



The Relationship among ELT Students' Speaking Accuracy and Fluency and Teachers' Oral Skill Class Presentation

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Abstract

This paper is a report of a study on speaking fluency performed by six low level students using retelling technique. The aim of the study is to find out the effect of retelling on the students' speaking fluency and to know the strategies used by those students while retelling a story. The data were the speaking transcripts which were analyzed to see the progress after six-time treatment was given. The result reveals that the speaking fluency of the students increased in some areas as shown by the improvement on their vocabulary and comprehensibility. The result of this study may be used for promoting the students' speaking accuracy and fluency in high schools and universities where their teachers try to Speak English for presenting their lessons.

Keywords: fluency, speaking, accuracy, class presentation, oral skill

INTRODUCTION

One of the main concerns of language learners is how to improve their speaking proficiency in general and different components of speaking proficiency such as fluency, accuracy, accent, vocabulary, comprehension, and communication in particular.

According to Susüzer (2006), the language that underlies communication between human beings is a sophisticated and very advanced system that enables emotions, thoughts and desires to transfer to the others by making use of the common elements and rules in terms of voice and meaning. The features of the language can be listed as (Susüzer, 2006; Selçuk University, 2009): 1- The first and main function of the language is its being an understanding means. 2- One of the most important features of the language is its being natural. 3- Each language has some rules peculiar to itself. 4- Language is a living organism that lives in its own rules has some features such as being born-growth- maturation. 5- Language is a common property of a nation. 6- Language is a social being.

Stoicovy (2004) also points out that based on several studies, retelling has positive influence in language learning as it promotes students' ability in rearranging information from the text that they have read. In addition, Brown and Cambourne (1987) mention that during the retelling process students apply and develop their language knowledge through the internalization of the texts' features.

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The recycling feature of news and the fluency of speech produced by the news casters provide a good chance for language learners to improve different aspects of their language proficiency. Different songs can also motivate language learners to learn the language better if they are used besides the lessons to be learnt (Pishkar, 2017). Moreover, Different films can improve listening comprehension and motivate language learners (Chapple & Curtis, 2000; Ryan, 1998).

Speech fluency is hard to acquire for most language learners but greatly contributes to one's image of successful and fluent speaking. Identifying and analyzing working mechanisms that influence fluency then should be regarded significant for our understanding of the complexities of speaking. It is probably one of the most important qualities of speech which greatly contributes to examiners' intuitive understanding of proficiency and technical assessment of learners' oral performance.

As fluency is considered a critical, perhaps foundational, component of speaking proficiency, temporal measures of fluency are expected to be strongly related to holistic ratings of speech quality.62p.381 Lennon (1990) argues that fluency is conceptualized and discussed in the literature in either a broad or narrow sense (see also Schmitt-Gevers, 1993). In the broad sense, the term has been used to describe a range of characteristics routinely displayed in the oral performances of adult first language speakers. In an article considered a classic in applied linguistics, Fillmore (1979) argued that first language fluency is a multi-faceted phenomenon that includes pausing, complexity, coherence, appropriateness, and even creativity. This broad sense of fluency extends into the domain of second language acquisition where the term is used to refer to mastery and ease of acquired second language performance (Faerch et al., 1984). First and second language domains are thought to converge when second language performance becomes 'native-like' at high levels of proficiency (Chambers, 1997). Successful communication plays a critical role both in spoken discourse and written one.

In the broad sense, 'fluency' is one of the most common terms used to describe speech, but the broad conceptualization remains vague (Fulcher, 1987; 2003). The lack of precision associated with the term reflects the difficulty of modeling rater perceptions; however, rater perceptions have been aligned with the observable and quantifiable aspects of performance represented by temporal measures of fluency (e.g., pausing, speech rate, and mean length of run. In language education, three primary aspects of communication should be taken into account: accuracy, appropriateness and fluency.

The first, long the traditional goal of teaching, has in recent years been weakened by interlanguage theory and the view that a knowledge of usage alone is insufficient. An overemphasis on Monitor-use (Krashen's terminology) may also adversely affect acquisition, lead to slow pacing and an impoverishment of language samples presented in the classroom.

