

Informal Linguistic Environments: Implications to Oral English Skills

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Abstract - *Informal linguistic environments have a pivotal role in second language learners' oral English skills. This descriptive-correlational study determined the association of informal linguistic environments and oral English skills of seventy-five (75) speech class students of a College in Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines. Data were gathered using pilot-tested questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results revealed that informal linguistic environments such as interacting in English language through technology-mediated communication, reading of fictional and non-fictional materials in English, watching of television programs and movies in English, and listening to the radio programs/songs in English were significantly contributed to students' oral English skills in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and comprehension. This study, therefore, recommended the need for student-participants to be exposed extensively to the informal contexts of learning the English language, specifically, on the macro skill of speaking.*

Keywords – correlational study, informal linguistic environment, oral English skills

INTRODUCTION

Speaking, as a medium of communication, is a nexus to conveying and expressing messages across a variety of audiences. It is the most indispensable tool for man's existence as it is essential for his day-to-day living. Thus, it is the most vital aspect in communication as it helps man unraveling, shaping and re-shaping the world he lives in.

On the surface, speaking the English language, among the second language learners is highly advantageous. Senatin and Centenera (2007) surmised that English speaking skills allow people anywhere in the world to gain power in international standards. Chiefly, English language is regarded as a tool-subject and as a discipline which lays the foundation of thought and experience upon which the rest of the academic knowledge is built (San Miguel, Barraquio, and Revilla, 2014). Thus, it is in this premise that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines offer speech communication courses in the curriculum of the different programs.

The emerging rapidly-expanding trends in post-modernism on globalization, internationalization and the ASEAN integration in Philippine educational system flagged the way for the school and the students to keep abreast on the said international and multi-cultural movements through language proficiency. Since the ability to speak well provides connections and relationships to others, HEIs have grasped the focus to prepare students to engage in future industry and government discussions. With this delineation, college students are, thus, deeply encouraged to speak the English language.

Although speaking in English is entrenched across subjects, the researcher, being a speech communication teacher, still observed that when students are tasked to perform any different English-speaking related activities in the classroom setting, majority of them are nervous. As a result, they end up conveying their thoughts using the Cebuano Visayan language. These observations were similar to Grumo's (2012) study on the perceived speaking problems

among the College students, where she delineated that even if students are already in the Higher Education Department, they still have fear, embarrassment, nervousness, and low self-esteem when it comes to expressing their ideas especially when talking to public. These observations clearly illustrate that students are not exposed to such English speaking activities outside the school premises. This study, therefore, intends to investigate the foregoing observations.

In conversing with others using the English language, one still has to go through a process. In speaking for instance, individuals get to learn the skills in formulating and organizing ideas logically, in observing appropriate intonation and pronunciation, in demonstrating correct grammar, and in analyzing messages comprehensively.

The above mentioned skills cannot only be learned in the formal linguistic environment or in a classroom and/or school setting. It can also be explored and learned outside these formal settings. According to Krashen (1981), informal language learning or informal linguistic environment is defined as the context where language learners effectively acquire the language outside the classroom set-ups. Rogers (2004) suggests that this environment is unstructured, but it is the most encompassing aspect of all the learning that people do every day. Given this framework, the study looked into the implications of the informal linguistic environment to students' oral English skills.

Thus, the study hypothesizes that informal linguistic environment correlates to student's oral English skills. It is within this light that this study is hoped to be an alternative to speech communication instructors to reinforce innovative strategies in responding effectively to students' speaking deficits.

FRAMEWORK

This study is culled from the theory of the informal language learning. Informal language learning or informal linguistic environment was first introduced and popularized by Knowles (1950); and, thus, being given an emphasis by

some of the language experts. Krashen (1981), a linguist, studied the features of the linguistic environment toward language learning and development. Accordingly, he labeled linguistic environment as formal and informal. Formal linguistic environment is a language learning where second language learners acquired proficiency of the language in a school based context. On the contrary, informal linguistic environment is grounded in the context outside the classroom.

The present study, though aware of contributions that formal linguistic environment can make to language learning, is mainly concerned with differences in oral proficiency level attributable to exposure to English language used outside the formal classroom instruction. In view of this, Lightbown and Spada (2001) articulated that language learning can occur outside the classroom setting unconsciously and incidentally through learner's interaction and exposure of the target language.

The components of informal linguistic environment were elaborated by Mourtega (2011) who demarcated that informal linguistic environment happens whenever individuals engage in conversations in the second language with family members, and peers; whenever they read books, magazines, and newspapers written in that language; whenever they come across information disseminated in different multimedia sources; or even when they are mere passive listeners in any activity or place in which the second language is spoken.

