

# English Competency and Factors Affecting the Speaking Performance of College Students

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**Abstract**— This research aimed to evaluate the English competency and factors affecting the speaking performance of eighty (80) Bachelor of Arts in English Language (AB-EL) students at the Visayas State University (VSU). The first set of respondents composed of forty (40) AB-EL students were made to produce ten (10) Cebuano (L1) and ten (10) English (L2) responses based on the ten (10) cartoon images searched from Google Image but modified with the aid of graphic/photo editing software. For criteria evaluation, the study adopted the grammatical error categories by Ellis (1997). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Pearson  $r$  and linear regression analyses were also used. Competency in this regard was measured by the correlation and regression modelling of the responses made between attention time and performance errors. Results showed that application of grammar rules in speaking construction has no relation to the attention time. The study also found out that in speaking fluency, "hesitation" occurrence is a product of the learners' lack knowledge of the target language and it is a useful tool in measuring speaking competency rather than grammatical error. In both languages, "Misinformation" is the common grammatical error committed by the respondents while "Parenthetical remark" is the most "Hesitation" occurrence. In all parameters, results showed a similar trend and characteristic concluding that the respondents attained a good level of speaking competency. The study suggests that it is vital for students to have a good command on the rules of restrictions of the target language because conscious application of the rules on grammar will affect the fluency of the utterance. On the other hand, the second set of respondents composed of the remaining forty (40) AB-EL students answered a survey questionnaire on factors affecting students' speaking performance adopted from Mai and Tuan (2015). The speaking proficiency test was from the International English Language Testing System (IELTS, 2008). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Pearson  $r$  coefficient was used for correlation analysis. Findings revealed that there were various factors that affect the speaking performance of the students like the lack of motivation, worried about committing mistakes, and deficient vocabulary. There were also factors that have a significant relationship to students' speaking proficiency, and these were "confidence", "listener's support", "cannot think of anything to say" and "speak very little or not at all". Findings suggest that teachers are to be more aware on the factors that hinder the students' oral participation so they could devise relevant teaching strategies that could match to their students' needs to become proficient speakers of the English language.

**Keywords**— English competency, factors, speaking performance, grammatical error categories.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In understanding the second language (L2) acquisition, Fulcher (1995) stated that Chomsky (1965) has drawn the distinction between competence and performance. Competence refers to the speaker's knowledge of the language, while the speaker's use of this knowledge is performance or the actual use of the language in concrete situations. Oral performance is operationalized by occurrence of errors in the speech production. Ellis (1997) stated that error is an indication of the learners' lack of knowledge in the target language. Thus, it is a way to check the consistency in learners' performance. He further categorized errors into grammatical categories: 1) "omission" which is leaving out an item for an utterance to be considered grammatical; 2) "misinformation" which is using one grammatical form in place of another grammatical form; and 3) "misordering" which is putting the words in an utterance in the wrong order. As a second language learner of English, it is natural that not all can speak fluently and concisely the English language (Tong, 2006). One keeps on switching from English to the first language and vice versa, and due to the different grammar between the Mother Tongue and the foreign language, it is very often that students find this as an obstacle in learning to speak English. Therefore, without a good understanding of grammar, the message or the idea will not be sent clearly and effectively to the listeners. Moreover, students' lack self-

confidence because of their deficient language background may affect his or her oral participation (He and Chen, 2009). In this study, it was hypothesized that the AB-EL students of VSU had already acquired a more or less homogeneous proficiency, competency, and higher level of fluency in a prepared or planned written and oral discourses in English and had already established their speaking competence. The real question now is what about in an unprepared, unplanned or impromptu situations where time is limited, and what could be the factors affecting their speaking performance. If ever they need some improvements, they can probably develop their grammatical competence and speaking performance through the findings of this study.

### Objectives of the Study

This research attempted to investigate the English competency as well as the factors affecting the speaking performance of the college students. Specifically, the research aimed to:

1. Determine the relationship between students' attention time and their performance errors in both Cebuano (L1) and English (L2) responses;
2. Determine the common types of errors and hesitations committed by the students in L1 and L2;
3. Determine the students' speaking proficiency;
4. Determine the factors affecting the speaking performance of the students; and

5. Determine the relationship between the factors affecting the students' speaking performance and their speaking proficiency.