Methods play important role in achieving the educational objectives and arranging educational status (Pishkar, 2015). Using the most effective method among the ones used for learning and teaching purposes in order to reach the objectives on this arranged road increases the efficiency. It is necessary to make the learners gain capacities such as applying their knowledge and skills they have obtained, making up decisions, taking responsibility, communicating and working in a team (Gürol 2003; Dogan 1997) The methods which take the learners as center, allow the learners to learn and assign the teachers to act as a guide have been gained importance in order to make learning more joyful. Drama which is one of the methods spoken very frequently these days is based on the students' learning through acting and experiencing. Drama training was started in France by J.J. Rousseau (1712- 1778). According to the mentality of education believed by J.J. Rousseau, it says that development of body, covering and emotions is smooth and natural and the duty of the trainer is to respect to this development process and

Fluency

In speech, fluency is almost accepted as a function of variables related to time such as rate of speaking and the number of words or syllables uttered between pauses (Wood, 2008). Although this definition is the most prevalent one, there are many disagreements over this explication of fluency (Wingate, 1984). Neither have there been enough investigations on the relationship between FSs in speech and the effectiveness of oral communication. Fluency is, nonetheless, measured as syllables uttered per minute, the length of run (the number of syllables uttered between pauses), and the number of pauses (Pishkar, 2017).

Oral fluency is a measure of how well and how easily you can communicate your ideas clearly and accurately in speech. Of course, correct pronunciation of individual sounds and words is very important for fluency, for your listener has to be able to hear and distinguish the words you are saying. However, stress, rhythm, and intonation can be even more important, for they help make both single words and combinations of words, like phrases, clauses, and whole sentences, understandable to your listener. Grammar is the structure of the language and vocabulary holds the individual building blocks, so both are also essential to fluency. In conversation, you also have to be able to understand what the other person is saying, so good listening skills are also needed in oral fluency. Combining listening and reading with oral skills is a great way to improve your fluency.

Accuracy and fluency are two key components of second language acquisition. In today's world, it seems that learning the usage of grammar and focusing on accuracy are

emphasized by many language students over fluency. This topic of accuracy and fluency has been a controversial issue that has been discussed for many years. Although some formalists argue that learning a language means learning forms and rules, some activists take a different view and claim that learning a language means learning how to use a language (Eskey, 1983). Thus, this essay will argue that accuracy is not necessarily more important than fluency. It depends on learners' needs and the purpose of instruction in second language acquisition.

It is also suggested that education level is relevant to focus on accuracy or fluency. This is because teaching learners with preliterate level differs from teaching ones with literate level. If adults are at the level of beginners with little formal education, then focusing on form will be less important while fluency is the top priority (Pishkar, 2015). On the other hand, if the learners are at the intermediate or advanced level and are well educated, accuracy may be required and it may be necessary for the teacher to provide some feedback relating to form correction in order for them to make progress. Therefore, focusing on accuracy is not enough, fluency still needs to be concerned in terms of learners' age, proficiency level and educational background. On the other hand, if the teacher is focusing on productive skills, such as speaking and writing, then formal accuracy will become an essential concern. In addition, it has to be remembered that fluency is still needed for communication purpose. This is because if the teacher is offering a conversation class which purpose is for learners to really use the language to communicate with others, then fluency will be emphasized.

Strategies for developing speaking skills

Students often think that the ability to speak a language is the product of language learning, but speaking is also a crucial part of the language learning process. Effective instructors teach students speaking strategies, using minimal responses, recognizing scripts, and using language to talk about language, that they can use to help themselves expand their knowledge of the language and their confidence in using it. These instructors' help students learn to speak so that the students can use speaking to learn.

Measures of fluency

The combination of several measures, as used in the present research, can give evidence of chunking and proceduralization, as explained below. First, there is the mean length of pauses measured in seconds. The different ways of determining pauses and setting cutoff points are discussed below. Second, the phonation/time ratio is calculated as the percentage of time spent speaking as a proportion of the total time taken to produce the speech sample. This measure is related to the number of pauses in a speech: If the mean length of pauses is stable but the number of pauses decreases, phonation/time ratio increases. Third, the mean length of fluent runs is the mean number of syllables produced between pauses. Finally, the articulation rate—in syllables per minute—is calculated by dividing the total number of syllables produced by the amount of time taken to produce them, excluding pause time. It is slightly different from speech rate, which includes pause time. Kormos and D'enes (2004) found that the first three of these

