



LANGUAGE EXPOSURES: DETERMINANTS OF ENGLISH SPEAKING PROFICIENCY

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ABSTRACT



This study determined the influence of language exposures towards the English Speaking Proficiency (ESP) of the L2 students in one of the universities in Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines. A total of 75 fourth year students who were enrolled in the Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP 4) course were taken as participants. The correlational research method was employed. Mean, standard deviation, pearson r, and Multiple Regression Analysis were used to generate the findings of the study. The participants' language exposures were assessed using the Language Exposure Questionnaire while their ESP was determined using the Rubric on Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (SOLOM) adapted from the Riverside County Seal of Multi-literacy, (2008). The general finding showed that students had a very good oral English proficiency measured in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and comprehension. Generally, both formal and informal language exposures had significant association on the students' speaking proficiency. However, a combination of both formal and informal factors predicted the students' oral speaking skills implying that both the home and the school environment go, hand in hand, in facilitating the students' oral speaking skills.

Keywords: *Language Exposures, Formal Language Exposure, Informal Language Exposure, English Speaking Proficiency*

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1. INTRODUCTION

What differentiates man from animals is his ability to express, to entertain and most importantly to communicate. Animals have its own way of communicating with one another, but what makes humans worthy of the same name is his capacity to perceive meanings in its language. A well trained dog may follow a person's command, but it cannot tell in words what he or she feels inside. Indeed, language is the most indispensable tool for human existence. It is an essential tool for man's day-to-day living, and communication is extremely necessary for his survival. Man learns to connect with one another through the use of language being influenced by the linguistic environment. Hence, it is certain to note that one's ability to express meaning from the environment is an essential tool in the language acquisition and learning process.

Undeniably, exposure to the Target Language (TL) is one of the determining factors an individual holds to gain proficiency in the second language (L2). In fact, among the many factors contributing to the L2 learning, language exposures such as the formal and informal are of paramount importance, (Lightbown and Spada, 2001; Rogers, 2004). Moreover, the proficiency of the second language user towards the target language depends on the extent of exposure to some specific linguistic environment. It is believed that language learning through the reinforcement of environment has a pivotal role in L2 learners' proficiency. Anyone who is exposed with the TL may have an edge compared to others who are not. Thus, this research work intends to support the foregoing assumption.

Second language learning is no longer new in the Philippine context. In fact, Filipinos acquired the language extensively through the help of the educational system in the Philippines. Constitutionally, English language was mandated to be part of the Philippine curriculum and officially decreed as the medium of instruction from primary, secondary and tertiary education (Grumo, 2012). However, the competencies in learning to speak the language still remained a challenge in all school levels. Although there is a clear imperative that English language is well entrenched in Philippine formal education, this mandate does not seem to ensure that language proficiency is well attained. As observed, learners of the language are, generally, having difficulty in their oral English proficiency.

Obviously, this challenge in oral English proficiency could be attributed to a number of reasons. Filipinos are not native speakers in English. The exposure of the target language may be limited. The rules that govern the structure of grammar are more complex to them. The policy on bilingualism requires the separate use of Filipino and English as media of instruction in definite subject areas. Since Filipinos have more than one language at their disposal, these differences sometimes may cause students to make errors in their oral discourses. Most of them cannot speak English fluently, and they would prefer to code switch from their first language to be more understood. This phenomenon is likely to happen when learners of the foreign language are not thoroughly exposed to the language. If one is appropriately exposed to the TL, be it in formal or informal contexts, the learner will more likely show clear and accurate refinement on sophisticated structures of the language. This study, thus, investigated the students' extent of language exposure on both factors: the formal language exposure where proficiency of the English language is determined inside the classroom setting and the informal language exposure which can be determined through the informal natural exposure.

Extensive researches had also been done in the area of English language and its indicators as to how it is acquired proficiently in the environment, (Kim and Margolis, 2000; Jia, 2003; Ji, Zhang, and Nisbett, 2004; de Carvalho, 2006; Ajileye, 2007; Mustapha, 2011; Mourtega, 2011; Bueraheng and Laohawirayanon, 2014). Closely aligned to these idea of growing bodies of literature were supported by Harrison (2007), a linguist, who espoused that language proficiency is shaped by environment.

In this study, the researcher espouses that formal and informal language exposures are the determinants of English speaking proficiency; hence, this study is anchored.

2. METHODOLOGY

The correlational method of research which is essentially a method of quantitative description of general characteristics of the group was used in the study. A correlational type of research is a general procedure employed in studies that have for their chief purpose the description and observation of phenomenon, (Lomax, 2013).



