
The Oral Proficiency of Second Year BA English Language Students and their Performance in English 102 Subject

Jackie Lou C. Corbita

Bukidnon State University, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to determine the oral proficiency level of Second Year BA English Language students and their Performance in English 102 subject. It also aimed to find out if there is a significant difference between oral proficiency of Second Year BA English Language students and the Performance in English 102 subject. The main instrument used to gather the data was the oral interview schedule. The findings of the study showed that the overall oral proficiency level of Second Year BA English Language students is Average and their performance in English 102 subject is Less Satisfactory. Furthermore, there is a significant difference between the Second Year BA English Language students' oral proficiency and their Performance in English 102 Subject. With the result of the data that was gathered, the researcher came to a conclusion that BA English Language students' oral competence impacts writing. It was recommended in the study that teachers assigned for interviewing BA English Language entrants should impose oral proficiency examination. English teachers should continuously use English language in the classroom correctly and encourage writing activities for students to master their writing skills.

Keywords: oral proficiency, writing performance, academic performance

INTRODUCTION

Oral proficiency in English is very important especially for BA English language students. It is an aspect in their field in which they would concentrate on. It is their edge against others because if they have the ability to use the language proficiently, they can express themselves efficiently. In the first place, BA English language learners focus on the mastery of the language and to be proficient in it. The ability to use the English language appropriately will give one a great advantage. Therefore, it is important for one learner to be fully equipped with the knowledge of using the English language effectively because it helps him in every situation especially in school matters. Writing then is one of the skills that comprise English. For BA English language students, writing is about on discipline. During their second year in the course, they are required to have a writing class. In Bukidnon State University, English 102 or Writing in the Discipline has now made to adopt the English for Specific Approach. Thus, the writing activities of BA English Language students are fitted to their specific discipline. Writing is a skill which an English language learner should master because it is a tool that promotes higher order thinking of a person. Since the approach to writing in this

subject is the process approach, the respondents' grades were based on how they follow the stages in writing and of course the content of their output.

On the other hand, Bachelor of Arts in English provides students with knowledge and skills of the English language and literature. It trains students in creative writing, literary, cultural rhetoric, acquiring a high level of English proficiency and becoming articulate speakers of the English language. Based on an informal interview among teachers handling BA English language students, most of them said that the students' oral ability is not commendable. Not all students are performing orally in the class. Though they are English language learners, there are a lot of errors that they commit especially on oral communication. With this statement, it would support the idea that the second year students did not fully master the ability to express themselves in English since they are still on the second stage of the course and they still need to learn a lot about the language. This would also explain that not all BA English language students are proficient orally since they are not committed to this course. This led the researcher to conduct this research to second year students to identify their actual oral performance and to know their level of proficiency. The researcher also wanted to know the performance of the students in their English 102 subject which is Writing on Discipline. It further investigated if there was significant relationship between the BA English students' oral proficiency and their performance in English 102 subject.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

On Oral Proficiency

Oral proficiency includes the ability to communicate verbally in a functional and accurate way in the target language. A high degree of oral proficiency implies having the ability to apply the linguistic knowledge to new contexts (topics) and situations (Omaggio, 1986). Levelt's (1989) model of language production and utterances begin as pre-verbal thought in the conceptualizer. Once the communicative intention is generated, it emerges as a preverbal message and enters the formulator where lexical access and grammatical and phonological encoding occurs. After the formulator is finished with the utterance-to-be, there are two options: either the message enters the articulator triggering speech-motor functions to produce the utterance, or it is monitored internally for accuracy and appropriateness by cycling back through the speech comprehension system as sub-vocalized internal speech. For Canale and Swain (1980), oral proficiency has four dimensions: 1) grammatical competence or linguistic competence or knowledge of the rules of language; 2) sociolinguistic competence or the understanding of the social context in which communication takes place, including role relationships, the shared information of the participants, and the communicative purpose for their interaction, 3) discourse competence which refers to the interpretation of individual message elements in terms of their interconnectedness and of how meaning is represented in relation to the entire discourse or text; and 4) strategic competence or the coping strategies to initiate, terminate, maintain, repair and redirect communication.