measures were good predictors of fluency ratings by native and nonnative speaker judges, although articulation rate was not. (Two other measures not included in this study were also good predictors: speech rate and pace—that is, the number of stressed words per minute.) Towell et al. (1996) argued that these measures in combination can be used as indicators of proceduralization. The number and length of pauses by themselves are not reliable indicators of proceduralization, as they vary with task demands, planning opportunities, and speaker characteristics (some speakers pause more and longer than others). Another measure to consider is the mean length of fluent runs (i.e., stretches of speech that are spoken without pauses).³⁹ Speech repetition, which is our focus here, may lead to an increase in fluency because of advantages at several levels. First, at the semantic level (conceptualization), students generate the content for their delivery during their planning time and while they speak. In the second and third deliveries, they can benefit from this, which removes the need to pause and hesitate to plan new semantic content.

Second, vocabulary and grammatical structures are generated not so much during pretask planning as during the first delivery of a speech (cf. Bygate & Samuda, 2005, p. 65). Again, in subsequent deliveries students can benefit from having generated content. Even though they may not be able to remember and reproduce their first delivery verbatim, the words and grammar items they used are still more activated than before and thus more readily available for use (the priming effect discussed earlier). Pauses related to lexical searches and hesitations related to monitoring of grammar are likely to be reduced for these items. Overall, when students repeat their speech, they do not have to generate content (semantic, grammatical, lexical), which frees up cognitive resources, which can be used in several ways. One way is to speak more fluently, with shorter pauses and fewer hesitations, as Nation (1989) found. Another way is to get access to different language items, such as more sophisticated, or specific, vocabulary and more complex grammatical structures, which is also consistent with Nation's findings.

Accuracy

Nation (1989) investigated the fluency, accuracy, and complexity of speeches given in the 4/3/2 task, comparing the first and last speeches. He found an increase in speech rate (words per minute) and a decrease in the number of false starts, repeated words, and hesitations (such as uh, um). Accuracy improved only slightly for half of the participants, mostly when grammatical contexts were repeated but not for errors that involved inflections. The strategies used by the speakers to fit their speeches into less time included omitting unimportant details and changing grammatical constructions, which in some cases involved more complex sentences. Arevart and Nation (1991) replicated the study with a greater number of participants and found that both speaking rate (words per minute) and hesitations per minute improved significantly on the retellings. They concluded that the 4/3/2 task gives learners the opportunity to speak with higher than normal fluency and complexity during their third delivery. Neither study tried to tease apart the effects of repetition and time pressure, nor did they

include posttests to examine the long-term effects of the task, in contrast to the present study.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants of the study were 60 male and female Iranian learners of English with the age range of 18-20. They were all studying English in language institutes located in Yasuj city, the center of Kohgiluyeh & Buyerahmad Province in Iran. All participants were born in Iran, spoke Persian as their first language, didn't speak English out of classroom situation, and they had at least four semesters of formal language instruction. The subjects participated in English classes to enhance their conversational skills; however, they didn't take part in any other English classes. Most importantly, the subjects neither took any course of CS training nor encountered any teacher teaching CSs, and any materials involving CSs; although, perhaps indirectly, unintentionally, and unconsciously, they in their language and interlanguage experience gained some CSs of which they were not informed in a specialized and conscious manner. The participants were randomly divided in two groups. They were then randomly assigned into experimental and control groups.

Instruments

Undoubtedly one of the most important steps in this study was data collection. To do this, in this study some instruments including a pretest and posttest each consisting of the same number of tasks were used. The two tests were oral and measured speaking performance of the language learners. The reliability of the two tests was estimated through inter-rater reliability approach. That is, the speaking performance of the participants and the CSs used in their speaking was evaluated by two different raters. The coefficient correlation between the ratings of the two raters in both tests exceeded .8 which is an acceptable index for reliability. Each test consisted of the same types of tasks which will be explained separately in the following sections.

Data analysis

To measure accuracy, all the main clauses plus subordinate clauses attached to or embedded in them were counted as T-units. Only those T-units that contained no syntactic, grammatical, lexical, or spelling errors were counted as error-free T-units. In other words, the number of error free T-units are divided by the total number of t-units in order to calculate accuracy (Arent, 2003). To measure fluency, the number of correct words which each participant produced in one minute was counted. In other words, fluency was calculated by counting the number of words per minute. The data of the study were analyzed through different statistical procedures including descriptive and inferential statistics. As we were concerned with frequency of communicative strategies in the participants' oral production, the best statistical test is a nonparametric Chi-square test. In this study, we had three tests pretest, posttest 1 and posttest2. The results for each test are presented in the following sections.

