Oral communication Problems Encountering English Major Students: Causes & Remedies

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Abstract: **Speaking English well is crucial for undergraduates whose major is English. Speaking fluently is a goal for any second language learner. This study aimed at describing some defects that encounter the students during speaking English. Some students of English major at Education Faculty , Misrata University show a certain degree of failure when it comes to produce oral language. They feel embarrassed of making mistakes so they prefer to keep silent instead of producing the language.. A questionnaire was used to collect data about this problem. Forty students shared in the questionnaire to conduct this study. Qualitative method was adopted to analyze the data obtained. The findings of the study revealed that there were some problems get in the way when speaking English by some graduates in the faculty of Education, English majors such as lack of the time allotted for teaching this skill, Lack adequate exposure to English inside and outside the classroom, lack of some grammatical and pronunciation components, lack of retrieving the suitable vocabulary during oral communication, lack of word collocation and lack of not being use English out-side the classes, Students are not exposed to native speakers. Lack of self- confidence to speak L2 with non-native teachers.**

Keywords: **Speaking, oral production, factors, willing to communicate.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking is considered to be an important factor as it is one of the four language skills, (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). People in general concentrate upon this skill rather than the others, because it represents someone's knowledge about the language he knows. The major goal of all English language teaching process should give the learners the ability to use English effectively, accurately in communication (Davies &Pears, 1998). It can be said that not all language students can speak the target language accurately and fluently and this may be due to many factors concerning with language study. Students of English can pass and get the written knowledge about the language but the problem is how they can produce the language they have been studying in the faculty.

EFL Students have Some difficulties in speaking English such as use of the mother tongue instead of English when the students interact with each other in the classroom, inadequate time for speaking skill, lack of knowledge of the vocabulary in the target language and low proficiency in oral performance. (Al- Hosni, 2014 & Al-Jamal and Al-Jamal, 2014).

Problem statement:

Specifically, the majority of the students in English major in Libya lack the real life situation to get the opportunity to use the speaking skill of the target language they have been studying. In the department of English, faculty of education, many students still adhere to their mother tongue, ignoring at the same time the foreign language use. The learners are unable to participate, argue, share, debate or continue in a conversation. This is may be due to the limited exposure to English language use or little participation in class. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to find out the real reasons or factors behind the inability to speak successful communication.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Oral Communication is a challenge for any language learner. It is considered two-way process between a speaker and a listener. The rolls are interchangeable. The speakers becomes a listener and a listener becomes a speaker. Flucher (2003) argues that second language speaking is complex. He confirms that the learners who want to speak L2 have to master the grammar, vocabulary and the sounds. Al-Hosni (2014) believes that children can acquire language without effort. The ability grows with age and this needs practice. Richards & Renandya,(2002) Point out that achieving proficiency in oral communication is the main dream ad motivation which a large percentage of learners bring to language classes. Harmer (1991) & Grower et al (1995) noted that speaking has many different aspects including two major categories which are accuracy involving the correct use of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Brown and Yule (1983) confirm that spoken language production is often regarded as one of the most difficult aspects of language learning. Liu and Jackson (2008) claim that lack of vocabulary was regarded as the main hindrance for spoken communication used by Chinese learners. Morozova & Yeltsin (2013) point out in their study that Russian students had the following problems: 1. Inhibition to speak English. They are afraid of making mistakes. (2). The students use their native language when work in pairs. (3).The students do not have information on the topics discussed. (4) Lack of verbal and resources for solving the given task. They also provided the following steps to enhance speaking skills.

 1. Placing more emphasis on the quality of study books at the basic level.

 2. Giving enough time to speaking and phonetic drill of students.

 3. Not scolding but rather providing a friendly environment 4.

 4. Using practical and applicable strategies by teachers for students while speaking in English most of the time.

5. Developing boldness and confidence in students to ask questions of their teachers.

6. The classes should not be over loaded.

7. Awards and motivation for students.

8. Encouraging listening to CNN and BBC channels for keeping up-to-date and constantly retrain teachers,

9. Arranging various activities and balancing in the courses with respect to literature and language.

Byron (1994:9) believes that the main goal in teaching the productive skill is oral fluency and this can be defined as the ability to express oneself intelligibility reasonably accurately and without too much hesitation or otherwise communication may breakdown because the listener gets impatient or not interest. Byron (1994) sequences the stages of learning a language as presentation stage when the teacher introduces something new to be learned, practice stage when the teacher allows the learners to work under his control and production stage when the teacher gives them the opportunities to work on their own.