On Writing Performance

Writing is described in three stages by Vann (1981). Stage one; writing is relatively undifferentiated from speech. Hence, a student's oral competence impacts on writing ability. At this point of writing, sentences are often short and redundant like the beginning speech of the learner. Stage two; the focus is on form, on producing correct sentences. Students become

trapped at this stage of writing when the prescriptive and formulaic curriculum of the past is imposed. Then correctness is perceived as the ultimate goal even if meaning and expression are sacrificed. Stage three; the chief difference is the level of maturity of writing. The student possesses more lexicon and syntactic skill and is able to implement these in composing. Vann (1981) discusses acquisition of writing and noted that oral competence affects writing. Chen (2004) used writing proficiency grades of a timed composition task as measure of writing performance and found a significant negative relationship between anxiety and performance. Significant negative correlations between language anxiety and performance with several language production measures was also found out by Zang (2011).

On Academic Performance

Flores and Hadaway (1994) suggest that grades are without doubt the best predictors of academic performance. Mpofu (1997) investigated academic performance on mature students in higher education and argued that mature age is a second chance scheme for those who could not obtain the necessary formal qualification for university. However, before these people are finally admitted to university, they must have proven record of capability for this level of study as demonstrated by their level of performance in a set examination by the university. It was concluded that these students perform well as the regular students admitted under the direct entry scheme. In addition, Polloway (1994) said that although performance on standardized tests receives the greatest attention in discussions of students' academic performance, teachers' evaluations of performance as indicated in course grades represent a common metric of student performance that often is more directly tied to the day-to-day business of teaching and learning than are annual standardized test scores. Grades serve a number of important functions. However, as a measure of academic performance, teacher-given grades have well-known limitations. Grades are composite measures that account not only for students' content mastery but often for other factors, such as their class participation, attitudes, progress over time, and attendance according to Guzman (2003).

METHODOLOGY

This study used the descriptive method of research. This design was used to determine the oral proficiency of BA English language students. This was conducted at Bukidnon State University specifically at College of Arts and Sciences department. The respondents of this study were the second year students taking BA English language in Bukidnon State University, Malaybalay City, enrolled for the school year 2013-2014.

Research Instrument

The researcher used an oral interview as the main instrument to assess the oral proficiency of the students. This is to measure their oral capabilities. The oral interview also determined their oral proficiency level through their answers. The questions reflected on the questionnaire focus mainly on student's personal aspect. Their answers depend on their own viewpoint. Regarding their performance in English 102 subject, the researcher looked into the Midterm grades of the students through asking permission from their subject teacher.

Data Gathering Procedure

After title proposal has been approved by the panel members, permission from them allows the researcher to conduct the study. The researcher met the respondents and explained to them the reason why the study is conducted and asked for their support. Before the interview began, the researcher explained to the interviewees that there was a need to record their answers for an accurate basis. It was also explained to them not to be conscious during the interview and just relax to have a clear outcome. The same questions were given to each respondent for a fair chance of answering it. On gathering the data regarding their performance in English 102 subject, the researcher asked permission from the subject teacher through a letter and asked for their midterm grades which were the researcher's basis in determining their performance in English 102.

Analysis of Framework

The students' responses on the oral interview were rated by a rater. This rater has the knowledge of the language rules, knowledge of the fundamentals of public speaking, a good speaker of the language and has an enough experience of teaching English language. The rater rate individual scoring by using the rating sheet adopted from the "Testing for Language Teachers" by Arthur Hughes (1989). The final score of each respondent is based from the average score obtained from different levels of proficiency. Each respondent was scored in terms of the five language areas, namely; pronunciation, grammar, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The following are the description of the five language areas.

