

Performance Evaluation on Grammatical Errors and Hesitation Occurrences in Speaking Skill

Lizel M. Laurente¹, Annie A. Parmis¹

¹*Department of Liberal Arts and Behavioral Sciences, College of Arts and Sciences, Visayas State University, Baybay City, Leyte, Philippines*

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Email of Corresponding Author: lizelm Laurente@gmail.com

Abstract

Language production reveals a variety of goals that influence how people speak and how information or ideas are mediated into language. Language production procedure in speaking or writing can reveal details about how language understanding works. Speaking is regarded as one of the most difficult aspects of language learning. This present study focused on some of these aspects, that is, the performance evaluation on the grammatical errors and hesitation occurrences in speaking skills. Participants of the study were 32 Third Year Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies (ABELS) students of Visayas State University- Main Campus. Results identified a high incidence of misordering as the common grammatical error committed and filled pause as the highest type of hesitation. Under hesitation, findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between the respondents' parenthetical remarks and Mother Tongue. Remarkably, another significant relationship exists between the respondents' false start (hesitation occurrence) and misordering (grammatical error). Based on their barely moderate scores in grammatical errors and hesitation occurrences, results revealed that the respondents were found to be highly proficient in oral production. This study has come to conclude that speakers have the tendency to commit errors and hesitations during self-monitoring process in language production. Moreover, this study would somehow validate the respondents' fluency in oral production. Since this study was conducted online, a similar study in face-to-face setting is recommended for comparison or for validation purposes.

Keywords: Grammatical Errors, Hesitation Occurrences, English Oral Proficiency, Language, Speaking

1. Introduction

There is this common definition that language proficiency has something to do with the one's capacity to speak or act in a language that is either acquired or learned (Hirsch 2018). Some students nowadays have difficulty in expressing themselves in straight English. Therefore, it is important to know more about their status in language production. To prove this claim, a headline news in February of 2018 was reported that Filipino students' English proficiency was declining and believed to cause problems in the country's labor force in competing in global markets. Why is there a need to study language proficiency? Language proficiency is typically the individual's ability to speak, communicate, or perform in an acquired language.

Language production is an extremely developed motor behavior that demands the transfer of conceptual knowledge into an extensive series of motor commands in order to talk, sign, write, or type. Language production comprises retrieving information from memory, organizing an articulatory plan, and employing cognitive control and self-monitoring. On account of psycholinguistics, the study of language production shows various intentions that influence how people talk, generally how information and ideas mediate into language. Speaking is very important when one is to deal with language because first and foremost, language is basically oral. With this in mind, it is but understandable if oral production via speaking is described as one difficult task in language learning (Leong & Ahmadi 2017). For some reasons, many language learners would rather keep quite if they are not sure on what to express and how to express themselves using the target language.

According to González (2019), when one talks about language, one must look at it as a way of understanding people and consider the appropriate use as the right way to interact with others in society. The correct use of language is understood to be very important in the communicative process. Therefore, it is imperative to take into account that people are communicating all the time, with their families, at school, in the workplace, and all the different activities that each one of them usually does in their daily routines. A grammatical error as described in academic writing refers to something considered as a mistake (in tenses, maybe), anything unconventional (not following the standards), or a thing that could not relate to syntax (Nordquist 2018). Moreover, this grammatical error is usually distinguished from factual errors, logical fallacies, misspellings, typographical errors, and faulty punctuation.

In Collins English Dictionary (2019), hesitation is defined as the unwillingness to do something, or a delay in doing it, because the person is uncertain, worried, or embarrassed about it. Hesitation happens when a person feels uncertainty or doubt. It can be a pause in speech, a faltering moment before one act, or a silent second of indecision.

In this study, students' grammatical errors and hesitation occurrences were examined to find out their oral proficiency specifically in their oral production. Although finding out the students' grammatical errors and hesitation occurrences are just two aspects of the many factors in evaluating oral proficiency, this study can still very well contribute to one's knowledge about the status of the respondents' oral production.

