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Assessing Oral Communication errors of Arab learners of English

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Abstract

Oral communication achieves a number of general and discipline-specific academic purposes . Learning to communicate is an important aim in itself , for it provides learners with a set of skills that they can utilize for the rest of their lives . Talking is the form of communication most often used to state opinions , make argument , offer explanations and make impression upon others . For successful communication , learners necessitate more than the formal ability to present well a range of formulaic expressions . Oral communication shows the constant and powerful role of language and communication in human society .

The present study deals with the grammatical errors in oral communication of college students who are less proficient in English . The main purpose of the study is to identify the types of errors in oral communication . The language data are taken from a simulated oral presentation of 40 third year college students participating in an English conversation lessons . Error analysis of oral interactions show that five common errors made by the students are with the areas of tenses , word order , modification , articles and pronouns . The errors in oral presentation are investigated ,and the surface structure taxonomy is used to identify four main ways by which students modify the target forms , namely , misinformation , omission , addition and disordering . Findings visualize that misinformation accounted of the majority of the total errors showed (41.83 %) , followed by omission (35.71%) and addition (14.28%) . Besides , tenses , word order

and modification are reflected the three most frequent types of errors , which accounted for almost (50%) of the total errors , made by the College Students.

1. Definitions of Oral Communication

Abbott and Godinho (2001 : 49) visualize that oral communication is more than merely a substitute of words between persons . Comeaux (2002 : 128) asserts that oral communication is a transaction in which the participants are mutually engaged in the process of creating meaning . Wood (2004 : 59) defines oral communication as " a dynamic , systematic or contextual , irreversible and proactive process in which communicators construct personal meanings through their symbolic interactions ". Myers and Anderson (2008 : 134) state that oral communication is at the core of our humanness and that it is a transactional process . Oral communication reflects the persistent and powerful role of language and communication in human society . Oral communication is the transmission of messages via verbal and non verbal signals . Oral communication is complex . If there are two persons talking , in reality , there are many persons interacting via the perceptions attached to the message sent and received (Gutierrez , 2009 : 42) .

Oral communication is known as the ability to talk with others to give and exchange information and ideas such as , asking questions , giving directions , coordinating work tasks , explaining and persuading . Oral communication indicates spoken verbal communication . Oral communication includes speeches, presentations, discussions, and aspects of interpersonal communication . " Oral communication " comes from the Latin term ' communis ' which means to share and inform ideas and feelings (Danesi , 2013 : 177) .

Unlike written communication , oral communication is instantaneous and needs lesser time to convey .

B. Giving instant feedback :

A very important part of communication is feedback from the receiver of a message to the sender . As oral communication happens in the presence of both , the sender and the receiver , instant feedback is provided to the sender who can then modify his message or clarify it or add to it .

C. An effective persuasion tool :

The purpose of communication is to persuade people to change their thinking to agree with others . Oral Communication is the most effective tool available to persuade others (Ibid) .

D. Ideal for exchange of views :

As oral communication makes it possible for us to interact with others and receive instantaneous feedback , it is ideal for exchange of views within a group and getting new ideas on any subject .

E. Building relationships

when we communicate with people , barriers breakdown and smooth interaction between people are made possible . In fact it is when we stop communicating that there is a breakdown in relationship and ends rapport(Samovar , 2000 : 57)

The following are some of the limitations of oral communication :

A- Distance is barrier : if the sender and the receiver are not linked by devices such as telephone , the physical distance between them will be a barrier and they will not

2. Nature and Importance of Oral Communication

Human beings are always communicating in both decoding and encoding messages . People spent 70 % of their communication time as speakers (Liu , 2001 : 42) . Oral communication is important because it enhances effective interaction . One is able to listen and convey information accurately and interactions and explanations are given clearly without words being minced . Improved oral communication helps one to give good presentation and confidently participate in discussions(Sen, 2007 : 79) .Oral communication is the spoken interaction between two or more people . Humans have the unique facility of speech which communicators use more extensively than the written form . Oral communication brings people together and builds relationships between friends , colleagues , neighbors and family members . Oral communication is made up of many elements which result in the success or failure of an interaction . Oral communication is proactive because the communicators are capable of seeing , perceiving , and shaping situations (Gutierrez , 2009:127) and (Schwartzman , 2011 : 81) .