Pronunciation

- A. Pronunciation frequently unintelligible.
- B. Frequent errors and a very heavy accent, making understanding difficult, require frequent repetition.
- C. "Foreign accent" requires concentrated listening and mispronunciation leads to occasional misunderstanding and apparent errors in grammar and vocabulary.
- D. Marked "foreign accent" and occasional mispronunciation which do not interfere with understanding.
- E. No conspicuous mispronunciation, but would be taken for a native speaker.
- F. Native pronunciation, with no trace of "foreign accent".

Grammar

- A. Grammar almost entirely inaccurate except in stock phrases.
- B. Constant errors showing control of very few major patterns and frequently preventing communication.
- C. Frequent errors showing some major patterns uncontrolled and causing occasional irritation and misunderstanding.
- D. Occasional errors showing imperfect control of some patterns but no weakness that causes misunderstanding.
- E. Few errors, with no patterns of failure.
- F. No more than two errors during interview.

Fluency

- A. Speech is so halting and fragmentary that conversation is virtually impossible.
- B. Speech is very slow and uneven except for short or routine sentences.
- C. Speech is frequently hesitant and jerky; sentences may be left uncompleted.
- D. Speech is occasionally hesitant, with some unevenness caused by rephrasing and for words.
- E. Speech is effortless and smooth, but perceptibly non native in speech and unevenness.
- F. Speech on all professional and general topics as effortless and smooth as a native speaker's.

Vocabulary

- A. Vocabulary inadequate for even the simplest conversation.
- B. Vocabulary limited to basic personal and survival areas (time, food, transportation, family, etc.)
- C. Choice of words sometimes inaccurate, limitations of vocabulary present discussion of some common professional and social topics.
- D. Professional vocabulary adequate to discuss special interest; general vocabulary permits discussion of any non technical subject with some circumlocutions.
- E. Professional vocabulary broad and precise; general vocabulary adequate to cope with complex, practical problems and varied social situations.
- F. Vocabulary apparently as accurate and extensive as that of an educated native speaker.

Comprehension

- A. Understands too little for the simplest type of conversation; answers only in terms of words or phrases.
- B. Requires constant repetition and rephrasing of questions for better understanding; answers are always disorganized.
- C. Requires considerable repetition or rephrasing of questions; answers are frequently disorganized.
- D. Requires occasional repetition or rephrasing of questions; answers are sometimes disorganized.
- E. Understands questions immediately and shows semblance of organization in his answers.
- F. Understands everything; uses both formal and colloquial speech expected of an educated native speaker; answer shows evidence of logical organization.

Weighting Table

Proficiency Description	A	B	C	D	E	F
Pronunciation	0	1	2	2	3	4
Grammar	6	12	18	24	30	36
Fluency	2	4	6	8	10	12
Vocabulary	4	8	12	16	20	24
Comprehension	4	8	12	15	19	23

Finally, the evaluators determine from the conversion table the description within which the total score falls. (Adopted from Cañosa’s score limits)

Total

16-32

Description

Poor – Pronunciation frequently unintelligible. Frequent errors and a very heavy accent, making understanding difficult that requires frequent repetition. Constant errors showing control of very few major patterns and frequently preventing communication, speech is very slow and uneven except for short or routine sentences. Vocabulary limited to basic and survival areas (time, food, transportation, family, etc.) and requires constant repetition and rating of questions for better understanding answers are frequently disorganized.

33-49

Fair – “Foreign accent” requires concentrated listening and mispronunciation leads to occasional misunderstanding and apparent errors in grammar and vocabulary. Frequent errors showing some major patterns uncontrolled and causing occasional irritation and misunderstanding. Speech is frequently hesitant and jerky; sentences may be left uncompleted. Choice of words sometimes inaccurate, limitations of vocabulary present discussion of some common professional and social topics. Requires considerable repetition or

50-66

rephrasing of questions; answers are frequently disorganized.