In this research, a conceptual model was created for sentence production. The correlation between the respondent's grammatical errors and hesitation occurrences was analyzed in student's oral production. Thus, this study aimed to identify the oral proficiency of all Third Year ABELS students focusing on grammatical errors and hesitation occurrences in their oral production under online instruction class setting conducted during the second semester of School Year 2020-2021 using the google meet app., zoom app, and messenger app.

Although grammatical errors and hesitation occurrences represent only two aspects of oral proficiency, the study argued that examining these variables can still contribute meaningfully to understanding the status of students' oral production. The rationale of the study rests on the need to assess how learners perform in spoken English, especially when some learners tend to remain silent when unsure of what to express in the target language (Leong & Ahmadi 2017). The study therefore focused specifically on all Third Year ABELS students and analyzed their oral proficiency through grammatical errors and hesitation occurrences in an online learning setting. It was designed to generate useful insights for teachers, students, and future researchers by offering evidence that may support improved instruction, stronger learner awareness, and related studies on oral production.

Based on the content provided, the study aligns most clearly with SDG 4 – Quality Education because it examines learners' speaking proficiency and seeks to support improved teaching and learning in English oral production. It also aligns with SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth because the text links English proficiency with graduates becoming globally marketable and competitive in the labor force.

This study would be beneficial to teachers, students, and researchers. The results of this study can serve as suggestions or tips on how to improve learner's oral production and to measure the ability of the learners to employ their English language in terms of speaking proficiency. It will also provide a tool for ABELS students to be mindful of the grammatical aspects in communication, and to be aware of their speaking proficiency so that when they graduate, they will become globally marketable and competitive. This study will be a tool to measure students' ability to speak the English language in real-life settings outside of the academe. For the teachers, this study will open a doorway in creating a new teaching method or approach to solve the problem at hand on the learners' speaking proficiency in the target language as well as to empower their oral abilities to speak fluently eliminating errors and hesitations from their speech. Finally, for the future researchers, this study will serve as a basis for future related studies to enhance the learners' speaking proficiency by checking on some variables related to oral production.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

This study used a quantitative-qualitative research design conducted in an online setting in response to the flexible learning environment adopted by Visayas State University during the COVID-19 pandemic. Direct communication with the respondents was done through email and Messenger. To facilitate the conduct of the study, the researcher first sought permission from the teacher and secured the list of Third Year ABELS students together with their email addresses. Invitations were then sent to all identified students through email and Messenger.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Visayas State University in Baybay City, Leyte. The target respondents were Third Year Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies students enrolled during the second semester of Academic Year 2020–2021. They were considered a homogeneous group because they had a similar level of training and advancement in learning the English language.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were Third Year ABELS students of Visayas State University. Their profile information included mean age, standard deviation, range, sex, native language or mother tongue, and type of secondary school attended. These characteristics were gathered to describe the participants of the study.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study initially targeted all 43 Third Year ABELS students. Each student was contacted through Messenger for the invitation and was later sent the PowerPoint presentation containing the speaking tasks. Of the 43 students, only 32 willingly responded and were considered valid respondents. The remaining students were unable to participate due to technical issues such as poor internet connection, lack of time, and other related concerns.

2.5 Research Instrument

The study used a task-based instrument presented through PowerPoint slides. The instrument included materials from standardized IELTS speaking test samples and consisted of three parts: a self-introduction, follow-up questions, and a picture-cued description task. The self-introduction served as the first task, the follow-up questions formed the second task, and the picture-cued description served as the third task. Voice recording was used as the main tool for capturing the respondents' oral production, particularly their hesitations and grammatical errors. Scoring rubrics were used to determine the respondents' English oral proficiency. For hesitation occurrences, the score ranges were 1–18 for highly proficient, 19–36 for moderate proficiency, and 37–54 for low proficiency. For grammatical errors, the score ranges were 1–9 for highly proficient, 10–18 for moderate proficiency, and 19–27 for low proficiency. Lower scores indicated higher proficiency.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