3. Advantages and limitations of Oral Communication

Oral communication takes place " in real time " that is , the message is decoded by the receiver as soon as it is encoded into the oral message by the speaker . In such communicative situation , the message is also conveyed with the help of means other than language , such as hand gestures , intonation and postures (Samovar , 2000 : 56) and (May and Hornberger , 2008 : 946) . The following are some of the advantages of oral communication :

A. Saving time :

it is that he wants to achieve by the communication he is about to undertake (ibid).

C. Maintain eye contact : While speaking to your audience , make eye contact with all present . In large audience , scan from side to side and from front to back . Everyone must feel that you are talking to them . Eyes are our mirrors , they reflect our feelings . During oral communication maintaining eye contact is essential to establish a relationship with your audience . A person making eye contact is listening to you and is receptive to what you are saying . On the other hand , a person who is not making eye contact has his attention elsewhere (ibid) .

D. Active listening : As a communicator , he should always actively listen to what his audience has to say , whether in the spoken form or not . As a communicator his sending out a variety of verbal and non- verbal signals , as does his audience learning how to read and interpret those signals is part of being a successful communicator (Schwartzman, 2011 : 89)

5 . The Elements of Oral Communication

As a human is a highly social being , he requires to exchange attitudes and views with his family , members , colleagues and teachers . Humans express emotions such as anger , love , and compassion . This exchange of views and ideas and expression of emotions is called communication (Sharma,2008:33) .

Communication is a projection of ideas , information , thoughts , emotions , and skills with the help of words , pictures , figures and graphs (Ibid) . Here are some of the elements :

A. The sender : The sender is one who begins the process of communication whenever he feels the need to express himself to others . The need could be based on his desire to share a

be able to communicate with each other .

B- Unsuitable for details : if the message contains lengthy details or an intricate design , oral communication is not suitable .

C- Short retention : Human memory being short , an oral communication cannot be retained for long .

D- Can lead to confusion : If the speaker has not organized his talk properly or does not present it sequentially , oral communication can be confusing Yook and Athings-Sayre , 2012 : 98) .

4. Principles of Effective Oral Communication :

Communication is basically indicated as the ability of one person to make contact with another and to make himself or herself understood . Communication is the process by which meanings are exchanged between persons through a common set of symbols (Flormate –Ballestteros , 2003 : 121) . Tim and Bienvenu (2002 : 113) point out the following basic principles of oral communication .

A. Know audience : What a communicator says must relate to his audience , communicator cannot be talking quantum physics to historian . Whether communicators are interacting with a friend or co-worker or speaking before a large group , knowing their audience is a part of effective communication as it allows him to tailor his content .

B. Know your purpose : A communicator must know the purpose of his communication very clearly . Ask himself what

3- Expression of Emotions : Communication is used to express emotions or feelings we may have for others . The expression itself may take the form of spoken or written words such as sending a thank you card to convey gratitude , an action such

2- Problem Solving : Communication is used extensively in an organization . Executives of an the organization define the key of elements of an issue and discuss these with others in the organization to seek solutions during meetings and conference .

1- Persuasion : Communication can be used to persuade audiences to change their thinking to agree with a sender . All advertisement and rhetoric resorted to by politicians meet the objective of persuasion

6. Functions of Communication
 explained below
 :
 2004 : 121) . Some functions of oral communication are communication , they seek to get information (Schwartzman , through a common set of symbols . Whenever people engage in the process by which meanings are exchanged between people Vivers and Schalkwyk , 2002 : 143) . Oral communication is , emotions and information among two or more individuals , thoughts and information is an interchange of ideas , thoughts

F. Feedback : For effective communication , it is basically that the sender of the message receive an input on how his or her message was understood by the receiver through the process of feedback . To get feedback , the sender can ask the receiver to respond to oral questions and encourage him to ask questions . In face to face communication the receiver of non-verbal behavior also provides important clues as to his understanding of the message (Hohls , 2001 : 119) .

story or pass an order merely to express an opinion . Every message has intent and the sender must bear in mind the level of understanding of the recipient of his message . Failure to understand who is communicating with will result in delivering messages that are misunderstood .

