Oral Communication Proficiency in English of the Grade 5 Pupils

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Abstract
This study aimed to identify the oral communication proficiency in English of the Grade 5 pupils in Bontoc Central School. Specifically, it highlighted fluency, accuracy, and nonverbal cues as they are the most commonly observed features in the oral language. Two speaking tasks were administered to the Grade 5 pupils, and two raters evaluated their performances. The result showed that the pupils' overall level of the oral communication proficiency in English is early intermediate or Grade 2 level according to the K12 Curriculum Standard. This means that they were only able to demonstrate understanding of grade level appropriate words used to communicate inter- and intrapersonal experiences, ideas, thoughts, actions and feelings. Furthermore, at this level, they only demonstrated understanding of common expressions for effective oral interpretation and communication. The findings only show that the oral proficiency in English of the Grade 5 pupils needs improvement on their fluency in speech, accuracy in the form and production of grammatically correct linguistic structures, and demonstration of appropriate nonverbal cues as these features in oral communication are interrelated. Findings and interpretation also show that pupils who have strong command of grammatical structure and understanding of various verbal and nonverbal elements in oral communication display a speech that is effortless, smooth with adequate speed.

Keywords: accuracy, fluency, nonverbal cues, oral communication proficiency.

Introduction

Student's ability to speak does not automatically lead to proficiency as this requires learner's exposure to the target language which entails particular attention and constant practice. This is why children's oral language proficiency should be developed as early as they can in the elementary level. It is through speaking that learners are judged upon most in real life situation (Thornby, 1995). Nunan (1991) also points out that the ability to carry out a conversation in language successfully is measured through speaking. In evaluating the speaker's proficiency, raters look into the features of oral proficiency. The indicators in these features found in the assessment tools may vary depending on the different viewpoints of what oral proficiency is whether it is taken in its broad or narrow sense. The term oral proficiency should not be taken synonymously to oral fluency especially in the second language assessment. De Jong (2018) and Kormo and Dénes (2004) consider fluency as one feature of oral proficiency.

In speaking, fluency and accuracy are components considered for effective speaking performance (Yahay, 2015). However, there are also different views on fluency. Some researchers define fluency as the ability to express one's thought easily where fluency gives an impression that speech "flow" (de Jong & Perfetti, 2011;Koponen & Riggenback, 2000). This is similar to Richards and Rodgers (2011) where they define fluency as having the qualities of being natural and normal, which include native-like use of pausing, rhythm, intonation, stress, rate of speaking, and use of interjections.

However, people differ in how they speak even in their mother language suggesting individual differences. Other people speak faster than others, and some use more filled pauses such as *uh*'s and *uhm*'s than others, while others use more silent pauses or long pauses than others (Clark & Fox Tree, 2002; Shriberg, 1994).

From these descriptions, Kormos and Denes (2004) mention good predictors of fluency scores for both native and non-native speakers. From other studies, these predictors are considered as temporal variables or measurements (Raupach, 1980; Lennon, 1990; Segalowits & Freed, 2004; de Jong & Perfetti, 2004; Garcia-Amaya, 2009). However, the temporal measures that are taken in the researches vary from the design of their research such as speech rate, articulation rate, phonation rate, mean length of runs, and pace. The measures mentioned are the common variables usually present in assessing fluency especially for studies focusing only on fluency. Kormos and Denes (2004) also suggest that accuracy should be included in measuring oral fluency. Though it is related to proficiency, accuracy also plays an important role in fluency judgments and so it is related to temporal variables.

What is common though among these studies in L2 is that researchers find the definition from two approaches: qualitative and quantitative aspects (Segalowits, 2010). They serve as the basis for identifying the features or variables on fluency measures. From Lennon's definition, these two aspects still fall on the narrow sense. This study takes oral fluency in a narrow sense focusing only on the qualitative aspects.

To establish accuracy as an important variable in oral proficiency, measures of accuracy are also included.Fluency and accuracy as features of proficiency are considered to be indicators of the learner's proficiency as they are used for measuring the progress in language learning (Housen & Kuiken, 2009). Speaking also covers knowledge on the linguistic features that requires memorized vocabulary and grammatical comprehension which are also the components of accuracy (Derakhshan, Khalili, & Besheti, 2016).

Accuracy focuses more on form and the production of grammatically correct linguistic structures. The importance of grammar is associated with accurate use of language for effective communication. As mentioned by Ahangari and Barghi (2012), accuracy is the ability to use language correctly, and the main aim of grammar instruction is to uplift and enhance the accuracy of language learners for better communication. This is why accuracy, as one component of linguistic competence, cannot be ignored in language teaching.

