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CENTRO DE IDIOMAS

TÍTULO:

EFFECT OF GRAMMAR ON SECOND LANGUAGE

CONVERSATION: CASE OF STUDY LANGUAGE CENTER OF THE
ESPAM- MFL

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally the grammar usage has been associated with the speech pace learners may face when developing the ability and fluency to speak and express their ideas. This research work was aimed at analyzing the relationship between those two essential aspects (grammar and speech pace) when performing a conversation in a second language.

For this reason a test focused on assessing the speaking skill of three students who held the highest grades according to the levels A1, A2, and B1 was carried out. On the other hand, a survey approached to find out the students' feelings towards grammar when having a conversation in a L2.

Several considerations over the teaching-learning process of a second language were done. In the end, there was an assumption concerning the speech pace, which indicated that learners might not feel comfortable at all to speak fluently when being grammatically corrected at the same time, because as they are trying to accurately organize their ideas when there's something to say in front of a listener they tend to get complicated due to the proper use of grammar.

KEYWORDS

Second language, grammar usage, acquisition, speech pace, cognitive level, fluency.

INTRODUCTION

Not matter what the language is; throughout the years, it has been noticed that one does not think of any grammatical structures that determine the correct use of the mother tongue when expressing ideas in a speech. This is due to - among other things- the daily contact with its usage -also called the implementation- which allows any language acquirer, to express oneself fluently. Therefore, as soon as the action of thinking about the right use of its rules in every part of the communication process decreases, contrastingly the fluency in the speech increases. So, is it good to learn grammar then? Grammar integrates the means

that holds the pieces of language together; otherwise the transmission of ideas will be wrongly performed because the message will be unclear and meaningless. In other words, it is necessary to become familiar with it to ensure the proper use of language in all its forms.

What is more, it is to realize that during the process of acquiring a second language - with emphasis in geographical areas where the target language is not spoken; in the beginning, speakers communicate with difficulty as they try to organize their ideas in a grammatical mindset, which prevents them from expressing themselves freely. This occurs until the learner becomes familiar with its use and enters the stage of fluency, at the time they will not need to grammatically organize their ideas in mind to express them.

However, some authors refer to grammar as something indispensable for reaching the speaking fluency on the new language. Nevertheless, there are lots of people who have gained the skill of a SL by having lived in a society where the target language is spoken and they therefore have no idea about the use of grammar when speaking.

This study tried to assay the influence of grammar in a second language conversation by determining the accurate parameters to the analysis in order to evaluate the effect of grammar in people's second language conversation as a case of study at the Language Center of the ESPAM MFL.

For this reason, it was necessary to conceptualize some of those ideas in previous researches about grammar on speaking, so that a better understanding on the relationship with one another may be reached, and consequently, to make it possible state how grammar interferes in the mental process to perform a good speaking.

BACKGROUND: Case of Speaking English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

Before starting to speak many factors and components must be formed in a person's mind (Kianiparsa & Vali, 2010). Learning to speak also demands a lot of practice and attention. We learn to speak our mother tongue just by listening and

repeating (Bashir, *et. al* 2011). On the other hand, Cruz (2011) asserts that grammar instruction has been partially relegated and new trends have occupied its place. Students have traditionally a negative attitude towards the English language and, since they do not need English in daily life, they do not speak or hear English outside the classroom (Segura, 2012).

Nunan quoted by Nguyen Hoang Tuan (2015), states that speakers need communicative competence which includes not only linguistic competence but also a range of other sociolinguistic and conversational skills which help him/ her know how to say what to whom and when.