B. Encoding : Encoding is the process of translating the desire to communicate into words or symbols or other means of sending a message which the sender thinks will be best understood by the receiver or receivers . The message could be encoded into words , spoken or written , or into a gesture , behavior or body language that the sender feels will help to best communicate his message according to his intent , depending on the situation

C. Channel : The channel of communication is the means by which the message will be sent . It could take the form of a letter , a face to face communication , telephone , call or use of the mass-media(Harries and Lelson , 2008 : 134)

D. Receiving the Message : The receiver or receivers hear and / or see the sent message which may be affected by external barriers , if any , and the receivers own internal barriers which may include their experience level , their understanding of the terms used , their point of view toward the material , or the way they feel about the sender (*ibid*)

E. Decoding : Decoding is the process of interpreting the sent message using conventions , culture or context , and language skills . The received message may or may not meet the intent of the sender . At this point in the process , there is no way for the sender to determine that the message has been understood in the intended manner . To determine this , the sender needs feedback from the receiver (*ibid*)

message with the greatest accuracy and that which has the most likelihood of understanding by your audience . E. Relevancy : It is important to remember that unless a person is interested in the subject of your message , he is not likely to pay much attention to it and if he is forced to attend to it he will be even less likely to pay attention to you in the future . Ensure that your entire message is relevant to the issues you are trying to highlight

F. Brevity : whatever is to be communicated must be in the briefest form . People have very short spans of attention , too many details can bore them . Stick to the essential and give details only when asked for others (Ibid)

8. Communication Barriers

Communicators would have often come across situations when they are talking to someone and they misunderstood what they are saying . The process of communication is very sensitive to distortion which can happen at any point . This distortion is a barrier to communication and keeps communicators from understanding ideas and thoughts of others (Sharma 2008 : 45) .

Munro (2011 : 98) reflects two kinds of barriers , they are internal and external barriers . Internal barriers are those that occur within the sender or receiver . Some of these are :

- 1- Fatigue : It indicates that if the sender or receiver of the message is tired , he may not pay the required attention in encoding or decoding the message or may omit to complete the loop by not responding

- 2- Poor listening skills : One of the basic barriers in the way of effective face-to face communication is the lack of good

as sending flowers to convey love , a posture such as clenched first to show anger , a smile to demonstrate appreciation (Ibid)

7. Essentials of Good Oral Communication

communication is a fundamental notion in the study of behaviour, which acts as a frame of reference for linguistic and phonetic studies. Oral communication refers to the transmission and reception of information(a 'message between a source and a receiver using a signaling system (Crystal , 2008 : 123) . For the success of the communication , the communicators must keep in mind certain factors in forming his message (Yook and Atkins , 2012 : 4) The following may be considered as basic elements of good communication :

A. Structure : The ease with which the receiver or receivers absorb and understand the message depends on how it is structured . It is widely accepted that a good communication must have an opening , a body and a conclusion whether a communicator send a memo , a voice mail message , an email or making a phone call

B. Clarity : The message you want to deliver should be clear and unambiguous . To ensure clarity , the sender must know exactly what he wants to convey to the receiver . If he is confused , the message he will lack clarity and audience may ignore the message as they will not know what it is that message (Ibid) .

C. Consistency : Whatever it is that a communicator wishes to convey , his position on a topic should not change , it should be consistent . If a communicator keeps changing his opinions , his audience will not trust and will not act on the message he sends them

D. Medium : The medium you use to deliver your message should be the one that communicates your

identify and correct the errors. Krashen and Dulay (1982: 78) visualize a descriptive taxonomy in describing errors . They show that errors occur when surface structures are changed in a specific or systematic way . This can be done by omission , addition , misinformation and disordering . Corder (1973 : 101 visualize errors from a different attitude . He distinguishes three kinds of errors which are transfer error , analogical error and teaching induced errors . In explaining these errors , Slinker (1974 : 43) has also included strategies of second language learning and strategies of second language communication , beside the three types of errors suggested by Corder . For the purpose of this study the researcher has adopted a surface structure taxonomy in analyzing the errors . Our data indicates that the majority of learners errors are developmental in nature rather than due to transfer from the learners' native language .

