

Investigating the Process of Acquiring Communicative Competence by an LEP Adult in a Natural Setting

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ABSTRACT

The area of interest in this study is in acquiring communicative competence by an adult with Limited English language Proficiency (LEP). As such, this study aspired to investigate the process involved in the development of achieving communicative competence by an LEP adult in a socially constructed environment. The data in this study were divided into two categories: spoken and written. The spoken data was collected by recording selected meetings involving the researcher, the subject, and several participants from the generic English-speaking society in which the subject socialises in. The spoken data were analysed based on a checklist and a scoring rubric that were both developed based on the test specifications of the speaking component in Malaysian University English Test (MUET), with features of interactional modifications by Pica & Doughty (1985). The written data were collected using authentic journal entries and analysed using a checklist and a scoring rubric that were developed based on the test specifications of the speaking component in MUET. Findings from the spoken and written data revealed that by being in a socially constructed environment, communicative competence can be acquired by an individual with limited English proficiency. One of the recommendations that can be made from this study is to integrate such method in English classes in a country's institutes of higher education.

Keywords: Communicative Competence, LEP, Adult, Environment

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

To survive globalisation, English is the language that everyone should master (Yamaguchi, 2002). Being able to master the language is a valuable and fruitful asset to have because it is not just a skill, but a means of social mobility as well. This is because English has always been the international language of the world (Kitao, 1996) and will always be the language of communication, sharing of information, knowledge, thoughts, ideas and the medium of instruction in many higher institutions of education (Mohd Faisal Hanapiah, 2002). Hence, newly industrialised countries (Bozyk, 2006; Guillen, 2003) such as Malaysia and China are now starting to place a high value on the English language because its values transcend from personal to professional life (Zhou, 2007).

Over the years, the need to develop a competitive English-speaking population has heightened globally (Birmingham, 2010). However, it can be seen as a daunting task especially when it involves adults who have already acquired their first language (Yang, 2006). Nevertheless, the English proverb, 'you are never too old to learn', is especially true as there is no age limit for

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adults to acquire a second language. Given that they have already acquired a first language, adults naturally fall into the category of second language speakers (Malmkjær, 2002).

Adults normally face numerous challenges and will either persevere and become successful or withdraw and become unsuccessful (Schleppegrell, 1987) in attempts to acquire a second language. As opposed to children, adults are more capable of handling stressful environments or situations and emerge with positive results. This is because they possess superior cognitive abilities, greater self-confidence and “can deal with language that is not in a “here and now” context” (Brown, 2001, p.90). Possessing superior cognitive abilities also enables adults to handle more abstract rules and concepts but this will only be successful if positively aided with real life language usage (Brown, 2001) and not depending heavily on classroom materials such as textbooks (Cote, 2004). Therefore, acquiring the English language through daily social conversations is deemed to be more effective and beneficial in enhancing the process, especially for adults.

Acquiring English through daily social conversations expose adults to opportunities to use the language in ways that are highly relevant and useful to their daily lives and consequently making the acquisition process more interesting and meaningful (Krashen, 2007). This is in accordance to Malcolm Knowles’s theory on the five assumptions about the characteristics of the adult learners: self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning and motivation to learn (Knowles et al., 1984). Hence, by being in an informal and socially constructed setting as well as being able to use the language with true human to human interaction will no doubt aid adult learners in becoming members of the generic English-speaking community in which they live in (Schwarzer, 2009).

Although language learning and acquisition by adults have been numerous studied in the field of second language acquisition (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Ellis, 1994; McCarthy & Carter, 1994; Krashen & Terrel, 1995; Krashen, 1998; Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2006), studies of language learning and acquisition by illiterate adults and/or adults with limited educational background are not extensive as yet (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004; Tarone, Bigelow & Hansen, 2009; Tarone, 2010).

Therefore, this is the gap that this present study attempts to bridge by employing a case study research methodology to document and analyse the process of acquiring communicative competence by an adult with limited English language proficiency from a limited educational background in an informal learning environment. This case study is primarily qualitative in nature, with a small scale and simple quantitative approach to gain data to support and strengthen its results and findings.

Limited English Proficiency (LEP), a federal interagency website (2012), defines LEP individuals as “individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write or understand English can be limited English proficient, or LEP” (p.1). Hence, this case study investigates how an LEP adult can acquire communicative competence in the target language via conversations in low-anxiety social situations in the generic Malaysian English-speaking community.