In this study, this environment included the participants' (1) exposure to English language use at home, (2) interaction in English language through technology-mediated communication, (3) reading of fictional and non-fictional materials in English, (4) watching of television programs and movies in English; and (5) listening to the radio programs and songs in English (Ajileye, 2007; Mourtega, 2011; Bahrani, 2012).

As regards the components of Oral English Skills, the study made use of the rubric on the Riverside County Seal of Multiliteracy, (2008) where it covers the following facets of Oral English Skills: (1) pronunciation, (2)

vocabulary, (3) grammar, (4) fluency, and (5) comprehension.

Within the paradigm of the literature reviews presented, this study is, therefore, intended.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The overall purpose of this study was to determine the implication of the Informal Linguistic Environment and Oral English Skills. Specifically, the study determined the following: (1) the extent of students’ exposure to informal linguistic environment, (2) the level of students’ Oral English Skills, and (3) the relationship between informal linguistic environment and Oral English Skills.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The study used the correlational research design. There were only seventy-five (75) second year students who were randomly sampled and who participated in this study from the total population of one hundred thirteen (113). These participants were picked from the Speech Communication class in one of the Colleges in Cagayan de Oro City. The researcher opted to choose these students to be his participants of study as they were enrolled in the speech class course for the school year 2017-2018.

A validated and pilot-tested instrument was utilized to gather the data. Part 1 is a survey questionnaire that provides indicators of student-participants’ informal linguistic environment. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the

questionnaire is .827, which indicates that the variables involved under study are reliable. Part 2 is a scoring tool that assesses the participants’ oral English skills during their extemporaneous and impromptu speech activities with the researcher.

As for the interpretation of the participants’ responses on both research instruments, the scores were coded using the following scales: 4.51 – 5.00 (Very Moderate Extent/ Excellent); 3.51 – 4.50 (Moderate Extent/ Very Good); 2.51 – 3.50 (Moderate Extent/ Good); 1.51 – 2.50 (Low Extent/ Fair); 1.00 – 1.50 (No Extent at all/ Poor).

Descriptive statistics such as mean distribution was used to determine the participants’ informal linguistic environment and oral English skills. Pearson r correlation was also used to identify the association of students’ informal linguistic environment and oral English skills.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the mean distribution of the participants’ exposure to informal linguistic environment. Generally, data show that the participants’ informal exposure to the English language was to a “moderate extent”. This holds true to the student-participants’ informal linguistic exposure to the English language in listening to radio programs/songs in English (M=4.64), reading of fictional and nonfictional materials in English (M=4.24), and watching movies/TV programs in English (M=3.59).

Table 1. Mean Distribution of Informal Linguistic Environment

Informal Linguistic Environment	Mean	Qualitative Description
Home	2.05	Low Extent
Technology-mediated communication	3.33	Moderate Extent
Reading of fictional and nonfictional materials in English	4.24	Moderate Extent
Watching movies/TV programs in English	3.69	Moderate Extent
Listening to radio programs/songs in English	4.64	Moderate Extent
Overall Mean	3.59	Moderate Extent

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

Moreover, participants’ informal linguistic exposure in technology (M=3.33) is at “moderate extent”. This implies that when student-participants communicate using the technology, they are likely shifting from one language over the other language and/or dialect when they communicate with others using the technology. Lowest among variable indicators was the participants’ informal linguistic exposure at home (2.05). This implies that participants are not likely to use the English language at home when they are communicating to their family members, friends, and relatives. One of the reasons for this is that Filipinos’ first language is not the English language. Be it that the medium of communication used at home was their dialect or their national language.

Table 2 reveals the mean distribution of the participants’ oral English skills. Accordingly, the overall mean of 3.57 indicates that the participants are rated as “very good” in their oral English skills. Highest among the area assessed was the student-participants’ fluency (M=3.70) indicating a very good rating. This means that they are able to express themselves smoothly using the English language (Klemek, n.d). Their speed and spontaneity of the language are deemed to be proficient. The participants’ oral English skill in terms of comprehension (M=3.68) was also rated as very good. This would validate that participants of the study were able to answer well at a normal speed in the open-ended questions during the interview, although intermittent repetition of both the question and answer were nevertheless identified.

Participants’ oral English skills in terms of

vocabulary (3.55) and pronunciation (3.51) are rated as very good. This means that the student-participants, when being interviewed, used simple words to strengthen the whole communication process. With their vocabulary skill, for instance, participants were occasionally using inappropriate terms, where they themselves tried to rephrase to be clearly understood.

As to their pronunciation, participants were intelligible, though were very conscious of a definite word and occasional inappropriate patterns. It was also observed that they were able to enunciate the words well when they were speaking. Although the language used is English, utterances of words are still identified to be that of a Filipino accent.

Lowest area on students’ oral English skills was on grammar (3.40). Findings in this area reveal that student-participants were having frequent errors with their grammar, which resulted to an occasional obscurity of their answers. This finding could be possibly attributed to the fact that at times grammar in speaking is overlooked, as the speaker is only focusing on the substance of his message than that of the his structure. With this contention, Hilliard’s (2014) study on “Spoken grammar and its role in the English language classroom” serves this end. Although student-participants were already aware about the rules that govern the use of the language, they still can’t help but to commit a mistake when talking. However, in this study, it implies that student-participants may at times overlook their grammar skills when communicating orally.

Table 2. Mean Distribution of Students’ Oral English Skills

Oral English Skills	Mean	Qualitative Description
Pronunciation	3.51	Very Good
Vocabulary	3.55	Very Good
Grammar	3.40	Good
Fluency	3.70	Very Good
Comprehension	3.68	Very Good
Overall Mean	3.57	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

Table 3 presents the association between the implications of informal linguistic environment and the student-participants’ oral English skills. Evidently, the data show that there is a significant association between the participants’ informal linguistic environment and oral English skills.

Table 3. Association between the Implications of Informal Linguistic Environment to the Oral English Skills

Oral English Skills		Home	Technology	Fiction and Nonfictional Materials	Movies/TV Programs	Radio Programs/Songs
Pronunciation	<i>Pearson r</i>	0.16	0.40	0.24	0.05	0.22
	<i>Sig.</i>	0.17	0.00**	0.35	0.65	0.05**
Vocabulary	<i>Pearson r</i>	0.13	0.36	0.26	0.28	0.21
	<i>Sig.</i>	0.27	0.00**	0.03*	0.02*	0.07
Grammar	<i>Pearson r</i>	0.12	0.35	0.29	0.18	0.05
	<i>Sig.</i>	0.31	0.00**	0.01*	0.13	0.67
Fluency	<i>Pearson r</i>	0.15	0.28	0.20	0.18	0.11
	<i>Sig.</i>	0.19	0.01*	0.28	0.11	0.34
Comprehension	<i>Pearson r</i>	0.13	0.31	0.26	0.22	0.04
	<i>Sig.</i>	0.27	0.01*	0.03*	0.05**	0.70

*correlation is significant at 0.05 level

**correlation is significant at 0.01 level

Based on the findings of the study, it is espoused that the higher the participants’ exposure of the English language in informal linguistic environment in terms of technology, fictional and nonfictional materials, movies, television, and radio programs and songs, the more likely they increase and/or improve their oral English skills, specifically, on the areas of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and comprehension. This finding is similar to Selinger’s (cited by Ajielye, 2007) study that informal linguistic environment could explain the participant’s oral English skills (Bueraheng and Lohawirayanon, 2014; Mourtega, 2011). Bahrani, Sim, and Nekoueizadeh (2014) in their study admitted that the informal settings are of high importance in attaining language skills, specifically in speaking.

This is possible considering that participants’ exposure to the English language is not only learned in the confines of the classroom

set-up. Because English language is considered as the participants’ second language and to some as their first language, student-participants are able to understand, and comprehend well the English language when having speech activities like extemporaneous, impromptu, and debate to name a few.

In a nutshell, the result of the study implies that participants’ informal linguistic environment is imperative to their oral English skills. This is viewed in the context where student-participants’ rated their oral English skills as “very good” and a “moderate extent” of their informal linguistic environment, specifically, on the areas of using technology, reading of fictional and nonfictional materials, watching movies/TV programs, and listening to radio programs/songs in English. This result validates Mourtega’s (2011) postulation that the informal linguistic environment provides

opportunity for the second language learner's to acquire the language extensively.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study assessed the extent of the participants' exposure on the informal linguistic environment vis-à-vis their oral English skills. Evidently, informal linguistic environment provides an impact to student-participants' oral English skills. This finding is in consonance with Krashen's (1981) assertion confirming that meaningful language activities in informal linguistic environment settings are contributory to second language learning. Such meaningful language activities that Krashen asserted are the interactions of the second language learners toward the environment predominantly at home, with their peers, using media, technology, and materials written in English. That being said, Krashen emphasized that second language learners who are more exposed to the target language in an informal setting will have a strong foundation to strengthen his/her oral English skills. This implies that when students are highly exposed to informal settings of learning the language, they are likely to acquire the necessary skills in speaking. In the school's effort to strengthen the oral English skills of students, the researcher points to the need for the informal linguistic environment to create more opportunities for the learners to hone their oral English skills in a meaningful wide variety of contexts. Thus, the finding implies the need for student-participants to be exposed extensively in the informal context of learning the language. As regards to the communication teachers, they may device activities, methodologies, techniques, and strategies in helping and promoting students' communicative language performance through their exposures on the informal linguistic environment.

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