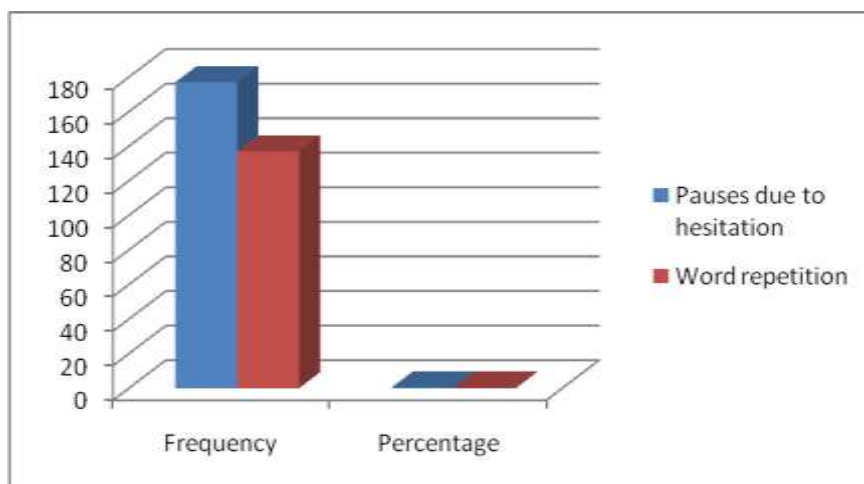
Conclusion

No doubt from this study one can get a valuable insight in to the problems related to oral fluency; caused by the lack of oral proficiency, both from statistical and descriptive point of view. This study was an attempt to comprehend the true nature of the problem from different perspective.

From the results of this study it is evident that the oral fluency of a student is most of the time affected by grammar. If they don't have proper knowledge of grammar rules and their automatic application in verbal speech, they won't be able to speak fluently. After grammar, the second factor which affects the verbal fluency is lack of vocabulary. While speaking whenever students get short of appropriate words; supposed to be used in relation with particular context, they start feeling hesitation or start repeating words and lines which they had uttered before. This thought is proved with evidence in correlation study where word repetition has a strong relationship with vocabulary mistakes.

In most of the ESL class's teacher emphasize reading and writing skills giving less attention to oral language with a thought that learners will develop oral fluency outside the classroom and this expectation is always unfounded. Most commonly this happens with second language learners who do not need aid of English to communicate with their fellows and family outside the classroom. Even inside the classroom such students do not get hold of verbal communication tasks. Whenever these students are given some verbal task in group, they just start talking in their mother tongue. Although they may want to express their ideas orally in English but they find themselves unable to do it. The major reason behind all this is that they do not have proper knowledge of a target language. If the structures and words which would have been familiar to them they would have used them in their verbal communication without any hesitation.

All such evidences clearly shows that extensive knowledge of grammar and vocabulary which is put in to the minds of second language learners is rarely put into practice. Due to which growing number of students start becoming incapable of speaking English and also affect their academic growth.

As the results of this research study have shown that oral proficiency does affect oral fluency. It is important that language instructors should recognize that the limited knowledge of

grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation of a native language are creating problems for second language learners. After acknowledging the presence of such problems they should assist the second language learners in this regard and should change their teaching strategy according to the requirement of the student's problems. There should be some specific teacher training courses related to the ways of enhancing student's oral fluency in order to make teachers aware of this complex issue and hence, mitigate it. It is also recommended that teachers should confront student's erroneous and irrational beliefs by cultivating in them "reasonable commitments for successful language learning."(Horwitz, 1988: cited in onwuegbuzie et al 1999, p 232)

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