10. Materials and Method

The participants for this study are 40 students in an English conversation lesson taught by one of the teachers . Of these students are 20 females and 20 males . They are the third College Students from the faculty of College of Education for Humanities at the University of Tikrit . English conversation lesson is a compulsory university course where student are required to control the four skills of English language which are ; reading , writing , listening and speaking . One of the objective of this course is to enable the students to communicate with others . The subjects are selected depended on the convenience sampling as they are available , accessible and willing to participate in the present study . Each students' presentation of 5-8 minutes totaling to about 250-300 minutes is audio-taped and later transcribed . The data are analyzed based on surface structure taxonomy which categorizes errors

listening skills . Persons may be hearing but not be listening . listening requires a person to pay attention to what is being heard . Some communicators are poor listeners because they allow their minds to drift onto matters of the past or the future .

3- Differences in Perception : Perception plays an important role in communication , Unfortunately , each individual has his own interpretation of what he or she saw , heard , or experienced . Opinions are formed on the basis of the meaning you attached to words , symbols pictures , gestures , body postures and other verbal and non verbal cues (Ibid) .

External communication barriers on the other hand are those that are created by the environment within which communication take place . Organizational structure is one of the most familiar external barriers . Most large organizations adhere to s strict hierarchical structure which does not encourage free communication a long vertical lines , especially upwards . This can also lead to distortions as each level can add or subtract from the content of the message (Ibid)

9. Error Analysis

James (1998: 61) indicates that errors could be classified into two kinds ; the linguistics category classification and surface structure taxonomy . The linguistics category classification specifies errors in term of linguistics categories and where the error is located in the overall system of the target language . Errors can be accrued at the , grammatical , lexical , phonological , textual or discourse level . James adds that language learners who don't have knowledge of the language would not be able to correct the errors . Guided revisions in the classroom assist the college students to

(student 3) in this instance , the student has clearly neglected the use of the third person singular in the sentence

Total errors	392	
Disordering	32	8.16
Addition	56	14.28
Omission	140	35.71
Misinformation	164	41.83
Types of Surface Structure	Total	Percentage

Categories of Surface Structure Errors in Students Oral Presentation
Table (1)

The results indicate that 41% (164 out of the 392 errors) of the errors is in the category of misinformation . This reflects that the majority of the students had problems in this category where the rules of tenses are different from their native language . The following is an excerpt of their presentation :

- He usually returned* home early .
(Student 1) : in the example , the student has incorrectly used the wrong form of the word " returned " instead of " return " . Clearly in this instance , the student has not been able to make a distinction between the use of simple present tense and past tense

As shown in Table (1) , the second highest category of surface structure error is omission (35.71 or 140 out of 392 errors .)
An example is
My brother study ^ English language every night .

into for types ; omission , addition , misinformation and disordering . Errors of omission are made when compulsory elements are omitted . These occur basically in tense such as the omission of the grammatical morpheme " be " in a sentence . An example would be " My father ^ the headmaster of the school " . Error of addition on the other hand are made when unnecessary parts are added to the word such as putting the - s marker on verbs after the plural pronoun/nouns in the simple present tense . An example is " Ahmed does not knows may name " . Errors of misinformation occur when the wrong forms of the verbs used , for instance " My sister eated very quickly " . Errors of disordering are made when the correct elements are wrongly sequenced , for example , " My brother is all the time late . " instead of " My brother is late all the time " . The more detailed linguistics description of grammatical errors is classified into tenses , word order , modification , articles and pronouns .

Results and Discussion :

This section presents the results of the error analysis of the College students' oral presentation . The presentations are recorded and transcribed . The symbols * is utilized to indicate errors and ^ is used to refer to missing parts in the utterances

Students' Grammatical Errors in Their Oral Presentation

An examination of the errors exposes that the most frequent category of error made by the third College Students of Tikrit university is misinformation (164 errors or 41.83%) followed by omission (140 errors or 35.71%) and addition (56 errors or 14.28%) , see table (1) . The percentage of errors in the category of disordering is insignificant and it amounts to only 8.16 % of the total type of surface structure errors

1- Tenses

The most frequent linguistic error is in tenses(130 errors or 33.10%) . Most of the errors are in the category of misinformation (59 instances) followed by categorizes of omission 38 instances and addition 24 instances . There is only 9 errors under the category of disordering . Learners who made these errors might be confused about the differences in situating time in their L1 and L2 . An excerpt of the error in tenses is given below :

Misinformation : The sun is* rise in the east and set* in the west .