The process of acquiring communicative competence began with the acquisition of the most fundamental rules of the English language (Phase 1), followed by informal social conversations with participating participants of the generic Malaysian English-speaking community in the subject’s social circle (Phase 2). The present study also considers the process and developments in the LEP adult’s written competency by documenting and analysing several personal journal entries that were written by the subject (Phase 3) as well as some selected posts on her Twitter account (Phase 4). The guidelines for the framework of both the spoken and written data

analysis for this study are based on the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996), the Communicative Competence (Hymes, 1972), and the Comprehensible Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985).

The results from Phase 1 and Phase 2 are the determining factors in gauging the subject's success in achieving communicative competency in terms of her spoken skills. The results from Phase 3 and Phase 4, on the other hand, are used to support the subject's success in her spoken skills by examining the competency in her writing skills.

1.2 Purpose and the Objectives of the Study

This study attempts to show that an LEP adult can acquire communicative competence in the English language through social conversations. Acquiring communicative competence in this study is gauged not only from the spoken aspects, but from the written aspects as well. Hence, the purpose of this study is to investigate the process and developments of an LEP adult in acquiring communicative competence in her spoken English by having real and authentic social conversations with participating participants of the generic English-speaking community which the subject socialises in. The subject's competency in both spoken and written aspects is measured by the subject attaining mutual intelligibility and fluency. This is done using an evaluation rubric and a checklist developed for this study. Hence, the main objective of this study is to investigate the process of acquiring communicative competency by an LEP adult in a natural setting.

1.3 Research Question

To achieve the objectives above, this study will attempt to answer the following research question:

What is the process of acquiring communicative competence by an LEP adult in a natural setting?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is an attempt to investigate an LEP adult coming from a limited educational background acquiring communicative competence in both spoken and written English by being in a low-anxiety, natural setting. As the number of studies in this area is limited, this study will contribute to the literature of second language acquisition in LEP adults with limited educational background.

The methods of acquiring communicative competence employed in this study are by being in an informal learning environment, having real-life exposure to the English language as well as having the opportunity to use the English language with real human-to-human interactions. Hence, the significance of this study is that it attempts to apply the findings from the LEP adult's acquisition process into developing an improved methodology in English classes in institutes of higher education, especially in Malaysia, in hopes of producing more effective and functional adult English speakers.

A case study research, especially one that employs only one subject, is usually questioned in terms of its generalisability. As such, this study is a bold step to show that a case study using only one subject can be used to show that generalisability is not an issue, but simply a misunderstanding. The results and findings of this study can contribute and benefit language educators, language learners and consequently, even the development of the field of second language acquisition.

Language educators will find this study useful in understanding different learners in terms of these learners' needs and study preferences. This study can also provide language educators a better understanding of those who may seem to be 'problematic students'. They might not be problematic at all, as they simply learn differently. As such, the language acquisition methodology applied in this study can be used by language educators to employ on their LEP students who hail from a limited educational background. By providing these learners with a more hands-on approach to language learning would not only benefit the language learner but the educators as well.

Apart from that, learners too can benefit from the results and findings of this study, in understanding their own language acquisition strengths and capabilities. There are many other learners out there with a background like the subject with limited education but have a high motivation to acquire the English language and use it to improve their daily social communication as well as move along their occupational paths. This study therefore provides them with insight into the process of acquiring the English language and become functional in the language, and for them to understand that language acquisition does not only happen inside a classroom setting.

1.5 Scope of the Study

There are two aspects in the scope of this study:

1.5.1 Subject

The present study is a documentation of an LEP adult acquiring communicative competence by being in a social environment. Although the study should cover more than one adult in order for generalisations to be made, the constraint of time and resources in finding adults who fit into the criteria of subject selection led to the result of just one subject.

1.5.2 Corpus

Constraint of time caused the delimitation of the scope of corpus of spoken data by only selecting five meetings in Phase 1 and five meetings in Phase 2 to be transcribed. Apart from that, the corpus of written data only includes 5 personal journal entries for Phase 3

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 English as a Global Language

Ever since globalisation occurred, English has made its mark in becoming the most important language of the world (Park, 2009). It is no longer the language of the rich and educated for it has become the language, be it the standard or pidginised form, of interaction and expression in many parts of the world (Taiwo, 2009).