The tasks were distributed individually through the respondents' email addresses and Messenger accounts. The PowerPoint presentation included detailed instructions for completing the speaking activities. Each participant was given two to three minutes per slide to record their responses. The tasks were gathered through email and private messages, and the recordings were manually transcribed. Data collection was completed within two weeks. The speaking performance of the respondents was assessed based on their individual scores in the speaking tasks. The use of voice recordings enabled the researcher to identify and examine relevant features of oral production, particularly hesitation occurrences and grammatical errors.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The recordings were collected after one week through email and Messenger and were processed using Wondershare Filmora Version 8.0.0 Copyright 2017. After processing, the recordings were manually transcribed. Hesitation occurrences and grammatical errors were identified and classified from the transcribed responses. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analyses to determine possible relationships among variables. Point-Biserial Correlation and Spearman Rho analyses were used to measure the strength of association or co-occurrence between two variables and to determine the correlation between them.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Respondents' Profile

3.1.1 Age, Sex, School Background, and Mother Tongue

Most respondents were 21 years old (71.88%), followed by 20 years old (15.62%), 22 years old (9.38%), and 28 years old (3.12%). The group was composed mostly of females (84%), while males represented 16%. In terms of school background, 84% came from public schools, 13% from private schools, and 3% from semi-private schools. Almost all respondents (94%) identified Cebuano as their mother tongue. These results show that the respondents were relatively homogeneous in age, educational background, and linguistic profile. Such similarity provides a clear context for examining their oral production because the participants shared closely related learning and language backgrounds.

3.2 Oral Production Patterns

3.2.1 Grammatical Errors

The respondents' grammatical errors were grouped into misinformation, misordering, and omission. Among these, misordering had the highest number of errors (9), followed by misinformation (8) and omission (3), for a highest total error score of 16. Examples included the use of leave instead of left, give instead of gave, and going instead of went for misinformation; "What papa doing is" instead of "What papa is doing" for misordering; and notice instead of noticed for omission. The findings indicate that misordering was the most common grammatical error in the respondents' oral production. This differs from the findings of Muhamad et al (2013) and Ting et al (2010), where misinformation was identified as the more common error. However, Ting (2010) argued that misordering in spoken English may not always be treated as a serious error because it can be acceptable in oral interaction. In this study, the prominence of misordering suggests that the respondents' errors were present but may be less critical than misinformation and omission.

3.2.2 Hesitation Occurrences

Hesitation occurrences were classified into repetition, false start, silent pause, lengthening, filled pause, and parenthetical remarks. Filled pause was the most frequent type with a total value of 9, followed by repetition, false start, and silent pause with 8 each, while lengthening had the lowest maximum value of 6. The respondents commonly produced repetitions such as “I—I—I” and “very—very,” false starts such as “I had < > I brought few clothes,” silent pauses exceeding 250 milliseconds, lengthened sounds such as “soo—o-o,” and filled pauses such as “uhmm,” “ahh,” and “mmm.” Parenthetical remarks included expressions such as “I mean” and “you know.” These results show that filled pauses were the most evident hesitation feature in the respondents’ speech. This supports the claim of Khojasterad (2015) that lexical fillers are associated with information retrieval during oral production. It also agrees with Clark and Fox Tree (2002), who explained that pause fillers such as “uh” and “um” can serve discourse functions in turn-taking. The respondents’ hesitation patterns therefore suggest ongoing word search, planning, and self-regulation during speech.

3.3 Relationship Between Variables

3.3.1 Respondents’ Profile and Grammatical Errors

No significant relationship was found between the respondents’ profile variables and grammatical errors in oral production. Age, sex, type of school attended, and mother tongue did not significantly relate to the respondents’ grammatical errors. This result suggests that the grammatical errors observed were not determined by the respondents’ personal profile. The finding supports Ellis (2003), who explained that error is a deviation from the norms of the target language resulting from lack of knowledge, and that such errors may occur because learners are exposed to language varieties that differ from the standard dialect.