Tuan & Mai (2015) conducted a study dealing with factors affecting students speaking performance at Le Thanh Hiem High School in Vietnam. Their results revealed that (1) the students speak very little or not. (2) They cannot think of anything to say. (3) They use mother tongue instead of English when they discuss in groups or pairs. (4) Low Participation. (5) Lack of motivation to express themselves. (6) They translate Vietnamese before they speak. The students' difficulties occur when they speak English because of their limitations in mastering the component of speaking. They rarely practice speaking inside and outside the classroom. Rubiati (2010) conducted a study dealing with improving students' speaking skill through debate technique. She concluded that this technique is very interested to be implemented to improve this skill. Debating make the students co-operate and try to defend for their team and they are active to speak in the classroom. Moreover, this technique is more enjoyable for the teacher and the students. Her results showed that the students who taught through debate technique increased as well as their motivation in speaking.

Improving the students oral fluency is one of the most challenging issues for languages teachers and students. Skehan in Wang (20014) says that speaking fluently refers to the ability to produce the spoken language without pausing or hesitation . Yuan & Ellis (2003) points out that speaking accuracy indicates the extent to which the language produced conforms to the target language norms which involves the correct use of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. Schneider (1997) provided a solution for fluency problems which is to focus on fluency and make the students communicate English fluently. He added that knowledge of vocabulary and grammar cannot put one into oral practice. It

is helpful to focus on English and try to improve the students fluency. He suggested to let the learners tape themselves a record while speaking in pairs. Pair taping allows L2 learners to concentrate on making the output from the accumulated knowledge of English. The students difficulties appear when they speak the language. This is because of their limitation in mastering the component of speaking and they rarely practice speaking inside and outside the classroom. This is also due to the limitations of vocabulary they have. Liu & Jackson (2008) claim that lack of vocabulary was regarded as a main obstacle for the spoken communication English learners in china. During writing, the students have time to figure out the most suitable words and phrases but when it comes to speaking the words disappear and never come to their mind so the expressions may not be produced to say the intended meaning precisely. Liu & Jackson (2008) conducted a study concerning with Chinese EFL learners' unwillingness to communicate oral foreign language anxiety. Their results revealed that (1) most of the students were willing to practice in interpersonal conversations, but many of them did not like to put themselves in a risk of speaking English in class. (2) More than one third of the learners felt anxious and feared being negatively evaluated. Goh in Wang (2014) confirms that three types of speaking tasks can develop learners fluency which are: information gap tasks. This type of tasks requires to bridge the gap by exchanging their ideas, problem solving tasks which request the learners to solve problems together by using English and social monologues tasks which offer learners many opportunities to talk on a given topic. These tasks encourage students to express their opinions freely.

Uztosum & Erten (2014) conducted a study which dealt with the impact of English proficiency on the use of communication strategies employed by Turkish EFL learners. The study aimed at revealing the relationship between language proficiency and the use of communication strategies. Their study showed that Turkish EFL learners had limited speaking performance and they relied on particular strategies to overcome communication problems. The researchers related the use of these strategies to the learners' educational background which was lack of opportunities to practice the target language using different strategies. They mentioned that the Turkish EFL learners had limited communication strategies repertoires. The researchers also pointed out that Turkish EFL learners used communication strategies such as gaining time during conversations, repairing structural mistakes in their utterances, using alternative vocabularies when they are unable to recall the target words and rephrasing ambiguous points.

Shumin (1997) views learning to speak a foreign language requires more than knowing its grammar and semantic rules but he sees that learners must also acquire the knowledge of how native speakers use the language in the context of structured interpersonal exchange. He adds that Teaching a foreign language should incorporate some cultural elements that are intertwined with language itself. Culture of often taught explicitly as a part of linguistic forms that the students are learning.L2 learning has a number of features such as communicative and grammar competence , language proficiency and the attitude one's own or other culture. Shumin (1997) suggested that teachers can present situations in which there are cultural misunderstanding that cause people to become offended, angry or confused. In this case the students can discuss, debate, analyze and determine what went wrong and why.

Thanasoulas (2001) claims that culture is the foundation of communication. He views that culture and communication are inseparable because culture not only dictates who talks to whom about what and how the communication proceeds but also helps to determine how people encode messages, the meaning they have for messages and the conditions and circumstance under which different messages may or may not sent, noticed or interpreted.

Tomalin & Stempleski (1993: 7-8) in Thanasoulas (2001) provide goals of teaching culture:

• Helping students to develop an understanding of the fact that all people   exhibit culturally-conditioned behaviors.