A large part of this phenomenon is the result of the widespread of English music and films through the radio, television and Internet (Meierkord, 2009). Printed materials such as newspapers, magazines, advertisements (Thusat, Anderson, Davis, Ferris, Javed, Laughlin, Sinclair, Vastalo, Whelan, Wrubel, 2009) and social networking websites such as Facebook (founded in February 2004), Friendster (founded in March 2002) and Twitter (founded in April 2007) are also the leading factors in the accelerated need and use of English the world over.

As reported by Zhou (2007), the effects of globalisation have turned English into the most prestigious language in China. In India, English is the language of survival, especially in the job

industry (Scrase, 2004) and in Japan, a country that puts the highest value on its national language, *Nihongo* (Japanese), also acknowledges the heightened importance of English for it is now used in almost every aspect of their daily lives including academic, news, music as well as communication to remain competitive in the modern era (Kitao, 1996; Blair, 1997; Yamaguchi, 2002).

According to a study conducted by Park (2009), Korean parents have become so obsessed with ensuring their children having the absolute best of oral proficiency in English that they have started sending their children to countries with a wider exposure to the language such as Malaysia. This just goes to show that Malaysia has become a competitive English-speaking nation (Bermingham, 2010). In a country where there is a huge repertoire of languages spoken e.g., Malay, Cantonese, Mandarin, Tamil, Hokkien, Bajau, Ilanun, and Iban, English then is one of the two (Malay language or *Bahasa Malaysia*, being the first) main languages of communication among the speech communities in Malaysia (Asmah Omar, 1982).

2.1.1 The Malaysian Scenario

Recent evidence suggests that over the last twenty years, English in Malaysia is becoming increasingly dominant although *Bahasa Malaysia* remains the official language in government administration. The language of transactions, agreements, tourism, mass media and even daily street communications has now grown into English (Baskaran, 1994; Zarina Mustafa, 2009). This was also reported by Baskaran (2002) where the roles of English both intra- and internationally in Malaysia were discussed.

A large-scale study by Asmah Omar (1982) which examined the verbal communications among specific, different, and major subgroups in Malaysia along with the bilingualism, interference, code-switching, and code-mixing occurrences pointed out that communication in English was confined and limited:

“A time will come when the sociolinguistic situation in Malaysia will be similar to that of Indonesia or Thailand where people use the national language as their main tool of communication.” (p. 123)

One major criticism of Asmah Omar’s statement is that now to remain globally competitive Malaysia has recognised English as the world language of communication, information, and globalisation (Zarina Mustafa, 2009) and the need to be able to function well in the English language has rapidly increased (Hajibah Osman, 1997).

This points out that English is now being spoken and used extensively in Malaysia by Malaysians (Mohd Faisal Hanapiah, 2002), even though the status of *Bahasa Malaysia* as the official language strongly remains (Murugesan, 2003). English is the language used in the working environment for power, advancement and networking (Hajibah Osman, 1997; Ambigapathy & Andul Ghani Aniswal, 2005; Lie, Pang & Fadhil Mansur, 2009), in the educational environment for knowledge and information (Murugesan, 2003) as well as in the everyday social setting (Baskaran, 2002).

2.1.2 Malaysian English

Malaysian English (herein after referred to as ‘ME’) is one of the varieties of the Standard English, such as Standard British English (S.Br.E) and American English (Am.E) that exists mainly in Malaysia. As such, ME is thick with cultural-related components and elements given that Malaysia is a harmonious multicultural country. Consequently, this causes speakers of ME to code-mix and to use slang words originating from the Malay, Chinese and Indian dialects in their daily social and spontaneous conversations (Marlyna Maros, Tan & Khazriyati Salehuddin,

2007; Ting, Mahanita Mahadhir & Chang, 2009; Ang, Hajar Abdul Rahim, Tan & Khazriyati Salehuddin, 2011).

Given that ME is spoken widely in Malaysia by the multicultural society living in the country, ME has a lot of culture-bound influences and localisations in the language spoken (Pillay, 2004). The pronunciation (Rajadurai, 2006; Joseph, 2007), choice of vocabulary and even expressions are very much heavily bounded by the cultures in Malaysia and could cause problems if Malaysian English is used with speakers with no knowledge of the slangs, words and jargons in *Bahasa Malaysia* (Ooi, 2001; Noraini Idris, Loh, Norjoharuddeen Mohd. Nor, Ahmad Zabidi Abdul Razak & Rahimi Md. Saad, 2007).