Specifically, the type of correlational method of research that was used in this study is the predictive correlational. A predictive correlational design is used when the study attempts to explore the factors that predict or have an influence to another variable. In this study, the participants' English speaking proficiency was determined vis-à-vis the extent of their language exposures.

There were two research instruments used to answer the questions in this investigation. These are the Language Exposure Questionnaire (a researcher-made) and the Student Oral Language Observation Matrix adapted from the Riverside County Seal of Multiliteracy, (2008).

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument, the researcher presented the research instruments to the experts for comments, suggestions, improvements, and refinements. The comments and suggestions of these experts were incorporated in the revision of the research instrument. Results indicated that the Language Exposure Questionnaire from the formal factor garnered the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient of (.847). On the other hand, the Language Exposure Questionnaire from the informal factor's Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient was (.827).

2.1. Target group

The participants in the study were the regular fourth year students who took the Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) 4 of XYZ University. This qualification ensured that the participants understood the nature of the study since all of them underwent JEEP classes from one (1) to three (3) where they were trained to be proficient English language speakers. Furthermore, the researcher chose these students as participants of the study because they were the only students among others who had JEEP classes in their curriculum. Specifically, the participants were the select students from the Education department.

Based on the report of enrollment gathered from the Enrollment System and the JEEP 4 coordinator, there were two hundred forty nine (249) students who were enrolled during the first semester of the School Year 2014-2015 comprising of one hundred nineteen (119) JEEP students from Business Processing Outsourcing (BPO) and one hundred thirty (130) JEEP students from English for International Employment (EFIE). Out of 249 students, only seventy five (75) students from the College of Policies Studies, Education and Management (CPSEM) were chosen as the participants of the study. From the two hundred forty nine (249) sampled population and from the total population of (119) BPO and (130) EFIE; thirty six (36) BPO and thirty nine (39) EFIE were identified as the participants of the study using the stratified random sampling. To conduct this sampling design, the researcher divided first the population into different strata and got 30 percent from each sampled population.

2.2. Methods of Inquiry

A validated language exposure questionnaire for both formal and informal served as the main instrument of the study; an informal interview was also used to determine the English speaking proficiency of the participants. The interview was done informally to ensure that the participants were comfortable to answer the questions, and that the researcher would have the opportunity to ask follow-up questions. The interview was rated by the researcher, along with an inter rater, and was recorded to ensure objectivity of the assessment by both the assessors.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Table 1 shows participants' mean distribution of formal language exposure. Findings indicate that the participants had a great extent of language exposure. Highest among the indicators was listening to class presentation (4.44) followed by giving of oral presentations (3.91). Lowest among the indicators of formal language exposure was sharing of ideas (3.51).

Table 1. Mean Distribution of Students' Formal Language Exposure

| Formal Language Exposure | Mean | SD | Description |
|------------------------------------|------|------|--------------|
| 1. Listening to class presentation | 4.44 | 0.50 | great extent |
| 2. Sharing ideas | 3.51 | 0.59 | great extent |
| 3. Giving oral presentation | 3.91 | 0.67 | great extent |
| 4. Talking to instructor/professor | 3.74 | 0.76 | great extent |
| Overall Mean | 3.94 | 0.48 | great extent |



Legend: 4.51-5.00 (Very Great Extent); 3.51-4.50 (Great Extent); (Moderate Extent); 1.51-2.50 (Low Extent); 1.00-1.50 (No extent at all)

The participants' responses to these questions would imply that they are likely exposed to the English language through their experiences in English related-activities inside the classroom setting. The finding has been supported by Eguico (2002) whose study claimed that a positive phenomenon in formal language exposure would aid to students' development of language skills. Similarly, Wapille-Maghamil (2010) points out students who find practical tasks in English as most helpful would be assisted in their understanding and use of the language proficiently and efficiently.

Table 2 reveals the frequency and percentage distribution of the participants' informal language exposure. As gleaned from the table, the student-participants' informal language exposure was to a "moderate extent". This was especially true to the students' language exposure at home (2.54) and technology-mediated communication (3.37).

Highest among the indicators was the students' informal language exposure through reading of fictional and nonfictional materials in English (3.95) followed by watching movies/TV programs in English (3.69).