Average- Marked “foreign accent” and occasional mispronunciation which do not interfere with understanding. Occasional errors showing imperfect control of some patterns but no weakness that causes misunderstanding. Speech is occasionally hesitant, with some unevenness caused by rephrasing and groping for words. Professional vocabulary adequate to discuss special interest; general vocabulary permits discussion of any non-technical subject with some circumstances. Requires occasional repetition or rephrasing of questions; answers are sometimes disorganized.

67-83

Very Satisfactory – No conspicuous mispronunciation, with no trace of foreign accent. A few errors with no patterns of failure in grammar, speech is effortless and smooth but perceptibly non-native in speech and evenness. Professional vocabulary broad and precise; general vocabulary adequate to cope with complex, practical problems and varied social situations. Understands questions immediately and shows semblance of organization in his answers.

84-99

Outstanding – Native pronunciation with no trace of “foreign accent”. On grammar, no more than two errors committed during the interview. Speech on all professional and general topics as effortless and smooth as a native speaker’s. Vocabulary apparently as accurate and extensive as that of an educated native speaker. Understanding everything, uses both formal and colloquial speech expected of an educated native speaker; answers of an educated native speaker; answers show logical organization.

Concerning their performance in English 102 subject, the researcher based on the description on the rating scale.

Grades	Percentage	Equivalent
1.00	98-100	Excellent
1.25	95-97	Outstanding
1.50	92-94	Very Highly Satisfactory
1.75	89-91	Highly Satisfactory
2.00	85-88	Satisfactory

2.25	82-84	Moderately Satisfactory
2.50	79-81	Less Satisfactory
2.75	77-78	Better than Passing
3.00	75-76	Passing
5.00	74 and below	Failure

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Oral Proficiency Level of the Second Year BA English Language Students

The oral proficiency level of the students is Average (M- 65.40) as shown in the table. One respondent (4%) was rated Outstanding, nine respondents (36%) were rated Very Satisfactory and fifteen respondents (60%) were rated Average. There was no respondent rated as Poor and Fair.

Table 1. Mean of the Second Year BA English Language students' Oral Proficiency Level

Respondent's Number	Total Proficiency	Description
1	72	Very Satisfactory
2	86	Outstanding
3	56	Average
4	50	Average
5	53	Average
6	72	Very Satisfactory
7	71	Very Satisfactory
8	70	Very Satisfactory
9	63	Average
10	82	Very Satisfactory
11	50	Average
12	59	Average
13	70	Very Satisfactory
14	50	Average
15	65	Average
16	63	Average
17	76	Very Satisfactory
18	59	Average
19	59	Average
20	54	Average
21	65	Average
22	82	Very Satisfactory
23	65	Average
24	77	Very Satisfactory
25	66	Average
Mean	65.40	AVERAGE

The average proficiency rating of the Second Year BA English language students means that most of them have marked “foreign accent” and occasional mispronunciation which do not interfere with understanding. In grammar, they commit occasional errors showing imperfect control of some patterns but no weakness that causes misunderstanding. In terms of fluency, their speech is occasionally hesitant, with some unevenness caused by rephrasing and groping for words. In terms of vocabulary, they have professional vocabulary adequate to discuss special interests; general vocabulary permits discussion of any non-technical subject with some circumstances. With regards to comprehension, they require occasional repetition or rephrasing of questions because their answers are sometimes disorganized.

The result could be attributed to the fact that English has already become part of the daily routine of the respondents since their course focuses on English language. The Bilingual Policy of 1974 as mandated by 1987 Philippine Constitution, led to the continual use of English together with Filipino as the medium of communication and instruction in the classroom. There are certain subjects that are taught in English and others are taught in Filipino. On the other hand, the time of the interview session could have influenced the students’ proficiency level. The interview was done during the intramurals week and the researcher just inserted the said interview in their vacant time. Some of the respondents were not able to come for the interview due to unknown reasons. Before the interview started, some respondents said they were nervous and not ready for the activity. In that sense, the researcher can conclude that what they feel at the time of interview affect their answers. During the interview, there were times that they stuttered because nervousness prevailed in them. There were some instances that they laughed at their own answers and “code-switched” because of difficulty in saying some words in straight English.