• Helping students to develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class, and place of residence influence the ways in which people speak and behave.

• Helping students to become more aware of conventional behavior in common situations in the target culture.

• Helping students to increase their awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language.

• Helping students to develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture, in terms of supporting evidence.

• Helping students to develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture.

• Stimulating students' intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and to encourage empathy towards its people.

Harmer (1991) said that there are a number of strategies that teachers can make use to avoid problems occurring in the first place. He sees that prevention is always better than the disciplining cure. He added that unwilling to use English in the classroom during communicative activities make teachers by students behave in uncontrolled way because this is regarded as a student/ teacher failure. Some students resort to mother tongue when they cannot communicate in L2. Harmer (1991) adds that students are not blamed when using their first language in classroom. This is because the learners are incapable to produce anything or lack of knowledge about the topic. Harmer gave reasons for using L1 during oral communication activities such as **(1)** when the learners of use second language, they utilize translation without thinking about it. It is natural way specially in the elementary and intermediate levels to make the meaning of a new linguistic world through a linguistic world that the learners are familiar with. **(2)** students use L1 when they help each other during to explain something performing pedagogical tasks. **(3)** Teachers themselves do not prevent this habit. Students need to know when first language is permissible and when is prohibited.

Willingness to produce oral production is considered the ground towards communication. Learners appear to respond to a direct questions but many cannot continue or initiate interaction. Willingness to communicate is the first step and primary part in language use and a part of becoming a fluent of L2. When there is a will, there is away. Moazam & Mahmoodi (2014) investigated the relationship between willingness to communicate and a foreign achievement of Arabic language students at Al- Ali Sina University- Hamedan, Iran. They found that the students who are more willing to communicate are rather high at L2 achievement. Those learners have more abilities to interact in the classroom. Hashimoto (2002) carried out a study to measure the affective variables as predictors of reported second language use in classrooms of Japanese English second language. He concluded that the learners who have greater motivation and willingness to communicate reported using the language more frequently in the classroom.

Sahin (2005) carried out a study concerning with the effect of native speakers of English on the attitudes and achievement of learners in Turkey. He confirmed that the students who have been exposed to native English teachers have a better achievement in language learning process. He also found out that there was a significant correlation between students' attitudes and their achievement in English activities. Sahin(2005) mentioned that the results showed by the students who were exposed to native teachers had positive attitudes towards learning second language. They had more successful improvement in learning than the students who weren't exposed to native teachers.

3.   DATA ANALYSIS

Data collected through questionnaire can be considered as the most efficient way to get information. The students of English major were asked questions about the speaking skill to gain their views concerning this important skill in order to specify the problems that encounter them when acquiring the speaking skill. The method of analyzing the items of the questionnaire is a qualitative method. The research questions focused on the speaking factors that hinder the students to communicate L2 effectively.

1- I am not aware of using pronunciation features such as word   stress. (Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree):

Stress and intonation carry a great deal of information. English speakers use pitch variation and tunes. These features are very important for intelligibility because they are used to express intentions.

According to this item, it is clear that about 20% of the students agree and 3% strongly agree that some pronunciation features such as word stress and sentence stress affect their ability in speaking skill. They agree that they are aware of using this component which could be considered as one of the most problematic areas which sometimes get in the way during trying speaking the target language, whereas about 40% disagree and 20% strongly disagree about this issue and 20% were in neutral position.

2- The time given to teaching the speaking skill is (enough, not enough, more than enough):

Item number two presents information which clarifies that about 72% of the students agree that the allocated time for teaching the speaking skill is inadequate to carry out what required to accomplish many activities concerning with this skill, and only 28% of them agree that the given time is enough to teach this skill. The learners have to be given enough time to express themselves , discuss, debate or argue with other in the classroom. This increases their ability of speaking skills. Most of the time in the lectures, learners keep silent and just listening to lecturers and take down notes they need.

They have not chance to exchange information inside the class. The number of the students is also large in the classrooms. The classes are too crowded. The learners need more practice in the class which in turn needs much time. Students must be given chances to participate in conversation activities to improve their speaking skills.

3- I am not aware of word collocation. (Never, rarely, sometimes, usually, always):

This item revealed that about 40% of the students say that they sometimes face problem of word collocation which affect their performance in speaking skill of the target language, and about 15% of them said that they usually have this problem whereas 42% rarely encounter this defect and about 3% also always have this problem but 2% of them never get such this problem. Learners make many mistakes in producing L2 collocations. Collocations are very frequent in English language. Students should notice which words co-occur together in order to speak a foreign language as it is used by native speakers. Lack of essential vocabulary can be regarded as one of the most common reasons for the students' inability to express themselves in L2 language.