RESULTS

As the results in table 2 indicate, there is no significant difference between frequencies of communicative strategies used in oral production by the participants of both groups. That is, they used the same number of communicative strategies.

Results of the first posttest

The posttest was administered to measure the frequency of each communicative strategy in the oral production of the participants. The frequency of each CS and the inferential statistics (Chi-square) are presented in tables 3 & 4, respectively.

Based on observing average of marks in two groups, we can conclude that students in fluency group earn higher marks than accuracy group.

Table1. Group Statistics

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
mark	fluency	15	18.5000	1.19896	.30957
	accuracy	15	16.1500	2.36379	.61033

Table 2. Independent Samples Test

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Mark	Equal variances assumed	12.324	.002	3.434	28	.002	2.35000	.68435	.94817	3.75183
	Equal variances not assumed			3.434	20.756	.003	2.35000	.68435	.92580	3.77420

Bitchener (2008) investigated the effectiveness of other direct feedback combinations: (1) direct error correction with written meta-linguistic explanation (of the rule and an example of its use) and oral meta-linguistic explanation (in which discussion and clarification occurred); (2) direct error correction with written meta-linguistic explanation (of the rule and an example of its use); (3) direct error correction; and (4) no corrective feedback. Feedback was provided on only two functional uses of the English article system (the indefinite article “a” for first mention and the definite article “the” for subsequent or anaphoric mentions).

Groups one and three outperformed the control group while group two only just failed to do so. When the study was extended (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008a, 2009) to include an additional 69 learners, no difference was observed between the same three treatment combinations. Thus, it is possible that the larger sample size eliminated the difference in effect between group two and the other two treatment groups in the first study (Bitchener, 2008).

Sheen's (2007) study of the relative effectiveness of two types of direct feedback (error correction and written metalinguistic explanation) also found no difference between the two feedback options in the immediate post-test, but in the correction. Sheen suggests that the passage of time may have been the critical factor in facilitating this delayed effect for meta-linguistic explanation.

Considering these studies as a whole, we can see (1) that only the studies that have compared different types of direct written CF have investigated its effect on new pieces of writing over time and (2) that the provision of metalinguistic explanation may produce greater accuracy than other types of direct feedback. The nature of the metalinguistic explanation may have been the critical factor in the long-term difference in effect in the Bitchener and Knock (2010) and Sheen (2007) studies.

Further research that avoids the design and execution shortcomings of earlier comparisons between direct and indirect CF is also required to see (1) if there is a difference in effect between the two types and (2) if any difference is retained in the writing of new texts over time. Additionally, the proficiency level of L2 writers may have a further effect on the findings of such investigations. For these reasons, the study we are now going to report investigated the longitudinal effectiveness of providing advanced L2 writers with direct and indirect written CF on two functional uses of the English article system

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The first research question addressed the effect of oral presentation, as a speaking task, on learners' oral production in terms of accuracy. In response to this question, Table 4.2 revealed that this task can improve accuracy of students' speech. Like the present study, some researchers believe that task structures can affect accuracy positively (e.g. Tavakoli & Skehan, 2005; Tavakoli & Foster, 2008, Tavakoli, 2009, Jamshidnejad, 2011), although some others found no influence of task structure on speech accuracy (Skehan & Foster, 1999; Rahimpour & Mehrang, 2010). Skehan and Foster (1999), reported that accuracy can be influenced by task structure only when students engaged in some kind of pre-task activity before their under focused performance; this claim can justify students' improvement in post-test-session in the present study. Treatment sessions and the opportunity of each learner to present orally in class can play the role of pre-task activity before performing in post-test session.

The second question focused on the efficacy of oral presentation on speaking fluency of students. Findings of Table 4.3 revealed that task structure can improve fluency which is in line with the research findings by Foster and Skehan (1996), Skehan and Foster (1999) and Tavakoli and Skehan (2005). On the contrary, Tavakoli and Foster (2008), (Pishkar, 2016) and Rahimpour and Mehrang (2010) reported that task structure cannot improve fluency. For more study about effect of fluency and accuracy and their features in the oral presentations the researchers can refer to Tavakoli & Foster, 2008, Tavakoli, 2009, Jamshidnejad, 2011.

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