2.2 Adult Language Acquisition

Many adults in Malaysia have realised the importance of having more than just one skill and knowledge in one specific area to move upward in their professional lives (Faizah Abd Majid & Hazadiah Mohamad Dahan, 2009). However, there are many challenges that adult learners have to face once they have decided to go back to school, and as explained by Faizah Abd Majid and Hazadiah Mohamad Dahan (2009) these challenges are divided into three categories: i) situational (finance and time constraints); ii) structural (institutional challenges); and iii) attitudinal (face-saving reasons and lack of motivation). As such, it is important for adult learners to remain interested and motivated to be successful in their learning.

In the process of second language acquisition, adults are more able to handle stressful environments or situations and emerge with positive results (Brown, 2001) if they put their minds to it. Cote (2004) observed adult language acquisition and the ability to function in the language in two extreme conditions: highly positive and highly negative. These two conditions showed learning in an absolute immersion of the language but Cote (2004) did not discuss language acquisition in a social context without the adults being intensely pressured by any members of the language community.

In Malaysia, being able to function in the language, especially for adults from limited educational background with LEP, is not a pressure but a means of advancement (Hajibah Osman, 1997). Members of any generic English-speaking community in Malaysia are usually second language speakers and come from diverse language backgrounds (Asmah Omar, 1982). By being exposed to the language used by the speakers in the community of a target language, especially for adults, they will acquire some word-order and sentence construction (Francis, Schmidt, Carr, & Clegg, 2009).

As the findings in Schalge & Soga's (2008) study suggest, acquiring language with reduced anxiety is an advantage in the success of language acquisition as with the case of acquiring language through daily social interactions in various social settings. Incidental learning of the vocabulary and grammar is perhaps one of the learning mechanisms for adults (Francis et al., 2009) to overcome the obstacles in adult second language acquisition particularly if they use it in their daily interactions.

2.3 Communicative Competence

Chomsky's (1965) language acquisition theory was too constrained with its strong reliance on grammar. He claimed that in order to be competent in a language, the rules of grammar and sentence structure must be perfect. However, Hymes (1972) and Campbell and Wales (1970, as cited in Canale & Swain, 1980) were among the first to argue that this notion by Chomsky (1965) was too rigid and hence, this led to the development of a new theory regarding competence in language acquisition, known as Communicative Competence. Since its existence in the language field in the 1970s, this theory has been discussed, used and expanded greatly

but the fundamental of the theory remains as the ability to use language appropriately, both receptively and productively, in real situations (Kitao & Kitao, 1996).

The most important aspect in any language learning is to be able to function in the language (Brown, 2000) and this includes the ability to interact in a social context (Carter et al., 2001). Although adults may not achieve native-like pronunciation (Robertson, 2003), intelligible pronunciation is good enough to get the message in their communication across meaningfully and use their communicative fluency for autonomy, value and most importantly survival (Cote, 2004).

Since adults very rarely achieve native-like fluency as children and speak with some recognisable non-native accent (Vajda, 2001), being competent in the target language is deemed more as a successful improvement (Rozanna Noraini Albakri, 2009). To achieve communicative competence in the target language and to have the ability to use it accurately, appropriately and flexibly (Yule, 2004) is sufficient and can be considered as successful in acquiring the language.

This theory is proven in a work by Munro, Derwing and Morton (2006) consisting of subjects from a diverse language background. The ultimate importance of acquiring a language is to be able to be understood and to communicate messages without the need to sound like a native speaker. In adults who are second language speakers, the ability to be intelligible in the second language and to function effectively in a speech community of the second language are deemed successful.

However, no matter how successful a person is in a particular language, when it comes to speaking the language spontaneously, both in formal and informal situations, the structure of the language will never be as perfect as the written language for speech disfluencies (Shriberg, 2001) as well as ungrammatical utterances (Penner, 1987) are highly prevalent in any spontaneous speech.

Although these aspects in a language are typically deemed negative, this study attempts to examine both elements in a positive light to see the cognitive processing and developments that come with speech disfluencies and ungrammatical utterances in the LEP adult. In addition to that, this study also attempts to document and analyse other elements in the process of acquiring communicative competence.

