



GRAMMATICAL ERROR ANALYSIS IN SPEECH AS PERFORMANCE AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN SRI LANKA.

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ABSTRACT

Proficiency in the English language includes the four skills of writing, speaking, listening, and reading. In considering the proficiency among students to undergraduates a reasonable deficiency in productive skills is noticed. The concerned aspect of "speech as performance" is a unified aspect of the three categories of speech and the most considerate among them. As speech as performance carries more grammatical accuracy and meaning other than the organization of content the producer has to be conscious and cautious about the content they are to deliver. Upon that, speaking carries a minor level of confidence and the undergraduates are not positive to engage in speaking due to stage fear. Hence, the types of errors conducted by undergraduates can be divided into errors and mistakes. However, to understand the errors committed by the undergraduates five undergraduates each from six universities were given a task of a public speech. The total number of participants in the sample was thirty. The undergraduates were selected from the universities of Colombo, Kelaniya, Moratuwa, Peradeniya, Jaffna, and Ruhuna using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was utilized to identify undergraduates from a non-linguistic background. Some observations were physically conducted while the other sessions were observed through recorded materials. After analyzing the errors committed by the undergraduates, they could be categorized into three categories such as omission, misinformation, and irregular placement of parts of speech. These categories included mistakes relevant to articles, auxiliary verbs, tense formation, irregular formatting of plurals, superlatives, and predicate placement. Moreover, the Speeches conducted by the undergraduates demonstrated a high preference to present a pre-prepared speech, written in papers. The observations revealed that the errors were the results of less preparation while some were caused by the negligence of minor grammatical formations. False identification of the function of articles and prepositions and mismanagement of tenses were abundant. The usage of incorrect passive voice instead of active voice was another reason for the higher number of errors. Hence, the study demonstrated that undergraduates heavily rely on written production while the errors committed need revision of grammar from basic stages to make a comprehensible output within speech production.

Keywords: grammatical errors, speech as performance, undergraduates, speech production

INTRODUCTION

Mastering any skill carries proficiency in receptive and productive skills. Proficiency in one's language can be measured with an analysis of productive skills such as speaking and writing. Productive skills carry three aspects in their presentation speaking interaction, transaction, and performance. Out of the three speaking as a performance requires a higher proficiency of language skills due to its functionality as in public and performing speeches. Hence, to integrate the linguistic proficiency of an undergraduate into speaking as performance; in the university academic curriculum, they get wider exposure to speech as a performance which is manifested through presentations and



assignments. As observed by the lecturers of English the undergraduates of non-linguistic departments have a higher tendency to commit a higher percentage of errors during their speech in a generalized perspective. During the study, the author has to identify the difference between mistakes and errors and address the errors committed by the undergraduates.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This research aims to identify the common errors committed by Sri Lankan undergraduates during speaking performances and to classify them accordingly. Meanwhile, the author expects to figure out possible activities and lessons that can be executed in order to correct the identified errors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Considering the literature based on the field of analyzing errors in performing speeches the attention is within the recent two decades. Hence, reading from Richards and Schmidt (2002), portrayed an error as a deviant of a fluent linguist or a native speaker while it's a sign of incomplete learning. Moreover, the language learning process has two different definitions for error and mistake. According to Corder (1967), an error occurs with the changed output as a result of a lack of knowledge. It is a signal to the teacher to understand the lack of competence within the student. On the other hand, a mistake is the result of a learner's inability to perform the competence they have acquired. Mistakes become the outcome of "competing plans, memory limitation, and lack of automaticity." The above perspectives present the fact that errors and mistakes are considered seriously, and the concept of analysis is to avoid them. As in Nunan's (1999) point of view language learning does not limit only to the acquisition of theory but should master the practical aspect, the functioning of the language through communication. Hence, it is understandable that mastering speaking plays a vital role in language acquisition. In addition to that, "errors reflect gaps in a learner's knowledge; they occur because the learner does not know what is correct structure" (Ellis, 1997). That lets the instructor reflect and plan the upcoming lessons so that would bridge the gap between the existing knowledge and the forgotten or less competent subject matter.

METHODOLOGY

This research is carried out with the participation of thirty undergraduates five each from the University of Colombo, University of Kelaniya, University of Moratuwa, University of Ruhuna, University of Peradeniya, and University of Jaffna. The sampling was done under the purposive sampling method in order to obtain a sample of undergraduates that come from a non-linguistic background in a qualitative manner. As the observation task, the undergraduates were asked to conduct a presentation on a topic of their preference irrespective of their study stream. During the course of the presentations, some universities in the metropolitan area were visited by the researcher, while the rest was recorded and replayed. A presentation lasted for four hours either supported by a slides deck or not. The undergraduate had the freedom to select the option of getting the aid from slides or not. The committed errors were noted, and they were classified as omission, misformation, and misordering.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The errors conducted by the undergraduates during their presentations were classified into three categories followed by Ellis (1997). Out of the four proposed classifications, only three categories



were visible among the accumulated results. Hence, the three common categories were omission, misformation, and misordering.

The omission is the avoidance of parts of speech or other grammatical components where it is necessary. The undergraduates kept omitting articles, main verbs, auxiliary verbs, prepositions, possessive cases, and necessary pronouns. For example, the interrogative form “What you think of the future of economic market in the year 2030?” lacks “do” within the question. And heavily the be form was omitted while making participle tenses. “Girls improving the skills than boys” presents the omission of the auxiliary verbs while “student[s] work can affect the future of our country.” The subject student needs to carry a possessive case as ‘students’ to generate meaningful output. Beyond the assigned task during the introductory sessions, they committed the same error with “My English lecturer name is ...” While considering the teaching and learning process of an undergraduate from the school level onwards they are explained with the correct usage of possessive case, yet they keep on continuing the same mistake. Most commonly the undergraduates of the sample had a tendency to omit the pluralization marker. For instance, “There is several step to carry out against pollution of the environment”, Instead of “There are several steps”. Hence, the errors committed by the undergraduates suggest the grammatical components that need more focus within the classroom.

Misformation is the second category of classified grammatical errors. It is using the wrong form of structures and words that includes mispronunciations regarding pluralization, incorrect word selection, and the usage of irregular forms of verbs, adjectives, and nouns. The undergraduates demonstrated a higher tendency to create irregular formations in a regular way. In plural formation in adding s to every formation specifically “childrens”. Furthermore, the participants were using plural terms with uncountable nouns, which was crucial for undergraduates. A higher number of errors are noticed with the past participle formation as they generalized the past participle formation of adding -ed to irregular ones producing results such as “readed, teached, eated, seed (saw)”. In addition to that the undergraduates were not proficient in subject-verb agreements in the third person singular as they abundantly used base or plural forms of verbs with singular subjects. For a proficient speaker, these kinds of errors might appear as foundational errors, yet the undergraduates did not possess the knowledge of self-correction too.

Misordering “is putting words and sentences in the wrong order.” For example, incorrect placement of adjectives, nouns, or verbs. Misordering is the most frequent error among the sample that they placed the content belonging to the predicate either on their wish or mother tongue influence. For example, “People tiredly work develop the country”. In the given phrase the effect of the mother tongue is clearly visible.

Other than the identified categories of errors in the taxonomy, there were other errors in using conjunctions based on the first language. Many of the committed errors were the result of ignorance of rules and restrictions.

The percentages of the identified error occurrences are illustrated in Table 1.



Table 1. The Occurrences of Grammatical Errors

Type of grammatical error	Frequency	Percentage
Omission	66	22.6%
Misformation	39	13.3%
Misordering	158	54.2%
Other	29	09.9%
Total	292	100%

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study revealed the facts that students have the motivation to engage in speaking as a performance, but they are drawn back by factors such as stage fear and lack of confidence. Hence, the undergraduates need to be directed to deconstruct the ideas that they need to express so they will not make grave mistakes. Moreover, the heavy dependency on written scripts has to be avoided while the classification of the errors paved an insight into the foundation of the errors. They suggested the students lack comprehension of basic grammar to create grammatically correct and meaningful sentences. Most of the students have overgeneralized the formations in making plurals and participle forms relevant to verbs. The majority of the sample displayed a low proficiency in delivering the assigned task and asserted the influence of their native language.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the study suggested that undergraduates need more exposure to speech-related activities and space to practice from the school itself. The focus on written content should be varied when it comes to performance speech, and they need to be aware of echo correction. The English modules can focus more on speech-related activities and a practical approach to teaching grammar. During the process of the study the confrontations of the students on their inability to create an advanced sentence with the appropriate amalgamation of tenses, subject and verb agreement of auxiliaries, and the choice of correct lexical items. Hence it is evident that English teaching should commence with attention to basics with ample space for practice as mastering a communicative competence requires a balance between fluency and accuracy.

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