Omission :* My sister come* to visit us every night .

Addition : I comes * to university every day .

Disordering : I read usually* grammar every night .

The above excerpt reveals that the learners of English as a foreign language are unable to use tenses correctly . This indicates that students should pay more attention to this important area in language , and pay more attention to control the rules of tenses .

2- Word order

Errors in word order is the next most frequent error , making up to 23.72% of the error types . Most of the errors are in the category of omission (43 instances) . There are (20) and (30) instances respectively in the categories of addition and misinformation . There is non for the category of disordering . Omission in word order could probably be influenced by the weakness of the students in controlling on the basic rules of grammar . Excerpts from the presentation are shown below :

The third most frequent category of error in surface structure is addition (14.28 or 56 out of 392) . An example from the excerpt is as follows :

- My brother can playing * football well

(Student 6) : The student has added (ing) in his utterance , an unnecessary addition to the structure . The error in this category of disordering accounted for only (8.16 % or 32 out of 392) of the errors

- She not just will* indicate to her house .

The excerpt above reveals that the student is not able to place the modal verb (will) correctly , instead of " she will not just indicate to her house " . The overall results show that the misinformation is the most frequent category of errors

Table (2) shows that the frequency of errors in the oral presentation based on the linguistic description of errors . As shown in the table , there are five linguistic categories . There is a total of 392 linguistic errors , and of these , the three most frequent types of errors are in tenses (130 with a percentage of 33.10%) , word order 93 instances or (23.72%) , and modification 67 instances (17.09%) . These three types of language errors accounted for more than (50%) of the total errors

Table (2)
Linguistics Description Based on Surface Structure categories

	Omission	Addition	Misinformation	Disorder	Total	Percentage
Tenses	38	13	59	9	130	33.10
Word order	43	20	30	-	93	23.72
Modification	21	-	46	-	67	17.09
Articles	16	12	19	9	56	14.03
Pronouns	22	-	10	14	46	11.13
Total	140	56	164	32	392	

left out , with no errors of additions , and with fewer errors of omissions (22) and disordering (14) . An excerpt of these errors is given below :

Misinformation : My brother met Ali when he was going to the school .

Omission : My brother does not remember to bring * note copybook .

10 . Conclusion

The results indicate that the most frequent errors students made are under the category of misinformation (41.83%) , followed by omission (35.71%) , addition (14.28%) and disordering (8.16%) . Depending on the percentage of error committed ; tenses , word order and modification , these areas represent the grammatical categories that most students faced difficulty with . Errors made are of great concern to teachers as they are indication of what students do and do not know .Errors are also symptomatic of any problems students may have in the course of learning a target language .

The present study has supplied the input that may be utilized to improve students ' oral interaction skills . Speaking practice lessons could be an important way of improving their presentation skills .

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Omission : My brother * studying hard .

Misinformation : My sister eated* very quickly .

Addition : As an examples*

3- Modification

The third most frequent linguistic errors made by the students are in modification that is 67 errors or (17.09%) . Almost all the errors in modification are confined to the category of misinformation 46 , with omission having 21 while there are no errors under the category of disorder , and no errors in the category of addition . An excerpt from the presentation is given below :

Misinformation : The boy clever *

A girl beautiful *

This is a ball red * .

Omission : My baby is a beauty* girl .

4- Articles

Errors in articles rank as the fourth most frequent errors . Students made in their presentation , amounting to 14.03 % of the total errors made . Almost all the errors are in the category of misinformation (19 instances) while there are 16 errors in the category of omission . There is 12 errors in addition and 9 errors in disordering . An excerpt from the presentation is given below .

Misinformation : * Example is

Omission : The modification for a teacher and * lecturer are not the same .

5- Pronouns

Table Two shows that errors in using the correct pronoun is found to some extent in oral interaction of the students ; out of 46 errors in the use of pronoun the majority are misinformation errors (19 instances) in which the * s * marking for plurality is

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