4- I cannot retrieve the suitable vocabulary rapidly when I speak. (Never, rarely, sometimes, usually, always):

Some L2 learners have word recalling difficulties. They cannot retrieve the suitable vocabulary in spoken language production to express themselves or talk about a topic. The students may stop and think of suitable words to share in a conversation. According to this item, it is obvious that 35% of the students sometimes face this defect and 28% said that they usually encounter problems of not retrieving the suitable word in the suitable time which caused lack of speaking the target language fluency, and about 22% of them rarely face such this problem, whereas about 15% of the students said never meet this problem.

5- I am not aware of some grammatical categories such as complex sentence and tenses. (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree):

This item introduces information that about 18% of the students agree that the lack of using some grammatical categories such as complex sentence and tenses. This can be considered as a major problem which gets in the way during speaking English. It is also clear that 15% of the students say strongly disagree and 40% of them disagree that this defect causes a problem, whereas about 27% of them are in neutral position.

6- I am fearful of making mistakes during speaking. (Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree):

This shows that 38% of the students agree and 13% of them strongly agree that their fear of committing mistakes during speaking the target language. This factor can be considered as one of the main problems encounter them when trying speaking the target language. And 7% of the students strongly disagree and 30% disagree that they face this problem, whereas about 12% of the them were in neutral position. The learners are afraid of being criticized by lectures or students when they commit speaking mistakes or cannot recall the appropriate words. Horwitz et al (1996) confirmed that language acquisition is related to three performance anxieties: communication apprehension which results from self-awareness, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety

7- I feel shy when talking in front of others particularly staff members. (Never, rarely, sometimes, usually, always):

Inhibition is the one of the main factors that hinder the students in sharing the speak activities in the classroom. According to what presented by this item, it is clear that about 40% of the students agreed that shyness was one of the defects which encounter them when speaking the target language since they are shy during speaking English with staff members at English department, and about 20% usually encounter this problem, and about 10% always have the same defect, whereas 20% rarely got this problem and 10% never faced such this lack.

8- My vocabulary knowledge is not sufficient to express ideas and argue about any topics. (Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree):

Item number eight reveals that about 35% of the students agree that lack of vocabulary knowledge is one of the problems which encounter them when speaking the target language and about 5% strongly agreed about this issue, whereas about 25% disagreed and 5% of them strongly disagreed about this issue and 29% are in neutral position. Knowing knowledge of vocabulary is a good indicator for language proficiency and performance and it is considered as one of the basic requirements of successful oral production. Vocabulary holds an important position in forming utterances. The limited

knowledge of vocabulary makes the learners unable to participate or continue in oral performance. This why most L2 learners prefer to keep silent to make themselves away from criticism or negative evaluation. The more vocabulary the students have, the more they can participate in conversations.

9- I don't have chance to practice speaking outside the classes? (Never, rarely, sometimes, usually, always):

The aim of the question is to know whether the learners have chances to practice language outside the classroom or not. The answers of the students show that 90% of the students don not have chances to practice speaking skill outside the classroom. Only %5 of the learners rarely have chance to speak with Asian lecturers who are teaching in English department at the college. Only 5% sometimes have a chance to communicate outside the class. Learners here live in Arab speaking community. They speak in Arabic all the time when they talk or exchange information with teachers or colleagues outside the class in the college or outside the college. The learners of language have no chance to improve the speaking skill outside the class and they spend most of the time listening because the nature of the lectures. The lessons are give as presentations by the lecturers. They cannot rehearse the language in shops, restaurants or public places such as bus stop or hotels. About 30 years ago, the learners of foreign languages at universities in Libya were used to be sent to English or French speaking countries. They had to spend a specific time there to improve their language skills such as speaking and listening . The learners were exposed to native speakers. But this teaching procedure had been changed. The education authorities in Libya have stopped sending the students who study foreign languages since 1983.