The general finding would possibly indicate that the participants were able to learn and practice their language skills even if they were not in the confine of the classroom. Hence, Lightbown and Spada (2001) conceptualized informal setting as the contexts in which the adult learner is exposed to the target language at home or at work or in social interaction. The finding of the study is in agreement with Bahrani's (2012) study that informal language environment endeavors language development. Moreover, Pemberton, Fallahkhair, & Mosthoff (2004) supported the above-mentioned assertion that the participants having been exposed in an informal way would more likely develop language skills.

Table 2. Mean Distribution of Informal Language Exposure

| Informal Language Exposure | Mean | SD | Description |
|---|------|------|-----------------|
| 1. Home | 2.54 | 0.67 | moderate extent |
| 2. Technology-mediated communication | 3.37 | 0.57 | moderate extent |
| 3. Reading of fictional and nonfictional materials in English | 3.95 | 0.75 | great extent |
| 4. Watching movies/TV programs in English | 3.69 | 0.83 | great extent |
| 5. Listening to radio programs/songs in English | 3.66 | 0.66 | great extent |
| Overall Mean | 3.28 | 0.58 | moderate extent |

Legend: 4.51-5.00 (Very Great Extent); 3.51-4.50 (Great Extent); 2.51-3.50 Moderate Extent); 1.51-2.50 (Low Extent); 1.00-1.50 (No extent at all)

2. What is the students' English Speaking Proficiency in terms of:

- 2.1 pronunciation;
- 2.2 vocabulary;
- 2.3 grammar;
- 2.4 fluency; and
- 2.5 Comprehension

Table 3 shows the mean distribution of the students' English speaking proficiency. As a whole, it could be inferred that the student-participants had a very good oral English proficiency as indicated in the over-all mean of 3.93.

**Table 3. Over-all Mean Distribution of Students' English Speaking Proficiency**

| English Speaking Proficiency | Mean | SD | Description |
|------------------------------|------|------|-------------|
| 1. Pronunciation | 3.96 | 0.54 | very good |
| 2. Vocabulary | 3.92 | 0.65 | very good |
| 3. Grammar | 3.83 | 0.48 | very good |
| 4. Fluency | 3.72 | 0.77 | very good |
| 5. Comprehension | 4.20 | 0.53 | very good |
| Overall Mean | 3.93 | 0.52 | very good |

Legend: 4.51-5.00 (Excellent) 3.51-4.50 (Very Good)
2.51-3.50 (Good) 1.51-2.50 (Fair) 1.00-1.50 (Poor)

Highest among the areas assessed was on comprehension (4.20) followed by pronunciation (3.96) and vocabulary (3.92). The weakest area, though assessed as very good, was on fluency. This area on the fluency would naturally be the lowest area considering the fact that the English is not the mother tongue but a second language among the Filipino learners.

Problem No. 3: Is there a significant relationship between the students' language exposure and English Speaking Proficiency?

Table 4 shows the Pearson's r values showing the relationship between formal language exposure and English Speaking proficiency. Evidently, the data show that there was a positive correlation between the participants' formal language exposure and English speaking proficiency except on the areas of pronunciation and comprehension. Specifically, the data confirm that there were significant relationships found between sharing ideas and vocabulary ($r=0.24$, $p=0.03$); giving oral presentations and vocabulary ($r=0.26$, $p=0.02$), grammar ($r=0.40$, $p=0.00$), and fluency ($r=0.29$, $p=0.01$). Hence, it is implied that the higher the formal language exposure of the participants in the terms of sharing ideas and giving of oral presentations, the greater is the

tendency of the participants to be proficient in the areas of vocabulary, grammar and fluency. This phenomenon is likely to happen because when students prepare for oral presentations or when they share ideas, there is a tendency on their end to extra cautious of their vocabulary or choice of words, their grammar including their fluency. Inadvertently, they may not put emphasis or priority on their pronunciation and comprehension.

In this context, what matters most is being able to communicate the message they would like to convey. This assumption is supported by the study of Bruce and Hansson (2011) when they espoused that positive experience from peer interaction is a key to language and thus helps support language development.

Furthermore, the general finding in this study concurs Krashen's (1981) assertion that formal linguistic environment has the potential for encouraging both acquisition and learning. Similarly, the disclosure in this study is also in consonance with the studies of Bernard (2010) and Connor and Geiger (2009) who espoused that exposure to students' second language in the classroom contributes to their language proficiency.