Performance of the Students in English 102 Subject

The performance of the Second Year BA English Language students in their English 102 subject – Writing on Discipline is shown in Table 2. The result shows that the performance level of the students is Less Satisfactory (M – 2.5). Six respondents (24%) were rated Very Highly Satisfactory, one respondent (4%) was rated Highly Satisfactory, two respondents (8%) were rated Moderately Satisfactory, one respondent (4%) was rated Less Satisfactory, five respondents (20%) were rated Better than Passing, three respondents (12%) were rated Passing and seven respondents (28%) were rated Failure. There is no respondent that was rated Excellent, Outstanding and Satisfactory.

Table 2. Mean of Performance of Second Year BA English Language students in their English 102 Subject

Respondents’ Number	Midterm Grade	Equivalent
1	2.75	Better than Passing
2	1.50	Very Highly Satisfactory
3	2.25	Moderately Satisfactory
4	2.75	Better than Passing
5	2.25	Moderately Satisfactory
6	1.75	Highly Satisfactory
7	2.75	Better than Passing
8	3.00	Passing

9	2.75	Better than Passing
10	1.50	Very Highly Satisfactory
11	4.25	Failure
12	2.75	Better than Passing
13	4.00	Failure
14	3.50	Failure
15	3.25	Failure
16	2.50	Less Satisfactory
17	1.50	Very Highly Satisfactory
18	3.00	Passing
19	3.25	Failure
20	3.00	Passing
21	4.00	Failure
22	1.50	Very Highly Satisfactory
23	3.25	Failure
24	1.50	Very Highly Satisfactory
25	1.50	Very Highly Satisfactory
Mean	2.50	LESS SATISFACTORY

Relationship between BA English students' Oral Proficiency and their Performance in English 102 subject?

To test the relationship between the students' oral proficiency and their performance in English 102 or the Writing on Discipline subject, the data were subjected to t-test. The table shows that the t-value of the t-test made between the students' oral proficiency and the performance in English 102 Subject is 32.181 with a corresponding probability value of 0.000 which is less than the set level of significance at 0.05, highly significant evidence which leads the researcher to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between BA English students' oral proficiency and their performance in English 102 Subject.

Table 3. Summary of the t-test for students' Oral Proficiency and their Performance in English 102 Subject.

Group	Number	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
Proficiency	25	65.40	10.41	32.181	0.000
Performance	25	1.39	0.80		

The result says that if the oral proficiency level of the students arises, their writing performance will also increase. According to Vann's (1981) writing stages, stage one says that writing is relatively undifferentiated from speech. Therefore, a student's oral competence impacts on writing activity. Polloway (1994) said that although performance on standardized tests receives the greatest attention in discussions of students' academic performance, teachers' evaluations of performance as indicated in course grades represent a common metric of student performance that often is more directly tied to the day-to-day business of teaching and learning than are annual standardized test scores. Grades serve a number of

important functions. However, as a measure of academic performance, teacher-given grades have well-known limitations. Further, this result is parallel to what Vann (1981) noted that oral competence affects writing.

CONCLUSION

In general, the Second Year BA English Language oral proficiency level is Average as rated by the rater. This indicates that students have not gained the sufficient proficiency in the oral proficiency satisfactorily. There is still a need to improve it. Their performance in English 102 is Less Satisfactory. This shows that they need to improve their writing skills and there is a significant difference between Second Year BA English Language oral proficiency and their performance in English 102 subject which is on Writing in Discipline.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results, it is recommended that the teachers assigned for interviewing BA English Language entrants should impose oral proficiency examination during the enrolment period in which this should be one of the bases for admission to the English programs, the teachers handling English subjects should continuously use the English language correctly in the classroom and opportunities for every student to talk in the classroom should be enacted and English teachers should encourage students to writing activities for them to master their skills and acquire more knowledge with regards to writing.

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