10- Most of our lecturers are non-native speakers, so this does not encourage me to speak in English. (Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree):

 Teaching English to speakers of L2 has increased and gained some importance recently. This item introduces information about how much successful non-native teachers can teach L2. The results show that 23% of the students agree that most of the lecturers are not native speakers. This factor make them to avoid speaking in English. About 15% of them strongly agree about this factor, whereas 27% of them disagreed that this item could be considered as a defect encounter them during speaking English and 10% strongly disagreed but 25% of the students were in neutral position. Most foreign language departments employ native speakers to teach language to force the learners to speak in the target language Bedford (1970) gave reasons for using native speakers as teachers of English all over the world. The first reason is to shift from the dominant translation method to communicative approach. Moreover, the ability of the native teachers to speak the language he/she teaches because of their competency in the language for a long time. It demands a good deal of fluency on the part of the teachers which this feature is not available in non-native teachers. Non-native teachers must be trained and sent to English speaking countries to gain the speaking skill of the language accuracy and fluently. Native speakers are successful in oral communication because this is their first language. Teachers are considered to be one of the most crucial elements affecting the success of students learning a foreign language in non-English speaking countries.

4.   FINDINGS

This study has been conducted to investigate some problems encounter the students of English majors in English department, faculty of education. It was hypothesized that some students who specialized in English still adhere to their mother tongue even though it is necessary to use English. This is because their performance in the target language may not be good enough to help them use it, though they have been studying various English materials at the faculty.

Results of this study indicated that about 20% of the students agreed that English pronunciation features such as word stress affect students ability during speaking the target language. Their ignorance of this element causes many problems which encountered them when speaking English, though others about 57% disagreed and strongly disagreed about this issue. The results also revealed that the time allocated for teaching the speaking skill at English department is insufficient to help students practice their speaking skill, about 72% of the students agree that time is inadequate although about 28% insist that the allocated time for teaching this skill is satisfactory for mastering this skill. An important item in the results of the study is the word collocation. About 40% of the students said that they sometimes encounter this problem when speaking English, and about 15% of them usually face this problem, whereas some of them about 42% rarely suffer from this defect and few of them never have such this problem. Not retrieving the suitable vocabulary easily can be considered as a major problem which face some students during speaking English, about 63% of them have this defect, though others 37% rarely or never encounter this problem. The ability of grammatical categories use is also one of the problems that many students encounter during speaking the target language. About 18% of them agree that the lack of some

grammatical components such as complex sentence or tenses affect their ability to speak English fluently, though others don't consider this item absolutely. The study also reveals that student's fear of making mistakes can be taken in account as one of the defects which face them when using English in front of others. About 51% of the students agree or strongly agree about this item. Another important factor revealed by this study, that many students about 38% feel shy when the speak English specially in front of the staff members of English department. This can be considered as a psychological factor which affects students performance in speaking.

This paper also revealed obviously that English department students do not have opportunity to practice their language out-side the class. This is due to the position of their country. English is studied as a foreign language and not to be used in the society. About 90% of them encounter this problem because all people outside the class speak Arabic.

 According to the study, it is clear that 38% of the students of English majors are involved to use their mother tongue rather than the target language they study because most of staff members are non-native speakers which in turn discourages them to speak English.

5. CONCLUSION

This study appears that the majority of the students at English department lack the opportunity of speaking English fluently and accurately. This problem can be considered as a major defect encounter them during dealing with English. This shortcoming is due to different factors such as not using pronunciation features, specially word stress, the shortage of time allocated for teaching English skill and word collocation; since students cannot retrieve the suitable vocabulary easily and rapidly. Lack of some grammatical categories such as complex sentence and tenses can also be taken into account. Students fear and shyness of making mistakes during speaking English in front of others specially staff members are also considered. Lack of opportunity for real life communication in English is also clear, since they live in an Arab speaking country and most of staff members are non-native speakers of the target language.

6. ROCOMMENDATIONS

To make up, the lack of the target language use of speaking skill in an Arab speaking country like Libya, the time allocated for teaching this skill is inadequate to accomplish the required activities concerning with this skill. It should be increased to be enough for giving students chance to carry out different speaking activities in order to be familiar with many defects such as not retrieving the suitable vocabulary rapidly, not being able to use the correct word collocation and pronunciation components such as word stress, not being aware of some grammatical features and to avoid many bad habits such as shyness of speaking with others, fear of making mistakes and resorting to mother tongue use.

For the teachers, they should first improve the performance conditions by giving their students time to prepare themselves for a speaking tasks, teaching the students how to use mind map to generate ideas and giving students enough time to perform their activities. The teachers should help their students overcome inhibition problem by having friendly, helpful and cooperative behaviors to make students feel comfortable when speaking in the class, reminding students not to worry about making mistakes and giving them clear instructions and sufficient guidance.

The student of English majors have to be sent to foreign countries that speak the language as it was used before. This procedure makes the learners of L2 familiar with the target language use.

It is also recommend that foreign language departments at Libyan universities have to be provided with some native speakers to teach the target language to encourage learners use the language more effectively.

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