Table 4. Pearson's r Values Showing the Relationship between Formal Language Exposure and English Speaking Proficiency

| English Speaking Proficiency | Listening to Class Presentation | | Sharing Ideas | | Giving oral Presentation | | Talking to Instructors | | Formal Language Exposure | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|------|---------------|------|--------------------------|------|------------------------|------|--------------------------|------|
| | r | p | r | P | r | p | r | p | r | p |
| Pronunciation | 0.12 | 0.31 | 0.20 | 0.08 | 0.18 | 0.13 | 0.12 | 0.27 | 0.20 | 0.09 |
| Vocabulary | 0.20 | 0.09 | 0.24* | 0.03 | 0.26* | 0.02 | 0.12 | 0.34 | 0.27* | 0.02 |
| Grammar | 0.13 | 0.27 | 0.20 | 0.09 | 0.40** | 0.00 | 0.18 | 0.13 | 0.28* | 0.02 |
| Fluency | 0.15 | 0.19 | 0.22 | 0.06 | 0.29** | 0.01 | 0.18 | 0.11 | 0.26* | 0.02 |
| Comprehension | 0.13 | 0.27 | 0.16 | 0.18 | 0.20 | 0.08 | 0.10 | 0.41 | 0.18 | 0.11 |

* significant at 0.05 level

**significant at 0.01 level



Additionally, the finding of this present investigation reinforces the researcher's insight that formal language exposure is a key component in the language development of the students considering the area of speaking; the more the participants'

exposure to oral presentation and sharing ideas with others, the greater are the opportunities of honing their speaking proficiency. Nevertheless, the above finding did not hold true to the areas of pronunciation and comprehension.

Table 5. Pearson's r Values Showing the Relationship between Informal Language Exposure and English Speaking Proficiency

| English Speaking Proficiency | Home | | Technology | | Fictional/ nonfictional materials | | Movies/TV Programs | | Radio Programs /Songs | | Informal Language Exposure | |
|------------------------------|------|------|------------|------|-----------------------------------|------|--------------------|------|-----------------------|------|----------------------------|------|
| | r | p | r | p | r | p | r | p | r | p | r | p |
| Pronunciation | 0.24 | 0.35 | 0.35** | 0.00 | 0.24* | 0.04 | 0.06 | 0.60 | 0.11 | 0.34 | 0.29** | 0.01 |
| Vocabulary | 0.24 | 0.32 | 0.32** | 0.00 | 0.22* | 0.05 | 0.05 | 0.65 | 0.20 | 0.08 | 0.29** | 0.01 |
| Grammar | 0.16 | 0.17 | 0.31** | 0.01 | 0.28* | 0.02 | 0.11 | 0.36 | 0.14 | 0.23 | 0.28* | 0.02 |
| Fluency | 0.29 | 0.36 | 0.36** | 0.00 | 0.21 | 0.08 | 0.05 | 0.67 | 0.21 | 0.07 | 0.31** | 0.01 |
| Comprehension | 0.09 | 0.28 | 0.28** | 0.01 | 0.26* | 0.03 | 0.04 | 0.70 | 0.01 | 0.91 | 0.21 | 0.08 |

* significant at 0.05 level

**significant at 0.01 level

Table 5 presents the Pearson's r values showing the relationship between informal language exposure and English Speaking proficiency. The test of the relationship between informal language exposure and English speaking proficiency reached the significant level. The data reveal that the participants' informal language exposures such as technology-mediated communication are associated with pronunciation ($r=0.35$, $p=0.00$), vocabulary ($r=0.32$, $p=0.00$), grammar ($r=0.31$, $p=0.01$), fluency ($r=0.36$, $p=0.00$), and comprehension ($r=0.28$, $p=0.01$). Moreover, reading of fictional and nonfictional materials in English were also observed to be linked significantly with pronunciation ($r=0.24$, $p=0.04$), vocabulary ($r=0.22$, $p=0.05$), grammar ($r=0.28$, $p=0.02$), and comprehension ($r=0.26$, $p=0.03$). Nevertheless, no significant correlations were detected between informal language exposure and comprehension. The hypothesis in this context was not rejected. Generally, informal language exposures were significant on the areas of pronunciation ($r=0.29$, $p=0.01$), vocabulary ($r=0.29$, $p=0.01$), grammar ($r=0.28$, $p=0.02$), and fluency ($r=0.31$, $p=0.01$).