3.3.2 Respondents’ Profile and Hesitation Occurrences

A significant relationship was found between parenthetical remarks and mother tongue. The respondents frequently used expressions such as “I mean” and “you know” in their oral production, indicating that mother tongue had a positive effect on their learning process while using the target language. This result is similar to the assumption of Mei (2012) that second language production varies depending on specific second language phenomena. Mei (2012) explained that the use of “I mean” is influenced by the similarity between its pragmatic and semantic meaning, while the use of “you know” is mainly affected by native language. The respondents’ parenthetical remarks also reflect self-monitoring during speech, which aligns with Levelt’s theory, particularly the articulation and self-monitoring stage in language production.

3.3.3 Grammatical Errors and Hesitation Occurrences

A significant relationship was found between false start and misordering. Among the hesitation variables analyzed in relation to grammatical errors, only false start was significant at 0.41, indicating a positive moderate relationship. This means that as false starts increased, misordering errors also increased. This finding suggests that disruption in speech initiation is associated with incorrect word order in oral production. The result indicates that when respondents stopped and restarted their utterances, their chances of producing misordered structures also increased, showing a moderate link between hesitation and grammatical inaccuracy.

3.4 Respondents’ English Oral Proficiency

3.4.1 Proficiency Based on Grammatical Errors and Hesitation Occurrences

The respondents’ oral proficiency was computed using total scores for hesitation occurrences and grammatical errors. For hesitation, the total possible score was 54, with 1–18 interpreted as highly proficient, 19–36 as moderately proficient, and 37–57 as low proficient. For grammatical errors, the total possible score was 27, with 1–9 interpreted as highly proficient, 10–18 as moderately proficient, and 19–27 as low proficient. Based on grammatical errors, 66% of the respondents were highly proficient and 34% were moderately proficient. Based on hesitation occurrences, 53% were highly proficient and 47% were moderately proficient. These findings indicate that the respondents can generally be considered proficient in English oral production. Although moderate levels of grammatical errors and hesitation occurrences were still present, most respondents fell within the highly proficient and moderately proficient categories, showing an overall acceptable level of oral English performance.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

This study examined the grammatical errors and hesitation occurrences in the oral production of Third Year Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies students at Visayas State University Main Campus. Guided by Levelts’ theory of language production, particularly the process of self-monitoring during speech, the study analyzed voice-recorded responses that were manually transcribed and statistically treated. Hesitation occurrences were classified into repetition, false start, silent pause, lengthening, filled pause, and parenthetical remarks, while grammatical errors were grouped into misinformation, misordering, and omission. The findings showed that the respondents’ profile had no significant relationship with grammatical errors, although Mother Tongue was significantly related to parenthetical remarks in hesitation occurrences.

The results further revealed that misordering was the most common grammatical error, while filled pause was the most frequent hesitation occurrence in the respondents' oral production. A significant positive moderate relationship was found between false start and misordering, which suggests that as hesitation increases, grammatical errors in word order also increase. The presence of parenthetical remarks also indicated that the respondents were engaging in self-monitoring during speech. Despite these difficulties, the overall findings showed that the respondents were still considered proficient in English oral production based on their performance in grammatical errors and hesitation occurrences.

Based on these findings, the study recommends conducting similar research in a face-to-face setting to determine whether the same patterns appear in more natural speaking situations. It also suggests further discourse studies on hesitation markers, comparative research on speaking fluency and writing proficiency, and the inclusion of other variables in evaluating language proficiency. The study was limited to Third Year ABELS students from one institution and was conducted in an online setting during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have influenced the naturalness of the respondents' oral production and the overall scope of the findings.

Compliance with ethical standards

This section must be presented as one narrative paragraph only and should integrate all matters related to ethical compliance and authorship responsibility, including adherence to institutional ethical standards, voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality of information, ethical approval, conflict of interest declaration, acknowledgement of contributions, copyright ownership, and any other relevant ethical considerations observed in the conduct of the research.

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