### *Theoretical Background*

The Monitor Theory of adult second language acquisition as hypothesized by Krashen (1981) states that adults have two independent systems in developing ability in second languages: the subconscious acquisition and the conscious language learning, and that these two systems are interrelated in a different way. He further argues that Monitoring Theory has an extremely limited function in language performance. He gives three conditions for its use: 1) there must be sufficient time; 2) the focus must be on form and not on meaning; and 3) the user must know the rule. This study considered attention time in milliseconds as dependent variable. The independent variables are the grammatical errors and hesitation occurrences in oral production. These grammatical errors are classified into omission, misinformation, and misordering. Hesitation occurrences were classified into false start, repetition, parenthetical remarks, silent pause, filled pause, and lengthening. Meanwhile, it is necessary to also determine the factors affecting the speaking performance of the students so that they will be aware of the effects these factors bring. These things are all important for them to form or to have a strong foundation in communicative competence, specifically, in speaking as a preparation for more crucial situations ahead of them. The theory formulated by Bygate (1987) says that in order to achieve a communicative goal through speaking, there are two factors to be considered: knowledge of the language and skill in using this knowledge.

### II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The first set of respondents composed of forty (40) AB-EL students were evaluated based from a criteria adopted from Ellis (1997). Respondents were made to produce 10 Cebuano (L1) and 10 English (L2) responses based on cartoon images searched from Google Image but modified with the aid of graphic/photo editing software. Attention time was manually read in the timeline of the audio recording using an audio editing software application Wondershare Filmora version 8.0.0 (2017). Grammatical errors were taken from the transcription of the responses and further classified according to categories of omission, misinformation, and misordering in both L1 and L2. Hesitation occurrences were recorded and noted by listening to the recorded responses using the above-mentioned audio application software and further classified according to the following categories: false start, repetition, parenthetical remark, silent pause, filled pause, and lengthening. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Pearson r and linear regression analyses were also employed. Meanwhile, the second set of respondents composed of the remaining forty (40) AB-EL students answered a survey questionnaire adopted from Mai and Tuan (2015). The speaking proficiency test was from the International English Language Testing System (IELTS, 2008). The researchers requested an instructor from the Department of Liberal Arts and Behavioral Sciences (DLABS) to conduct the oral activity

with the respondents and to rate them based on the IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson r coefficient was used for correlation analysis.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For the students' English competency, there were 400 total responses in Cebuano (L1) and another 400 total responses in English (L2) gathered and recorded. Results showed that L2 recorded a higher time than L1 which can be considered normal since the respondents had a strong command of their Mother Tongue (Cebuano). However, respondents were found to be confident enough to speak the L2 even though they are not that good in grammar. Findings further revealed that there is no significant relationship between the students' attention time and their grammatical errors but there is a positive correlation between hesitation occurrence and time. This means that as hesitation occurrence increases or decreases, attention time also increases or decreases correspondingly. Results further showed that there is a significant relationship between grammatical error and hesitation. This implies that as hesitation increases or decreases, the grammatical error also increases or decreases correspondingly. Nonetheless, the study found out that there is a moderate relationship between grammatical error and hesitation occurrence in L1 responses. The implication is that even in L1, the respondents still hesitate in their utterances when they are conscious of their syntax and grammar construction. Linear models were produced and they indicated a similar trend between L1 and L2 although L1 has a lesser time compared to L2 but the characteristic showed that statistically, AB-EL students attained a good level of English speaking fluency. In error analysis, results showed that Misinformation is the common grammatical error committed by respondents both in L1 and L2. Moreover, results also showed that parenthetical remark is the most common Hesitations committed by the respondents both in L1 and L2 probably because of the attempts to correct utterances the respondents perceived as wrong so they would just utter automatically words or phrases that could serve as replacements. On the other hand, among the remaining 40 respondents, result in their speaking proficiency test showed that 5% of them fell under "expert" user, 12.5% "very good user", 27.5 % "good user", 37.5% "competent user", 15% "modest user", and 2.5% "intermittent user". On the factors affecting the speaking performance of the students, results showed that "confidence" stands out as the most dominant affective factor among the respondents. Even if they major in English Language, confidence, anxiety, pressure to perform well, teacher's feedback, insufficient knowledge, time for preparation, motivation to speak, listener's support, and time to perform still hindered them to participate in oral performances. In addition, among the twenty-six (26) factors listed in the study, four (4) factors emerged as having a significant relationship to the students' speaking proficiency. These are the "listener's support" "confidence", "cannot think of anything to say, and "speak very little or not at all". Results imply that students must have a strong foundation of

confidence within them to have higher chances not to fall into the listed factors.

#### IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has come to conclude that in speaking, a speaker must have a good command on the grammatical rules and restrictions of the target language because conscious application of the rules on grammar will affect the fluency of the utterance. Moreover, findings were able to establish that if students are more motivated and confident to speak, the higher are the chances for them to enjoy participating in oral activities and become proficient as time goes by.

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