Richard and Schmidt (2002) also explained that the ability to use the language accurately does not necessarily include the ability to speak or write fluently. This could be the reason why ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers nowadays view grammar less as a body of knowledge to be studied than as a skill to be practiced and developed (Larsen-Freeman, 2001). However, to convey meaning and to avoid being misunderstood, grammatical knowledge of the language learner is as much as important as developing their fluency for effective communication. For a learner to communicate effectively, he or she needs to attain both fluency in language and grammatical accuracy.

In the delivery of an effective oral performance, nonverbal cues are also worthy of attention because they do not only facilitate learners in L2 listening comprehension, but also have impact on learning of new words in L2 (Cao & Chen, 2017). They further explain that majority of gestures produced by speakers have similar meaning to their spoken words. Nonverbal cues do not only convey the speaker's feeling and attitudes but also from the listener's feelings and attitude towards the speaker. Furthermore, non-verbal cues are also significant in the evaluation of the speaker's oral proficiency. Jenkins and Parra's study (2003) on the role of nonverbal behaviours (paralinguistic features and kinesic behaviours) as assessment of non-native speaker's oral proficiency revealed that the speaker's nonverbal behaviours worked as an important evaluation signal both positively and negatively. Relative to oral proficiency assessment, speakers who present appropriate nonverbal cues are judged to be proficient (Kusanagi, 2005). Hence, there is a need for language learners to be aware of nonverbal cues, and there is also a need for teachers to emphasize this in language teaching. Nonverbal cues include paralanguage (vocal cues like tone of voice) and kinesic behaviours which include facial expressions, eye behaviours, posture, gestures, touch, and personal space (Hecht &

Ambadi, 1999).Often times, when speakers try to express their message, the body parts they commonly use are the head, face, eyes, eyebrows, trunk, hand, fingers, and arm. Such body movements that accompany speech depict thoughts. Because of this, others claim them to be communicative (Loehr, 2004). Also, because they are visible, they only take few minutes to impress the listener especially when verbal and nonverbal communications are in congruent for him to believe the speaker (Mehrabian & Morton, 1967).

For these reasons, the objective of this study aimed to determine the oral communication proficiency in English of the participants along fluency, accuracy, and nonverbal cues. Oral communication encompasses both listening and speaking skills; however, this study only covers one aspect which is the speaking skill of the pupils and is concerned with the speaker's proficiency.

These features of oral proficiency have a great impact on the learners. To develop this, teachers give speaking activities to learners to help them improve their oral proficiency. These tasks are also used in assessing oral proficiency especially when improving fluency and accuracy. As observed, many studies used monologue samples despite the advantages of using dialogues in terms of its authenticity (Witton-Davies, 2014). Monologues are easier especially when it comes to creating its rubrics though the activity is time consuming.

Based on the K-12 English Curriculum Guide 2016, to improve the oral language of the pupils, the common suggested activities from Grades 1 to 4 are sharing past experiences, expressing thoughts and feelings, retelling stories, sequencing events, narrating, among others which require free-talk and narration. Since these are the common activities that pupils are used to, this study also used free-talk activity using elicitation technique and picture-narrative tasks in assessing the oral proficiency of the pupils.

Method

Participants
Grade 5 pupils of Bontoc Central School (BCS) were the participants of this study. It is only appropriate to choose these Grade 5 learners for they are expected to express themselves in spoken language using the target language (L2). BCS has five sections for the grade 5 level with 25 to 30 pupils per class. Seven pupils from each section were randomly selected for the study with a total of thirty-five pupils.

Materials
Free-talk activity using the elicitation technique and picture-guide were used in the speaking tasks of the pupils to find out their oral proficiency level. On the teacher's evaluation tool in this study, the rating scale is made based on the K-12 Curriculum content and performance standard of 2016. Videotape was also used in the research to help the researcher analyse secondary characteristics such as paralinguistic features and struggle behaviour. The pupils' performances were all recorded and were transcribed carefully.

Procedure
Content validation of the evaluation tool for speaking activities was accomplished by six language education experts. After the evaluation tool was validated and approved, the researcher wrote a letter of request addressed to the school principal of the target population to conduct the study. The researcher then submitted the letter to the principal of Bontoc Central School, and the request was approved.

The researcher conducted class observations in the Grade 5 level to observe the natural state of the pupils in the classroom. The researcher was introduced by the classroom teacher and allowed her to observe how the pupils interacted with their classmates and how they participated in oral activities. This helped the researcher focus on the pupils' oral communication abilities like how well they deliver their message to the class. After two days of observation, the researcher administered the first task - a free-talk activity. The free-talk activity used the elicitation technique where the pupils were asked about their interests. This activity allowed the pupils to use the language creatively and at the same time, it reflected their ability to communicate effectively in the target language.