3.METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Case Study Methodology

A case study is a type of research methodology commonly used in the social sciences. This type of research allows an in-depth understanding of an event, phenomenon, or situations in a real-life context (Yin, 1994). It is usually adopted for studies that are more of explanatory, exploratory and descriptive (Tellis, 1997a) in nature because it answers the “why” and “how” questions, something that is not as easily justified by other types of research methodology (Tellis, 1997b).

3.2 Research Design

The methodology for this research is primarily qualitative for it is a means to have a better understanding of an LEP adult’s experiences in the journey of acquiring communicative competence in English through engaging in social conversations. This study also employs a small-scale approach to working with quantitative data, namely the frequency count, where data is grouped in accordance to the elements in the acquisition process.

To gauge the improvement and success of the subject, her conversational strategies and disfluencies processing are examined and analysed. The results were used to determine whether the subject was successful in becoming a member of the generic speaking English community which she socialises in.

3.3 Data Collection

There are two types of data collected for this study: 1) spoken data and 2) written data. As such, selection of the population and sample, sampling procedures, building the corpus, as well as to collecting, classifying, and analysing data were very carefully carried out.

3.3.1 Population and Sample

The population for this study initially consisted of two LEP adults, one male and one female, with limited educational background. These two adults were looking for means to improve their spoken English.

Apart from the subject and the researcher, there were several other participants involved in this study. For Phase 2, where the subject interacted with the researcher and other participants, a total of five participants were involved. Meetings 1, 2, 3 and 5 involved one participant in each meeting (excluding the researcher and the subject), while Meeting 4 involved two participants in the meeting (excluding the researcher and the subject).

For Phase 3, where the subject wrote her personal journal entries, a panel of five examiners participated. These five selected examiners chosen to assess and comment on the writings of the subject's personal journal entries are majoring in English at a public university.

3.3.2 Methods for Data Collection

Data collection for the present study involved both spoken and textual speech data. Spoken data were recordings of spontaneous conversations between the subject and several participants of the generic English-speaking community which she socialises in.

To chart the development of the subject's language competency, the recordings and transcriptions were done in two phases:

Spoken:

- i) Phase 1: the subject alone with the researcher
- ii) Phase 2: the subject with a small group of people

Written:

- i) Phase 3: the subject's intrapersonal speech data (five personal journal entries)

4. DATA ANALYSIS

For the spoken data, there are six categories used to rate the progress and eventually the success of the subject's communicative competency. These six categories are: 1) Initiation, 2) Response, 3) Conversational Strategies to Clarify and Continue Conversations, 4) Vocabulary, 5) Structure and 6) Cultural Appropriateness. For the written data, (Phase 3), there are three categories used to rate the improvement of the subject's communicative competence. The three categories are: 1) Content, 2) Grammar and 3) Vocabulary. These three categories were selected

based on the test specifications of the speaking component in a MUET as a guideline. Apart from that, data was grouped and categorised based on the features of interactional modifications by Pica & Doughty (1985). To mark the scores, a scoring rubric and a checklist where marks were given according to the rubrics were developed. After the marks from the informal speaking checklist had been obtained, a graph was charted to clearly see the success and development of the subject in her journey of acquiring communicative competence.

4.1 Result and Discussions

The results of the study can be seen in the elements in the process of acquisition that will be discussed which are: 1) Speech Disfluencies, 2) *Bahasa Malaysia* Words and Phrases in Spoken Malaysian English, and 3) Ungrammatical Utterances in Spoken Malaysian English.

4.2 Speech Disfluencies

Speech disfluencies (hereinafter referred to as 'SDs') are signs that a speaker is trying to produce language (Shriberg, 2001) in situations that are unfamiliar, using words that are unfamiliar (Kidd, White & Aslin, 2011) or to prolong a conversation (Clark & Tree, 2002). To distinguish between the general functions of SDs and the subject's use of SDs, her most frequently used SDs were identified and the rates were charted.

From Phase 1, the SDs that most commonly occurred in the subject's speech were: i) filled pauses ('uh', 'um' and 'ah'), ii) short pauses, iii) long pauses, iv) repetitions and v) repairs. The subject used SDs to recollect her thoughts to produce more analytical answers. