

Students' Fluency in English department-college of Arts – University of Kufa as a case study

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طلاقة اللغة الانكليزية لطلبة قسم اللغة الانكليزية- كلية الآداب – جامعة الكوفة

دراسة حالة

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المدرس

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Abstract

Speaking English fluently is one of the main problems that learners and students of English face during their process of learning. This paper sheds light on the obstacles that hinder the students' fluency. The article also states the main methods to improve the fluency of the students. A questionnaire has been designed to explore the main problems of the students and the reason they use English for. The questionnaire also states the level of the English of the

students in the department of English – College of Arts – University of Kufa and in which skill out of the four skills(reading, speaking, reading and writing). Eighteen students have been selected to participate in the questionnaire. The data have been collected and discussed to conclude the main problems and the possible solutions.

Key words: fluency, accuracy, learning, speaking, questionnaire, repetition, pauses.

الملخص

متكلموا اللغة الانكليزية. لقد تم اختيار ١٨ عشر طالبا و طالبة من جامعة الكوفة - كلية الاداب - قسم اللغة الانكليزية للمشاركة بالاستبيان. لقد تم جمع البيانات و تحليلها و استخلاص اهم المشاكل و حلولها الممكنة .

الكلمات المفتاحية : الطلاقة، الدقة ، التعلم ، التكلم، الاستبيان، الاعداء، التوقف في الكلمات.

تكلم اللغة الانكليزية بطلاقة في الوقت الحاضر يعد من اهم المشاكل التي تواجه طلبة و متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية. يسلب هذا البحث الضوء على الصعوبات و العراقيل التي تعرقل تعلم اللغة الانكليزية. يذكر البحث يذكر ايضا الطرق التي تحسن طلاقة اللغة لمتعلمي اللغة الانكليزية. لقد تم تصميم استبيان لمعرفة المعوقات و الاسباب التي تعرقل تكلم اللغة الانكليزية لمتعلميها، الاستبيان تطلع لذكر اهم الازغراض التي يستخدمها

1. Introduction

Learning to speak English is a continuing problem in the world as everyone wants to speak this global language. Learners want to speak English in order to communicate, read and listen to people, audio clips and videos. This article has tackled a specific problem in the department of English, University of Kufa- college of Arts. The problem is the fluency of the students in the department, so many students are very competent and knowledgeable but they can't speak fluently, they stammer and commit mistakes, they exert a great effort to speak in a flow continuous speech. This paper has stated the main causes that hinder

the students' fluency. A questionnaire has been designed to diagnose those causes. The students have been selected to participate in the questionnaire. After answering the questions of the questionnaire, the data have been analyzed and concluded.

1.1 Research Questions

- What is fluency?
- What is the difference between fluency and accuracy?
- What are the methods for improving the speakers' fluency?
- What are the main problems that hinder the speakers' fluency?
- What are the possible solutions for the students of English

department to make them speak fluently.

1.2 Fluency

This term can be defined as the ability to express a thought and how to express it. In other words it is the ability to speak or utter rapidly and effectively in a specific language(Pineda, 2017:80). According to Lynda(2017:80) fluency is not only speaking a foreign language but also speaking without hesitation or stammering.

From another point of view, fluency is not only the ability to speak the ability to understand what is said and written. It helps the speaker to communicate with other society and cultures (Riso, 2013:1). Speaking fluently means the amount of pauses shouldn't be excessive, pauses should be only between phrases and sentences, these pauses can be perceived as a rhythm of speech, but if the pauses are more than usual so it would be regarded as non-fluent speech (Ullakonoja 2009: 90).

1.3 Fluency of English Language Learners

Learners of English may forget the grammar rules that he has just learned while speaking, he may feel a bit unsure. The learners' may feel that they hit the peak of English language but they don't speak fluently. Actually this is not unusual, there is nothing wrong as the learners reach a point that can't be developed anymore by the traditional ways of learning, the learner must exert extra effort to reach the fluency level (Krashen 1981:19). One way to practice English is that the speaker must speak with himself in the mirror and trust himself (Leonard 2015: 229). Fluency can be reached by joining into a specific programme that can teach a learner to speak in specific situations (Lundquist 2008: 11).

When the native speaker speaks with second language learners, he will lose much time as the learner will take much time to recall his ideas and speak in spite of the fact that the learner exerts much effort than the native speaker(Abley 2003:30). The purpose of so many researches and programmes is not only to teach the language but also to speak that language successfully(Bygate 1987: 62).

1.4 Accuracy

The aim of most English lessons and programmes is to focus on the grammatical aspects and instructions. But if you want to teach the learners' grammar and fluency, you have to give instructions to be accurate both in grammatical level and communicative level, so teachers must stress on the accuracy of communication in order to make the learners fluent. The accuracy of the speaker could be measured depending on four syntactic categories: subject-verb agreement, past tense, negation and clitic object pronouns. There is a great advantage of using technology to improve their proficiency such as computer programmes, technical advices and smart boards(Pineda 2017:4).

Accuracy and fluency work together to make the speaker fluent, as fluency means the ability to speak and communicate with others without hesitation and accuracy is the ability to speak avoiding errors and mistakes, so the speaker should pay attention to both of them(Bachman & Palmer 1996:34).

1.5 Communication Strategies in a Second Language

When the speaker wants to speak a native language, he may miss a word or cannot remember it, if he speaks a second or foreign language, the problem will be bigger, so what to do? There are some strategies to overcome this problem and avoid hesitation.

- 1- Approximation: this process means using a more general word than the missed word such as furniture instead of a chair or animal instead of rabbit.
- 2- Paraphrase: it means the speaker can explain the word with a phrase if he missed that words e.g. I cleaned the room with.....
It is a machine that sucks air.
- 3- Invention: in this way the speaker can invent a word or some words instead of the missing words such as picture place instead of art gallery.
- 4- Mims/ gestures: this strategy means using the body language to explain the word such as clapping to explain the

word "applause" (Ellis 1985: 184).

1.6 Methods for improving your spoken English without a speaking partner

- **Think in English:** one of the difficulties to speak a foreign language is not the language itself but the way you think about it. If the speaker wants to speak English, he thinks in Arabic then translates his thoughts to English; this process takes time and hinders the fluency of the speaker. The best way is that the speaker must try to train his mind to think in English for what to do today, which food he likes to eat, what place he wants to go to, in this way the brain will be trained to work in English so the speaker will be fluent (Susan & Selinker 2008: 30).
- **Talk to yourself:** if the speaker has enough time at home or anywhere else, he can talk to himself/ herself, in the way, the speaker will listen to his thoughts aloud and think in English much better. The

speaker may notice some mistakes, committing such mistakes will help him/her to develop their fluency (Cook, 2008:53).

- **Use a mirror:** At any time if you are free, take few minutes to talk to yourself in front of a mirror, in this way set your timer for 4-5 minutes, choose a topic and start speaking to yourself, it will seem like you are speaking to another person, you will notice your mouth how it moves and pronounces the words. This way is very helpful to practice and improve your language and decide which words or sentences you have trouble saying them (Sandra 2013:29).
- **Focus on Fluency:** the speaker mustn't pay a lot of attention on grammar, but must focus on fluency, when the speaker speaks and thinks about grammar, definitely he will hesitate and stammer, but if he focuses on fluency, he will be understood in spite of some grammatical mistakes (Susan & Douglas, 2002:99).

- **Listen and repeat:** one of the best ways to improve fluency is to listen to some English videos on YouTube or T.V. channels. Listening to such videos and trying to repeat the speech line by line or word by word, the speaker will improve his fluency by imitating the conversations in such videos. By following this way, the speakers' tongue will be much trained to speak English Fluently (Cook 2008:48)

2. Research Method

This research has been conducted according to quantitative and qualitative methods. Eighteen students have been selected from the department of English in the College of Arts- University of Kufa. They have been questioned by a questionnaire that has been designed for this purpose to diagnose the problems of the students' fluency and what are the appropriate solutions for those problems. The data of this research has been collected according to a questionnaire that

consists of twenty two questions. The first ten questions state the frequently of making mistakes in the pronunciation, grammar and vocabularies, these ten questions also state the frequency use of pauses, repetition and the students' misunderstanding.

The second part of the questionnaire from question eleven to question twenty two deals with many factors that influence the fluency and accuracy of a students' English. Those twelve questions are diagramed and explained individually. There were a total of twenty students who participated in the questionnaire. However, since two of them failed to respond to all twenty-two questions their answers were excluded, therefore leaving us with only eighteen responses.

3 Data Analysis and Discussion

As it is mentioned before, the questionnaire consists of two main parts; the first part has ten questions about the problems and barriers that prevent the students from speaking fluently. So let's see the data of this part. A sample

of the Questionnaire is attached in the research.
a separate appendix at the end of

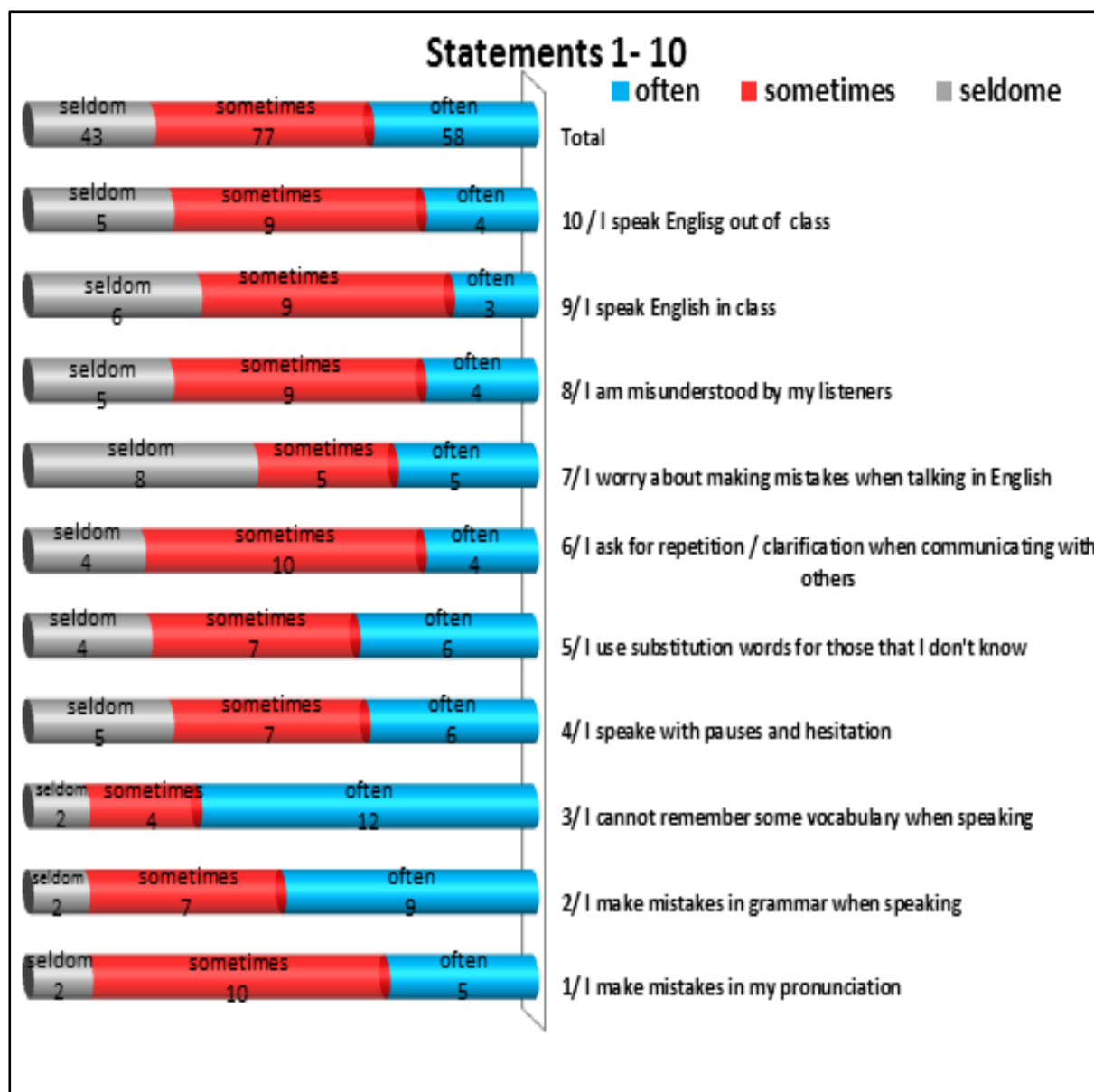


Figure (1) Scores of statements 1-10 of the questionnaire

Concerning statement one it can be seen that ten students sometime make mistakes, five of them often make mistakes, only two students

seldom make mistake statement two refers that nine students often make mistakes in grammar, seven out of The eighteen students sometimes make grammar mistakes and only two seldom make mistakes. Worrying about making mistake thirteen stated by statement seven. It is clear that eight students seldom worry about making mistakes, five of them sometimes worry about mistakes and also five students sometimes worry about their mistakes, statements four and five about speaking with pauses and

using substitution words respectively. Seven students out of eighteen sometimes use repetitive words and pauses, five students often use these techniques and other five seldom use repetition and pauses concerning speaking English, we can recognize in statement 9, that nine students sometime speak English in class, six of them seldom speak in class and only three often speak English in class. Statement ten shows nearly the same percentage of statement, but it is about speaking outside the class.

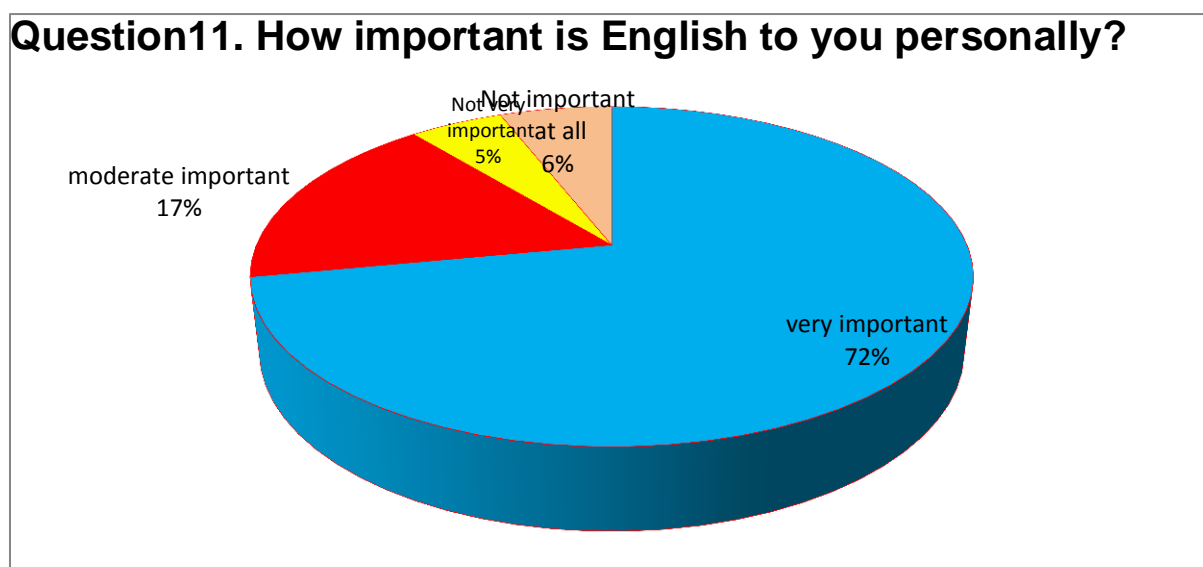


Figure (2) Score of question 11

Question eleven states how important is English for the students' personality. According to the

diagram, it is clear that 72% of the students state that English is very important to their personality, only

6% of the students show that English is not important at all. The students who said that English is not very

important are only 5%. Finally the only 17% of the students proved a moderate level of importance.

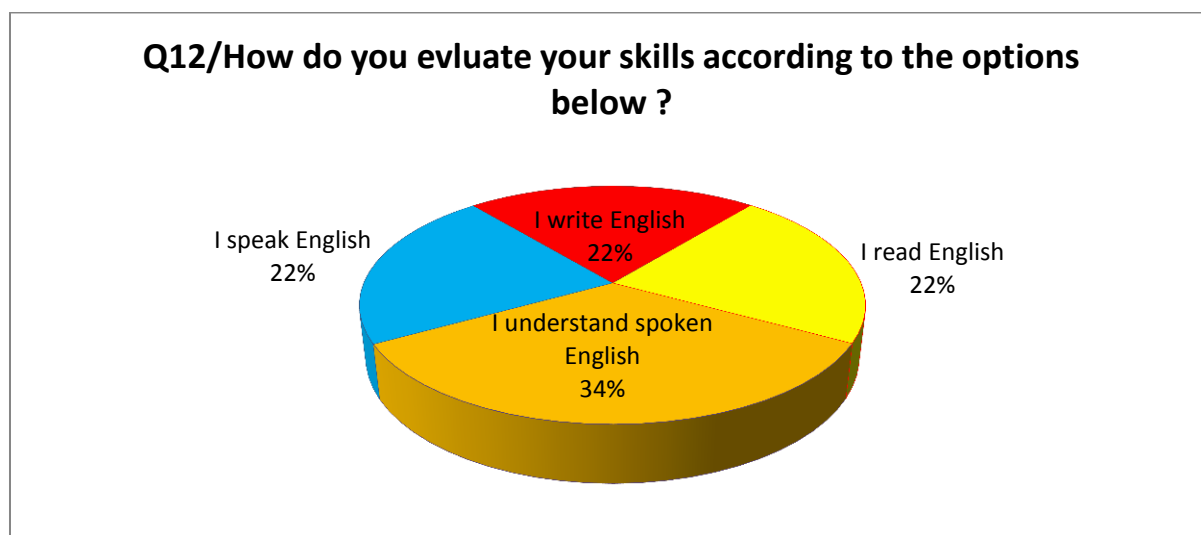


Figure (3) Score of question 12

three skills. 66% of the students show equivalent importance to the three skills (speaking, reading, and writing). 22 % for each skill respectively.

Figure(3) shows the level of the four skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. It is clearly figure that 34% of the students understand spoken English better than the other

Q13/How would you describe your English skills?

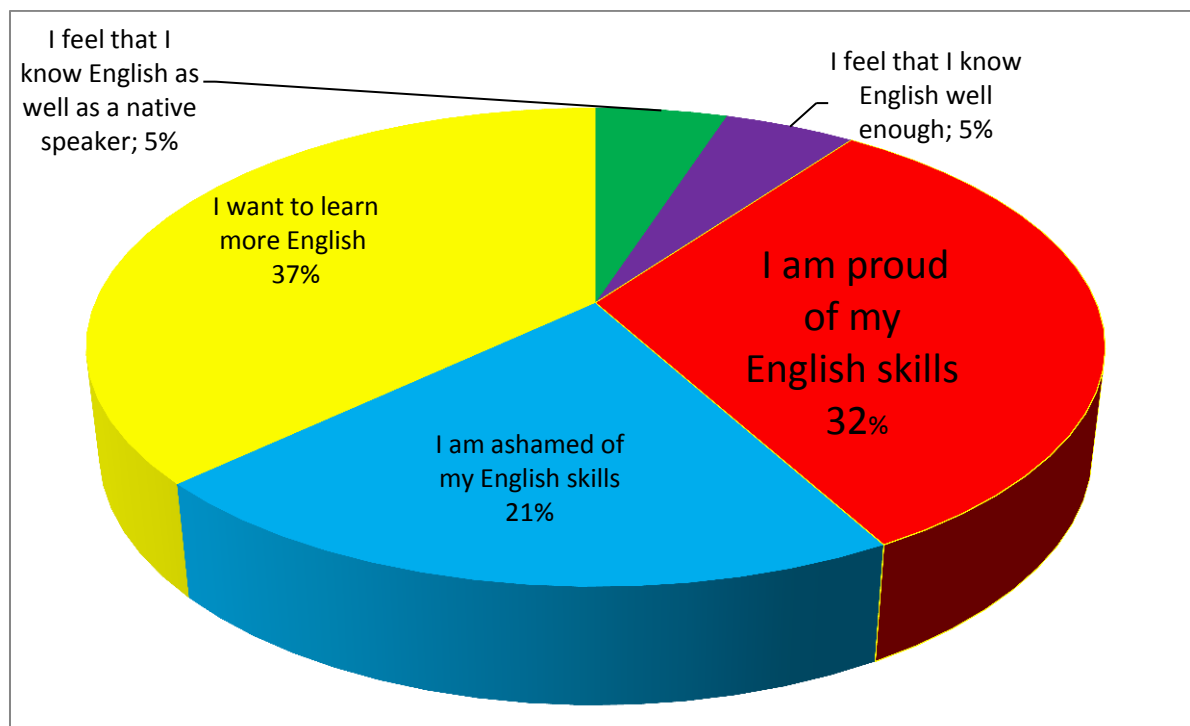


Figure (4) Scores of question 13

Question thirteen evaluates the students' level of their English. Unfortunately 37% of the students show a negative index of their level; this stated that they want to learn English. 32% of the students are proud of their moderate level of

English. 21% of the students frankly confessed their low level of English. Only one student that is 5% states that his English is native-like. Finally, also one student has high level of English but not native.

Q14/In which kind of situations do you feel your English skills are inadequate?

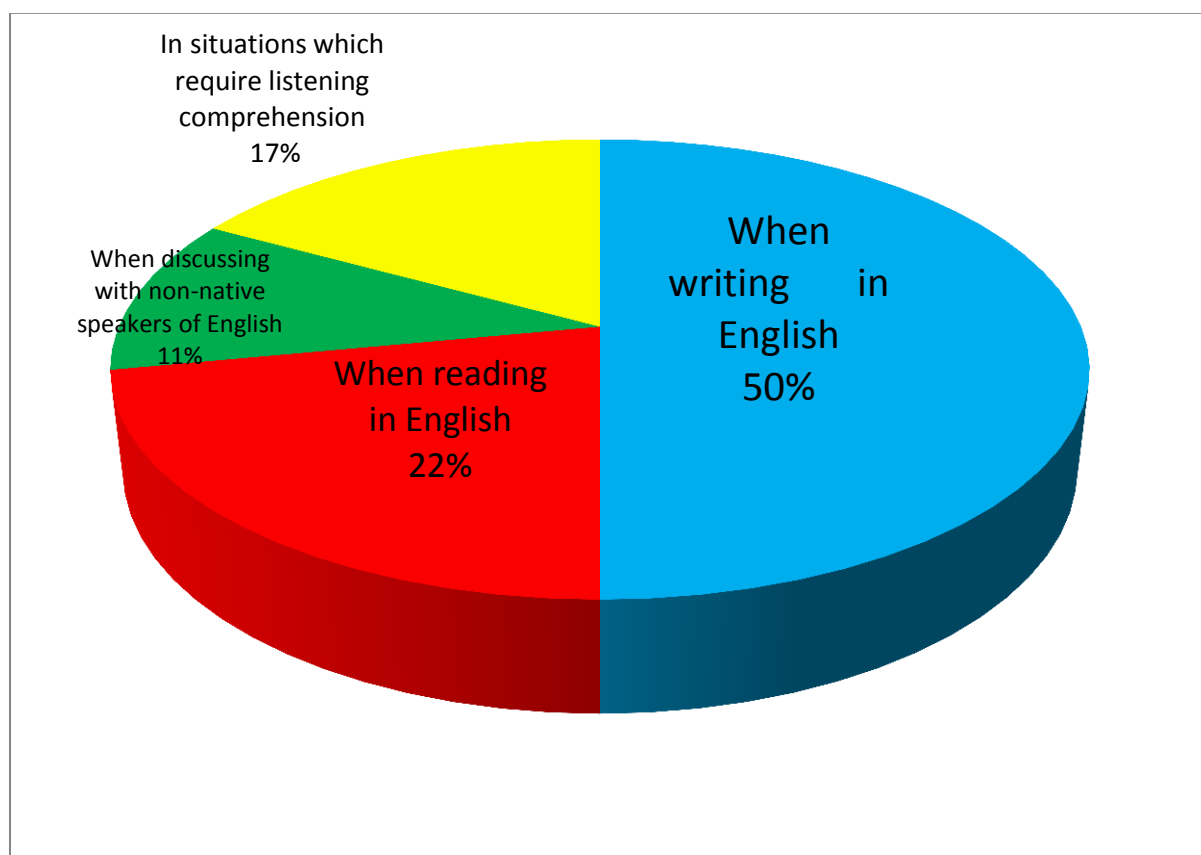


Figure (5) Score of question 14

This figure concerns the right situation in which the student feels that his English is inadequate. It is clear the least percentage is in situation of speaking, the next one is the listening as 17%. 22% of the

students think their ability in situation of speaking is inadequate. The majority of the participated students think that their ability to write in English is inadequate

Q15/What is your opinion of the following statments concering your use of English?

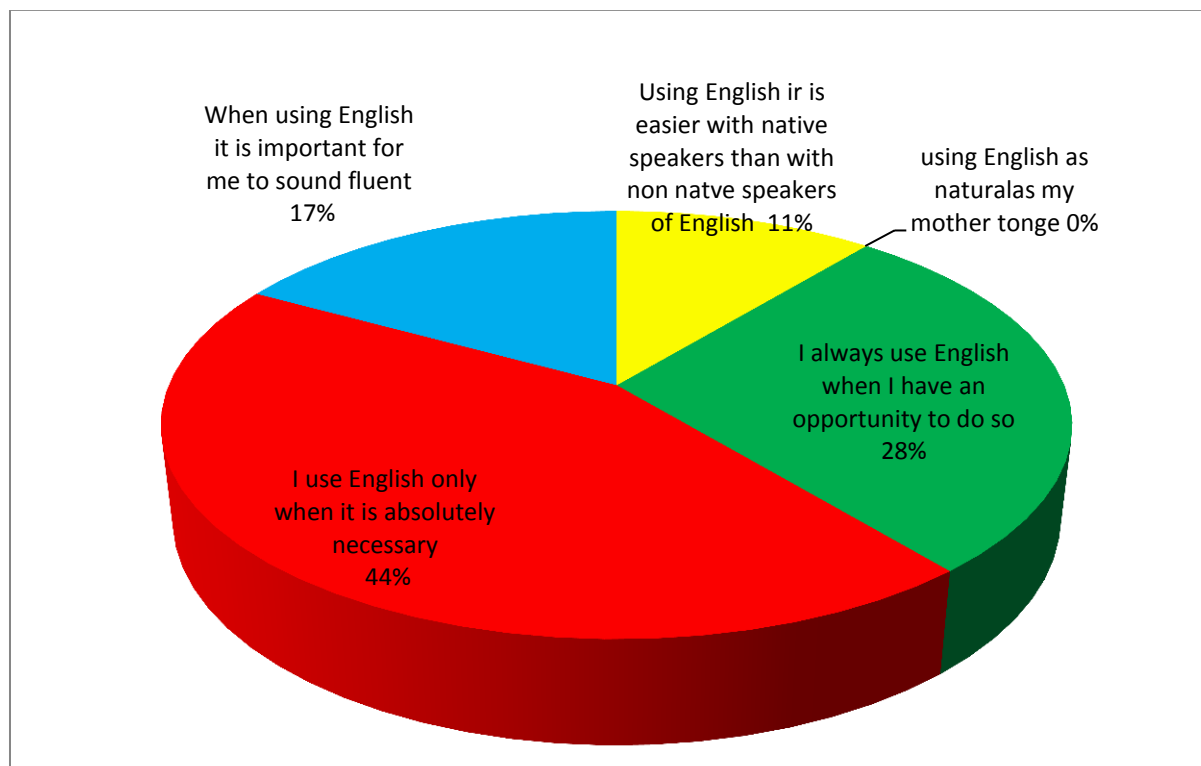


Figure (6) Scores of question 15

The above diagram states the degree of need to speak English. No one of the students uses English as his native mother tongue. 11% of the students speak English easier with native speakers than learners of English. 28% of the students make

use of any chance of speak English whether with teachers students or any other speaker .44%of the student are embarrassed to speak so they speak English when it is extremely necessary.

Q16/For which of the following reasons do you use English?

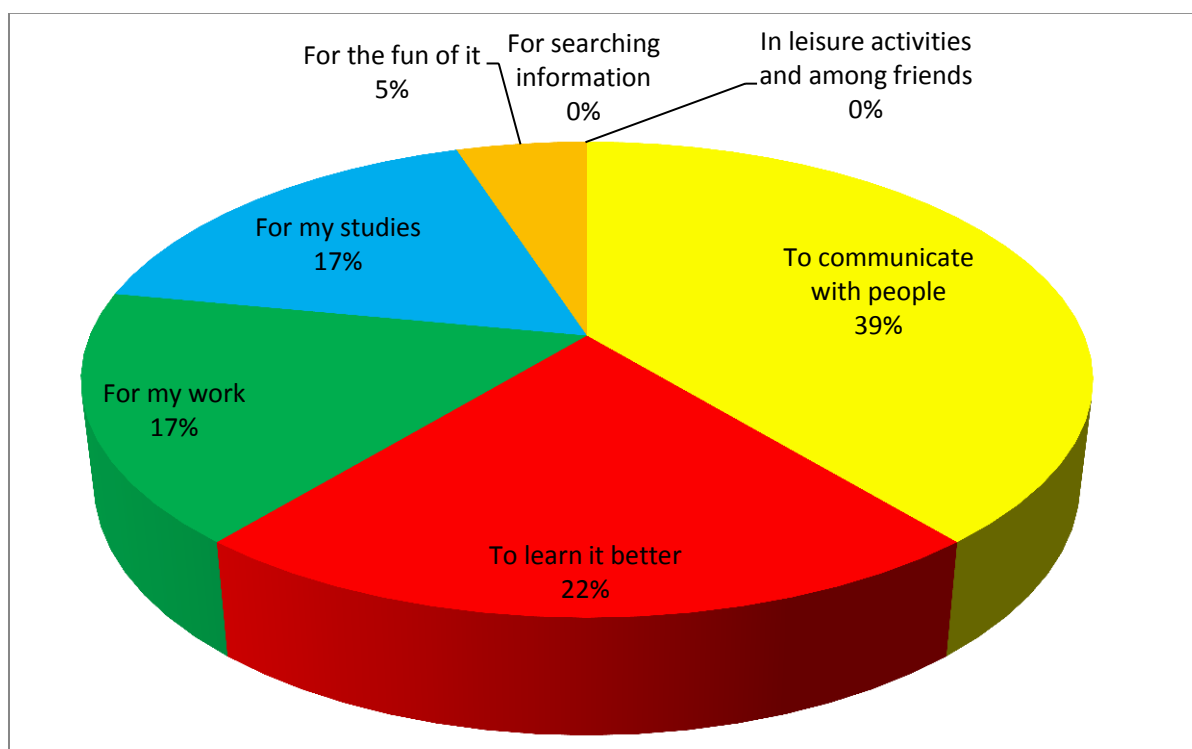


Figure (7) Score of question 16

This pie chart considers the reasons or the different uses of English. There is hardly any one uses English in the reach of information. 5% use it for those who use English for work

and studies. 39%, of the students use English to communicate with people .22% of the students use English to learn it better.

Q17/How do you mix your mother tongue and English ?When speaking or writing ?

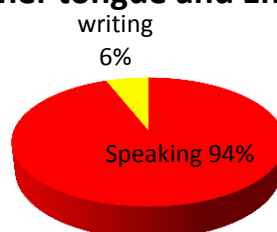


Figure (8) Score of question 17

writing .Only 6% of the student mix English writing with Arabic.

Figure 8 shows that 94% of the student mix English with their mother in speaking rather than

Q18/Why do you mix your mother tongue and English when speaking or writing?

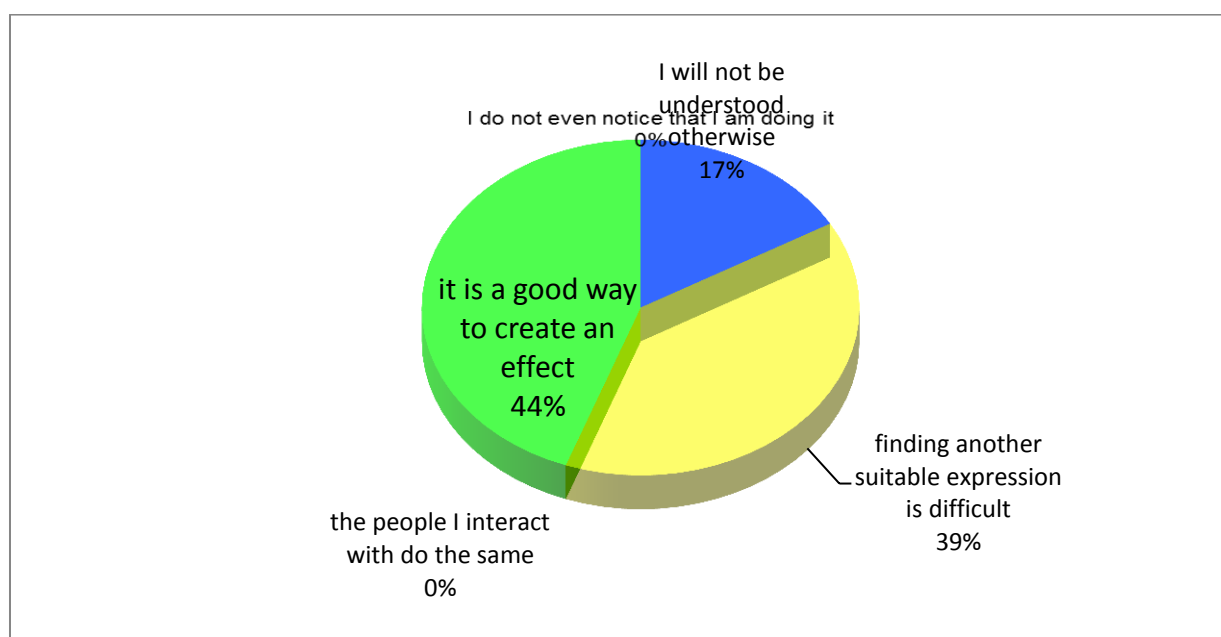


Figure (9) Scores of question 18

This diagram is related to the previous one, but it is about the reason of mixing English with students' mother tongue. 17% of the students feel that they wouldn't be understood if they don't mix English with their mother tongue. 39% of the students think that finding another

suitable expression is difficult so they try to find Arabic equivalent. 44% of the students find it is a good way to mix English with their mother tongue to create an effect. No one shows that he noticed to use English with his mother tongue.

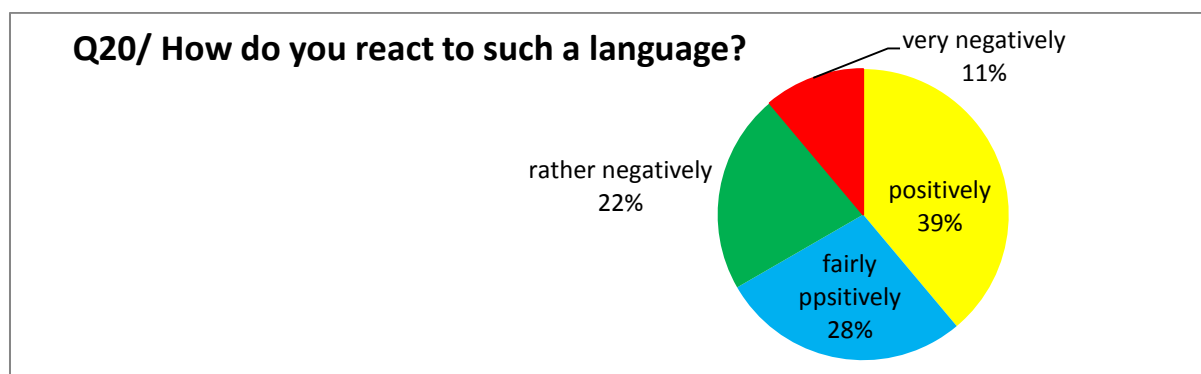


Figure (10) Scores of question 20

Diagram(10) shows the reaction of the students towards learning English. 11% of the students show negative reaction. 22% of the students show a rather negative a

reaction .28%of the students state a fairly positive reaction. The majority of the students with 39%show positive reaction.

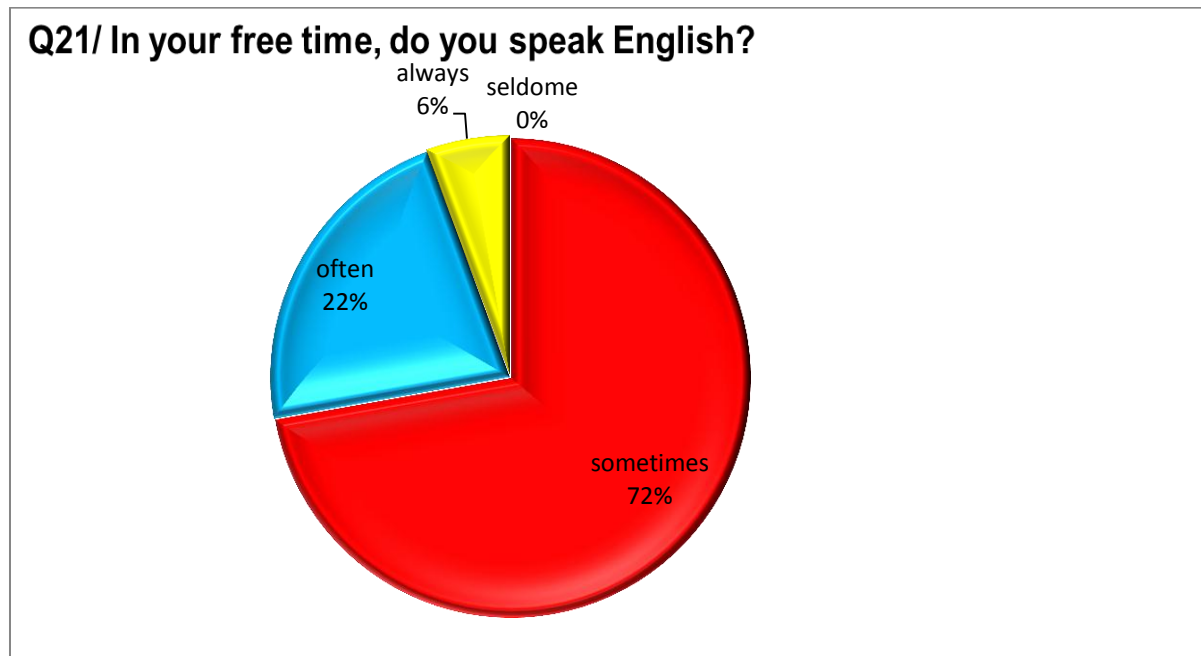


Figure (11) score of question 21

This pie chart shows the use of English in the students' free time. The major of the students with 72% sometimes speaking English in their free time. 22% often speak English

in their leisure there. 6% only always speak English in the free time. No one of the students speak English in their free time.

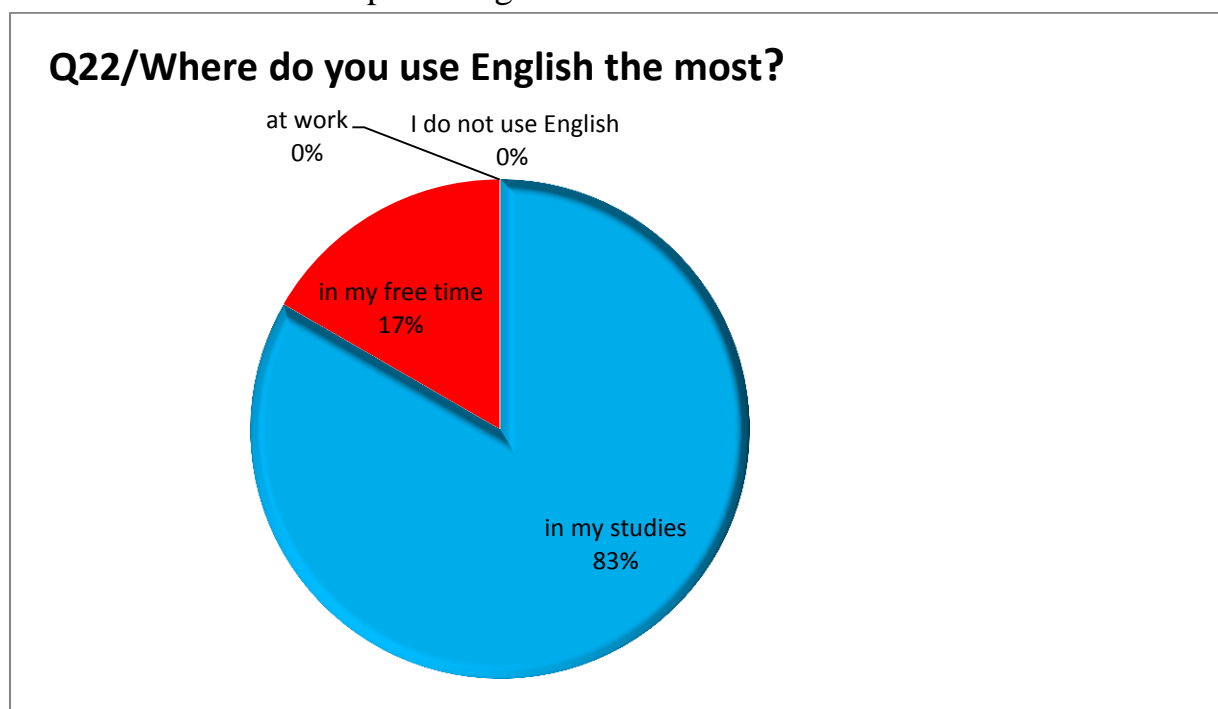


Figure (12) score of question 22

This final question shows the place in which the students use English more. No one uses English at work and no one deny the use of English. 17%only of the students use English at their free time. 83% of the students use English in their studies.

This questionnaire is designed for Students of the Department of English University of Kufa. We can infer from the questionnaire what follows. The first ten questions state the frequency of making mistakes in the pronunciation, grammar and vocabularies, these ten questions also state the frequent

1.15 Discussion

use of pauses, repetition and the students' misunderstanding. It can be recognized in statements 1-10 that 77% of the students from one group they were chosen sometime speak English in class. Question eleven states that 72% of the students state that English is very important to their personality. The level of the four skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing shows that 34% of the students understand spoken English better than the other three skills. Unfortunately, 37% of the students show a negative index of their level; this stated that they want to learn English. Most of the participated students think that their ability to write in English is inadequate. 44% of the student are embarrassed to speak so they speak English when it is extremely necessary. 39% of the students use English to communicate with people. 94% of the students mix English with their mother in

speaking rather than writing. 44% of the students find it is a good way to mix English with their mother tongue. Most of the students with 39% shows a positive reaction. The major of the students with 72% sometimes speaking English in their free time. 83% of the students use English in their studies.

Conclusions

According to the data analysis and discussion, the following can be concluded.

- 1- Most of the students do not speak fluently because they fear of committing mistakes. Most of the students' mistakes are grammatical.
- 2- One of the problems that hinder the students' fluency is speaking with many pauses.
- 3- 72 % of the students think that English is very important to their personality
- 4- 66 % of the students show equivalent importance to the

three skills: speaking, reading and writing.

5- 37 % of the students show a negative index of their level of English. 32% of the students show a moderate level of English.

6- 22% of the students think that their English is inadequate in situation of speaking. 50% of the students feel that their ability to write in English is inadequate.

7- The students use English for several purpose, 39% of the students use English to communicate with people, 22% of the students use English to learn it better, only

5% of the students use English at work.

8- 44% of the students mix English with Arabic to create a good effect on the listeners. 39% of the students mix English with Arabic because they find it difficult to find the suitable words.

Finally, it can be clearly seen that the solution to speak fluently is to practice English more and more by listening to English data and speak English more with the classmates as much as possible. The other way to speak fluently is train the students' brains to think in English, in that way, they will speak English fluently.

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Study Abroad: Finish Students of
Russian, Licentiate Thesis
Department of Languages
Russian Language and Culture ,
University of Jyväskylä .

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Appendix

Students' Fluency in English department-college of Arts – University of Kufa as a case study Questionnaire

*Date of Birth*_____

*Student Reference*_____

Please choose one of the options below to confirm your current level of English language ability.

The questionnaire aims to find out your experience in English oral communication. Please fill an answer from A. B. C. to each question according to your first reaction. There is no right or wrong answer. Thank you

A. Seldom; B. Sometimes; C. Often.

- 1. I _____ make mistakes in my pronunciation.*
- 2. I _____ make mistakes in grammar when speaking.*
- 3. I _____ cannot remember some vocabulary when speaking.*
- 4. I _____ speak with pauses and hesitations.*
- 5. I _____ use substitution words for those that I do not know.*
- 6. I _____ ask for repetition/clarification when communicating with others.*
- 7. I _____ worry about making mistakes when talking in English.*
- 8. I am _____ misunderstood by my listeners.*
- 9. I _____ speak English in class.*
- 10. I _____ speak English out of class.*

Please choose one of the options below to confirm your current level of English language ability.

11. How important is English to you personally?

- a. Very important*
- b. Moderately important*
- c. Not very important*
- d. Not important at all*

12. How do you evaluate your skills in English according to the options below?

- a. I speak English*

- b. I write English*
- c. I read English*
- d. I understand spoken English*

13. How would you describe your English skills?

- a. I feel that I know English as well as a native speaker*
- b. I feel that I know English well enough*
- c. I am proud of my English skills*
- d. I am ashamed of my English skills*
- e. I want to learn more English*

14. In which kind of situations do you feel your English skills are inadequate?

- a. When reading in English.*
- b. When writing in English.*
- c. In situations which require listening comprehension.*
- d. When discussing with non-native speakers of English.*

15. What is your opinion of the following statements concerning your use of English ?

Please record your initial reaction.

- a. Using English is as natural to me as using my mother tongue.*
- b. I always use English when I have an opportunity to do so*
- c. I use English only when it is absolutely necessary*
- d. When using English it is important for me to sound fluent*
- e. Using English is easier with native speakers than with non-native speakers of English*

16. For which of the following reasons do you use English:

- a. To communicate with people*
- b. To learn it better*
- c. For the fun of it*
- d. For searching information*
- e. For my work*
- f. For my studies*

g. In leisure activities and among friends

17. How often do you mix your mother tongue and English? When speaking or writing?

a. Speaking

b. Writing

18. Why do you mix your mother tongue and English when speaking or writing?

a. I will not be understood otherwise

b. Finding another suitable expression is difficult

c. The people I interact with do the same

e. It is a good way to create an effect

f. I do not even notice that I am doing it

19. Compare yourself as a speaker of English and as a speaker of your mother tongue, and choose those statements that best describe you as a speaker of English. . You can choose two answers .When I speak English I:

a. need to search for the proper words

b. gesticulate more with my hands

c. use utterances such as yeah, mmm, uhuh more

d. speak slower

e. am more talkative

f. feel like an outsider

g. feel less capable

h. am the same as I am when I use my mother tongue

20. How do you react to such language use?

a. positively .

b. Fairly positively

c. Rather negatively

d. Very negatively

21. In your free time, do you speak English?

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a. Seldom

b. Sometimes

c. Often

d. Always

22. Where do you use English the most?

a. In my studies

b. In my free time

c. At work

d. I do not use English