There were two raters for the two speaking tasks. The teacher rated the oral performance of the pupils inside the classroom while the second rater evaluated the oral performance of the pupils by watching the videos of the pupils. The raters evaluated the oral performance of the pupils using the validated rubrics. The first rater was a teacher who handled all the English subjects in Grade 5. The other rater was an English teacher who has a master's in Teaching English as a Second Language.

The second task was a picture-narrative task. This was administered one week after the first task. In this stage, the pupils were given two sets of 6-7 pictures, arranged in a logical order, and they were asked to come up with a story of their own. This allowed the pupils to generate ideas and use the language creatively. The pupils were given five minutes to prepare and 4-5 minutes to deliver. However, during the oral performance, the pupils only used 1-3 minute delivery. The same teacher and the second rater evaluated the oral performance of the pupils. All speaking tasks were recorded.

Design
The data gathered from the raters' evaluation tool were statistically treated using the weighted mean. The scores from each task obtained from the two raters were combined. The weighted mean was used applying the following scales:

	Level	Description
4.21 – 5.0	Grade 5	Advanced
3.41 – 4.20	Grade 4	Early Advanced
2.61 – 3.40	Grade 3	Intermediate
1.81 – 2.60	Grade 2	Early Intermediate
1.00 – 1.80	Grade 1	Beginning

The scales above followed the descriptive levels in the oral proficiency scale used in this study in assessing the pupils' oral performance.

Results
The oral communication proficiency in English of the grade 5 pupils along fluency, accuracy and non-verbal cues

Table 1: Summary of Table of Task 1 and Task 2

TASK 1 Free-talk activity

	5	4	3	2	1	Σ	μ	Description
Fluency	0	9	13	23	25	70	2.1	Early intermediate
	0	36	39	46	25	146		
Accuracy	0	3	11	39	17	70	2.0	Early intermediate
	0	12	33	78	17	140		
Nonverbal cues	0	4	26	32	8	70	2.4	Early intermediate
	0	16	78	64	8	166		
Overall Speaking Performance	0	4	16	32	18	70	2.1	Early intermediate
	0	16	48	64	18	146		
Grand Mean							2.1	Early intermediate

TASK 2 Picture-narrative

	5	4	3	2	1	Σ	μ	Description
Fluency	0	26	30	13	1	70	3.2	Intermediate
	0	104	90	26	1	221		
Accuracy	0	0	34	33	3	70	2.4	Early intermediate
	0	0	102	66	3	171		
Nonverbal cues	0	1	23	43	3	70	2.3	Early intermediate
	0	4	69	86	3	162		

Overall Speaking Performance	0 0	9 36	24 72	31 62	6 6	70 176	2.5	Early intermediate
Grand Mean							2.6	Early intermediate

Table 1 shows the summary of the two speaking tasks that were conducted in this study. From the two speaking activities, there were 35 pupils who participated. In addition, it reveals the Grand Mean from each task. Accordingly, table 1 show that the level of oral proficiency of the Grade 5 pupils in the first task is early intermediate with the grand mean of 2.1. Included also in the table is the result of the second task. In this task, the level of the oral proficiency of the Grade 5 pupils is early intermediate with a grand mean of 2.6.

Discussion

Fluency
Task 1 show that the pupils had a Grade 2 level of fluency or described as beginning with a weighted mean of 2.1 in task 1. In task 2, they had a weighted mean of 3.1 which describes the pupils as intermediate or with a Grade 3 level. In task 1, the pupils showed that they were able to connect simple short sentences to convey their thoughts, but their speech was slow and often hesitant. There were some sentences that were left uncompleted, but they were able to continue, however, hesitantly. Even then, listeners did not have trouble understanding them. Those pupils with a Grade 3 level of fluency exhibited smooth speech but with some hesitation and unevenness caused primarily when speakers rephrase and grope for words. They were also able to create simple but longer sentences. Though pupils rephrased their sentences or groped for their next words, they were able to add extra information and details about their responses. Their listeners could still understand them. The fluency of the pupils was affected mostly because of rephrasing and groping of words. As observed, rephrasing and groping of words are common to the pupils as well as self-correction; hence, their line of thought was affected resulting to their confusion as they are focused on self-correction and rephrasing.

In the two speaking tasks, none of the pupils had the Grade 5 level of fluency or none of them are intermediate. At this level, a speaker should be able to demonstrate a speech that is effortless and smooth with adequate speed. Furthermore, the speaker should be able to convey clear meanings and nuance with clear enunciation, pronunciation, intonation, stress and tone. The Grade 5 pupils were not able to demonstrate this level of fluency.

As observed from the pupils' oral performance, when speakers were not sure of what they were about to say, they tended to mumble or lower their voices in almost indistinct sound or even requested to used their L1 in giving their answers. When pupils were asked to explain something, it was natural for them to use their L1. But in language learning, if pupils were not encouraged, the result is that they shift to their first language. This is in accordance with Tuan and Mai (2015) who explained that when learners share the same mother-tongue which was easier for them to use. In addition, if they were asked to explain something to another, there was no doubt that they used their first language to explain it especially when there was no encouragement from the teachers to use the target language. Tuan and Mai (2015) further explained that since teachers frequently allowed this, the learners felt comfortable doing and this becomes a problem because language learners did not have the chance practicing the target language; thus, affecting their oral proficiency.

From the two tasks, Table 1 also reflects that the level of fluency of the pupils was different on both tasks even though these tasks were monologue activities. Tavakoli and Foster (2008) explained that monologue activities make greater demands on attentional resources which decrease fluency. Moreover, the preparation of the pupils has an effect in their oral performances. Fluency of the pupils improves when they were provided enough time to prepare. The pupils' performances in this study corroborated with what Tavakoli and Foster had explained. The first task was a free-talk activity using elicitation technique, and so the pupils were expected to answer immediately.

For the free talk activities, familiarity of the topic encourages learners to speak. In line with this, Shabani (2013) also explained that the familiarity of the pupils on the topic and their background knowledge provide them with the necessary information to facilitate speaking tasks and results in more fluency in speaking. However, during the first task, the researcher observed that they were too shy to talk about themselves, their family and friends and this has an effect in their fluency.

In the second task, the pupils were given five minutes to prepare for their own story after the pictures were raised on the board. The study of Ellis (2009) and Ahmadian and Tavakoli (2011) supported the idea that preparation and planning help in fluency development since this helps speakers enhance their access to their base knowledge and even assist them to make stronger connection to their models.

Since the result in this study showed that the level of fluency varies according to the tasks given to pupils, and as mentioned in the previous discussion of this study, oral fluency must not be the basis of the pupil's overall oral performance or oral proficiency of the learner as fluency is only a feature of oral proficiency. Oral fluency refers to how one expresses his or her thoughts easily (de Jong & Perfetti, 2011; Koponen & Riggenbach, 2000).

Accuracy
On the level of accuracy, table 1 shows that the pupils are described to be early intermediate or with a grade 2 level in both tasks with a weighted mean of 2.0 for task 1 and 2.4 for task 2. The pupils on this level had exhibited a fair control of most basic syntactic patterns. The pupils were able to convey meaning in simple sentences though there were some uncontrolled important grammatical patterns and errors which occasionally impeded pupil's comprehension.

As for the grade 2 level of accuracy, there were twenty pupils in Task 1 and sixteen pupils in Task 2. Most answers from the pupils were short answers and with limited vocabulary. Most of them also used the same simple syntactic pattern like the *subject-verb-object* pattern: for instance, *"I am (name). I live at (place). I am (age). My friend/s is/are."* This was due to the linguistic factors affecting the speaker's oral proficiency. As Nation (2001) explains, learners who had limited vocabulary can hardly put their vocabulary knowledge into productive use. Because of their difficulty in finding or remembering the proper word, their fluency was also affected.

Though task 1 was a free-talk activity, the pupils showed that they had difficulty in expressing their thoughts. According to Baker and Westrup (2003), learners had difficulty in responding to their teacher's questions especially when they were asked to say something in English language because they had little idea on what to say, which vocabulary to use, and how to use grammar correctly.

As it can be gleaned in table 1, none from the participants had reached the advanced or grade 5 level of accuracy on both tasks. Since the participants are in grade 5, they are expected to be at this level. Advanced level means that a speaker must have a strong command of grammatical structure. In this level, the speaker must also display some evidences of difficult, complex patterns of sentences and idioms. Moreover, the speaker must clearly convey meaning; the speaker must be able to differentiate meaning between words and process complete content of message in a cohesive discourse. Infrequent errors can be observed from the speaker's speech, though they do not impede comprehension.