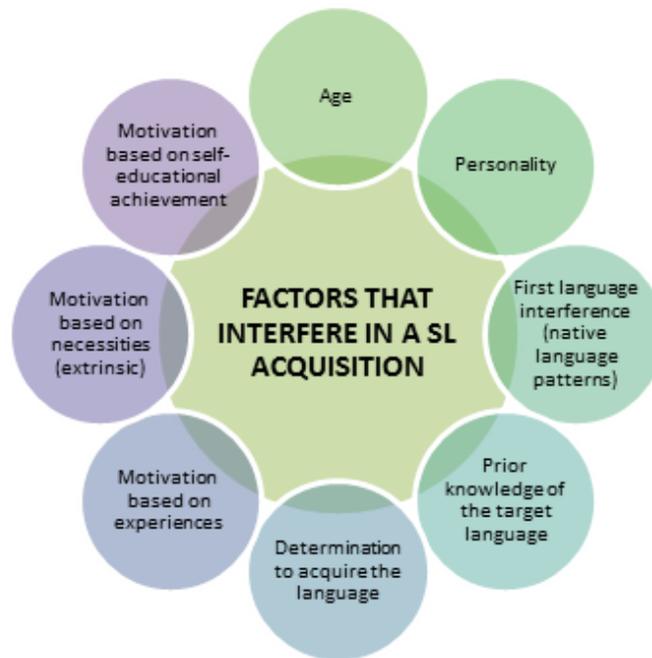
Grammar plays a vital role in speaking & writing better. Most of the undergraduate students are neglecting basic grammar concepts. So it hampers speaking English effectively. Pavan & Vijay Kumar (2015). In addition, grammar affects our credibility.

Language is most often described as having three main functions such as descriptive, expressive and social. The functional use of language can be determined simply by studying the grammatical structure of a sentence along with considering the social context in which the utterances take place. So before starting to learn speaking correctly in a foreign language, learners should bear the importance of grammar in their mind. Protiva, R. (2015).

FACTORS ON L2 SPEAKING PERFORMANCE

The Frankfurt International School (FIS) (s.f.) based on summaries of research into learner variables, done by Macaro (2010) & Lightbown, and Spada (2013) gathers the factors -others than grammar- that influence in the acquisition of a

second language, nonetheless, it does not state the ones which can directly frame the effects of grammar to perform real conversations. Hence, it is of great importance to point out the ones which might play a huge role in those situations and that were taken from that research, as it is shown in the following picture.



There are several factors which can affect the speaking performance. Although these aspects do not keep any relationship with grammar, they generally generate difficulties when doing a speech. Tuan & Mai (2015) state that students' speaking performance can be affected by the factors that come from performance conditions (time pressure, planning, standard of performance and amount of support), affective factors (such as motivation, confidence and anxiety), listening ability and feedback during speaking activities. The affective factors play a prominent role in the development of learners' oral performance (Mazouzi, 2014), for instance, Laguado (2012) states that attitudes and personality factors greatly affect not only the language learners' roles in communicative acts but also their ability to learn. It is therefore to say that the level at which people perform a conversation or the speed at which a speech can be categorized as slow or too slow, or perhaps fast or too fast will vary according to the situation, for instance: Carpenter (2013) says that professional

broadcasters speak at a pace of 150 words per minute. Based on the aforementioned facts, it is possible to exemplify that it is completely different to hear someone speaking for an audience, than to hear a friend informally chatting with you, in the first posed situation, the talker is mainly worried about the way how to avoid making mistakes, whereas in the second example, the speaker takes absolutely no care about what he or she is saying, hence the speaking pace of the first one is generally slower compared to the second, despite they both may have a good level. That is why, to state any guidelines in this research might turn out inconsistent.

PROCEDURE

To run this research, the students holding the highest grade in each course immediately after the levels A1, A2 and B1 provided by the Language Center of the ESPAM MFL based on the **Common European Framework of Reference** were considered as the study object for this research. Those students were required to speak for a minute on a topic they were familiarized with, which was given by an examiner. The students' speech was recorded and then scripted in order to get the total number of words they spoke within it called *word per minute* (wpm); the script was assessed by a writing rubric established by the Language Center Teachers' corpus, to ensure the accurate use of grammar in the spoken language.

On the other hand, it was necessary to obtain the students' perceptions to determine the level of congruence between the way they experience the grammar when speaking and how it really performs in their speaking skill. For this reason, a survey approached to inquire *the factors that influence the acquisition of a second language* was conducted.

Lastly, the results were compared and analyzed among the three assessed students, and their use of grammar measured by the number of mistakes they made when speaking, aimed at evaluating and characterizing the effect that grammar has on speakers when performing a conversation on a SL. It is to say,

by comparing the results of each survey which stated the learners' perception of the SL, to the number of words they spoke per minute and the number of mistakes they made, it was possible to qualitatively categorize the way how grammar affects a talker when performing a non- native conversation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Prior to state any judgment, which may cause divergences on researchers' criteria, other than generalizing the results, it has come to the conclusion that they might vary depending on other external factors such as prior knowledge of the L2, the ability to internalize the contents taught by the instructor among others. Furthermore, it is relevant to mention that the reached level by students on the speaking skill has been partially associated to the teacher's ability to perform good teaching. It is therefore to say, that the following analysis only comprises the aforementioned aspects and variables in this study.