Findings of the study reveal that majority of the student-participants were not able to utilize their exposures in an informal setting specifically on their exposures at home, watching of movies and TV programs in English, and listening to radio programs and songs in English. As observed, majority of them were not able to expose themselves with the English language at home which could in turn not help them

to proficiently use the language into different situations. Also, many of them prefer to listen and to watch radio and television programs that do not necessarily increase their learning of English; several of them prefer program with their first language rather than the target language. Nonetheless, many of them find exposures in the informal setting as effective in their language development especially when they are using technologies and reading fictional and nonfictional materials. They preferred to utilize these technologies and to read materials in English in order for them to enhance their language skills.

The finding of the study reinforces Selinger's study as cited by Ajileye (2007) that informal factors could explain or predict the participants' English speaking proficiency. In this study, however, only informal language exposure on mediated communication and reading of fictional and nonfictional materials have a significant association on the participants' English speaking skills. As previously established, the participants were, generally, found to have utilized technology-mediated communication in English to a "moderate extent" only implying that they have not really maximized the benefits accrued from the use of this technology. It is, therefore, argued that the more they optimize the technology-mediated communication in English, the more likely they improve their oral English proficiency. This line of thought is also aptly supported by Zhao's (2003) study emphasizing that technology enhances



language learning. This means that if learners realize the value of the target language and use it together with technology that mediates communication, proficiency of the language might follow.

Moreover, reading of fictional and nonfictional materials was also detected to have significant association on the participants' oral English proficiency. This finding is in contrary with the claim of Chio (2009) who pointed out in his study that

Table 6. Multiple Regression Result of the Students' Language Exposures and their English Speaking Proficiency

| Language Exposure | Beta | Std. Error of Beta | t (3) | p level |
|--|-------|--------------------|-------|---------|
| Formal Language Exposure | 0.132 | 0.152 | 0.869 | 0.387 |
| Informal Language Exposure | 0.246 | 0.140 | 1.751 | 0.084 |
| Model Summary | | | | |
| Adjusted R ² = .08839598 F(2,72)=4.5878 p<.01332 Std. Error of estimate: .49738 | | | | |

Table 6 presents the multiple regression result of the students' language exposures and their English speaking proficiency. The adjusted R² value explains the extent of influence of the independent variables on the variability of the dependent variables.

Findings show that 8.84 percent of the variation in the participants' English speaking proficiency is accounted for by a combination of their formal and informal language exposures (R²=8.84%). A host of other factors may have influenced their proficiency such as student, teacher and other environmental factors not concerned in the study.

The result further shows that none among the variables stands out as a more significant predictor of their oral English speaking proficiency, but combined, both factors significantly predict their speaking skill (F, 2,72)=4.59, p<.013). Findings may imply that the effect of students' exposures to their speaking proficiency cannot be supported; they are interrelated, which means that exposure to the language at home and in school go hand in hand in facilitating the development of their oral English skills.

The finding of this study is in consonance with Bahrani's (2012) study confirming that the source of language input for acquiring the language particularly in formal and informal settings should not be neglected. Needless to say, whether language learning is to take place in formal or informal language learning contexts in English as a second language, language learners need to have exposure and access to language input. In fact, language learning simply cannot take place without having exposures to some sort of language input. As Munoz (2010) claims, the lack of exposure would hinder

greater exposures on reading lead to a more successful lexical influence which implies that incorporation of interactive activities in reading enhances language learning.

Problem No. 4: Which of the formal and informal factors significantly influence the English Speaking Proficiency of the students?

second language learners to become proficient language users.

CONCLUSION

Evidently, language exposure combined as formal or informal could explain the English speaking proficiency of the participants implying that both formal and informal exposures contribute to the students' speaking skills. The finding confirms Krashen's assertion (1981) that formal linguistic environment has the potential for encouraging both the acquisition and learning while informal linguistic environment promotes real language use which is conducive to acquisition. As such, a learner who is more exposed to the language be it formal or informal will have a strong hold in language proficiency.

Findings of the study point to the need for both home and school environment to create more opportunities for the learners to practice English language in meaningful context. Furthermore, the results showed that language learners can improve their English speaking proficiency to a very great extent when they are sharing ideas; when they are giving oral presentations from the formal context; when they are using technology in communication; and when they are reading fictional and nonfictional materials in English from the informal context. Consequently, it is underscored that the participants' language exposures are not just the only mere indicators for their English speaking proficiency; hence, it may be attributed to other sources like their level of intelligence, demographic factors and the like.

As a whole, it is inspiring to mention that the education students enrolled in Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP 4) course had a very good command



of their oral skills. However, such areas can be more strengthened to achieve excellence in English speaking proficiency.

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