The Grade 5 pupils were not able to reach the accuracy level of what was expected from them because they lack vocabulary skills as reflected in their oral performances. From the oral performances, though the pupils committed grammatical errors, the content of what they wanted to convey was there, and they could also follow the conversations in English. During the free-talk activity, while a participant was giving his/her answer, some pupils tried to correct the grammatical errors of the speakers; and some also coached the speaker by suggesting an answer. This implied that the pupils were aware of correct grammatical structures but when it was their turn to speak, they also had the possibility to commit the same error. Such observation was similar to the findings in the study of Richards and Renandya (2002) that many students knew the rules of the target language, but they failed to show this knowledge for practical communicative purposes. Such observation implied

that pupils lacked practice in communicative interaction and awareness of the pupils on grammar was validated by the answers given by teachers who focused more on grammar and vocabulary.

Non – Verbal Cues

Nonverbal cues are as important as the verbal elements in oral performances since they convey meanings too (Loehr, 2004). The participants' level of nonverbal cues in oral communication is described to be early intermediate or grade 2 level in both tasks with a weighted mean of 2.4 in the first task and a 2.3 weighted mean in the second. The participants in this level missed one or two of these elements such as good posture, proper gestures, warm expressions and also eye contact to the audience. Eye contact to the audience was sometimes missing also. As observed during the first task given to the pupils, it was clear that they also lacked practice in presentation as this type of activity requires immediate answer. Some participants were observed to be either standing with their arms crossed or positioning their hands in front of their crotch. Others seemed to be "washing" their hands while speaking. As for their posture, some pupils even in other levels had slumped shoulders and caved chest. These gestures and facial expressions, as explained by Gregersen (2008), are signs of language anxiety. He argues that because of this anxiety, learners may find learning less stimulating.

The poor body language of the pupils affected the audience attention. Instead of focusing on the message of the speaker, the pupils shifted their focus on the speaker's body language reflecting much the speaker's state of mind and emotion, and the audience can observe this. Woodrow (2006) explains that pupils encounter the stress most when they perform in front of the class or when they are being assessed.

Pupils get distracted in their performance when they lose control on their body language. For instance, as observed in task 2, when pupils seemed to have forgotten the next event in their narration which they had organized earlier before their performance, it could already be observed that the speakers would stare at the pictures most of the time with less eye contact to their audience. Unnecessary movements were also observed such as swaying, covering their mouths, scratching their heads, and laughing.

Based on the result of each feature of oral proficiency of this study, this meant that the three features went hand in hand. However, the result also suggested that these levels vary depending on the activities given. The researcher had observed that the result from the two tasks was reasonable due to the different speaking tasks given to them. Free-talk activity as observed by the researcher seemed to be more difficult for the pupils. On the second task which was a picture-narrative, the pupils were asked to share their own stories. The researcher observed that the pupils were more creative. Before the speaking performance, the pupils were given five minutes to prepare to come up with their own story creating a positive effect on their oral performance.

The result from this study also suggests that pupils lack appropriate facial expressions and gestures when it came to their oral presentations which could affect their communication even outside the classroom setting. This also implied that teachers must also emphasize the importance of non-verbal cues in language teaching.

Based on the Curriculum Guide of K-12, the overall speaking performance of the Grade 5 pupils must be at level 5 as to their expected oral performance. This meant that Grade 5 pupils must be able to demonstrate understanding of various verbal elements in orally communicating information; various non-verbal elements in orally communicating information; and the oral standards of English in order to participate in various oral communication demands (situation, purpose and audience). However, as reflected in table 1, the Grade 5 pupils had a grade 2 level equivalent to the level of what was expected from a Grade 2 pupil.

The implications of the level of oral proficiency of the pupils based on the results of this study are on the speaking activities given to the class, and the teaching strategies of the teachers. Fluency and accuracy are both important in language teaching and learning. For teachers, some emphasize only one feature like fluency or on accuracy only. However, there should be a right balance between accuracy and fluency using different activities with the context relevant to the communicative situation.

Conclusion

The oral proficiency in English of the Grade 5 pupils need improvement on their fluency in speech, accuracy in the form and production of grammatically correct linguistic structures, and demonstration of appropriate nonverbal cues as this features in oral communication are interrelated. Furthermore, the common features in oral communication such as fluency, accuracy, and nonverbal cues were interrelated. If a speaker had a strong command of grammatical structure and demonstrated understanding of various verbal and nonverbal elements in oral communication, the speaker also had a greater chance of displaying a speech that is effortless, smooth and with adequate speed. If fluency and accuracy were fully developed, and the speaker was aware of it, then his/her display of nonverbal cues such as good posture, proper gestures, warm expression and eye contact with the listener were observed. This could reflect the speaker's confidence of his or her ability to convey his or her message no matter what situation he/she is faced with.

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