To interpret the results, factors asked through questions in the survey, and the amount of words spoken by the students in a minute, as well as the number of mistakes they made while giving their speech, were simplified to be analyzed as it can be observed in the following table:

FACTORS	STUDENT A1	STUDENT A2	STUDENT B1
Age	19-25	18	19-25
<i>Personality (on their own)</i>	Reserved	Extrovert	Reserved
<i>Ability to explain on L1</i>	basic structure of grammar	basic structure of grammar	basic structure of grammar
<i>English courses done before LC-ESPAM MFL</i>	no	no	no
<i>Think of grammar when speaking</i>	no	no	yes
<i>Determined to learn English as a L2</i>	yes	yes	yes

<i>Experience on talking to a Foreigner in English</i>	no	no	no
<i>English linked to his/her life through something at the moment</i>	no	no	no
<i>Pride for the level of English spoken</i>	no	no	no
<i>WPM</i>	72	85	105
<i>Number of GMs</i>	7	5	3

By the application of the survey, it was possible to find out that students' ages are on average between 18 and 25 years old. Also, the learners' main type of personality found was considered on their own criterion as reserved and just one out of three defined herself as extrovert, which denotes that personality does not affect a learner when acquiring a L2. In contrast, each one of them pointed out that explanation of basic grammar structures of their L1 can be carried out by themselves on their mother tongue which shows students' confidence on their L1. On the other hand, none of them had had any English training whether formal or not, before entering to the Language Center at The ESPAM MFL, which clearly poses the efficiency in the teaching-learning process run at this training center.

However, the B1 student stated that he thinks of grammar when having a conversation on L2 other than the A1 & A2 students who stated not to do it so. They all similarly answered that they are determined to learn English, which shows that motivation is essential to achieve the expected goals. In the same way, they pointed out the fact that they had not experienced any direct talk with a foreigner in English, what is very common on motivated-to-learn students, additionally, they stated asserted the fact that the learnt to-be L2 is not an active part of their life through any mean at the moment. Despite this, they are self-motivated to acquire the new language because of what they think could be their

need nearly in the future. Finally, they all agreed on the opinion of not being proud of what they know because they all think there is more to be learnt, thus it is sensible to say that values do not interfere with the new language acquisition.

Students A1, A2 & B1 reached a total of 72, 85 & 105 wpm respectively as correlated to the aforementioned guidelines they rely under the marked parameters. In other words, learners at the Language Center must find the way of speeding their speech pace to reach the rank corresponding to their levels; their slow pace when speaking might have been caused by the lack of practice other than deficiencies on the teaching, though.

In the end, it was found 7, 5 & 3 mistakes on the respective A1, A2, & B1 levels speeches, which clearly shows the correlation that exist between the cognitive level of the L2 and the grammar used when having succeeded a higher level. Despite the fact that the B1 learner spoke the greater number of words he asserts to think of grammar when speaking, by contrast, the other two students stated not to think of it, and they could speak a great number of words. It is to say that, the B1 student could improve his speech pace by avoiding thinking of grammar when speaking, so that he may reach the common number of wpm that must be spoken at that level.

CONCLUSIONS

Grammar reduces the speaking pace by interfering with the process of producing ideas quickly instead of strictly correct. Thus it is more effective that teachers approach their teaching on contents in the four skills in an integrated way more than trying to get the students ready to perform a conversation in a L2 by the perfect use of grammar.

On the other hand, the more, second language learners think of grammar when speaking, the fewer mistakes they make, despite the fact that their fluency goes down when it occurs.

It was also found that personality does not have anything to deal with the speaking pace, so there might be learners who are rather extrovert and reserved,

though this aspect tend to vary depending on the situation or circumstance they are and even the level of language competence they would like to show to impress other speakers, but when it comes to speaking they might feel the need to accurately try to express themselves in the best possible way and at the right pace just to feel confidence and comfort.

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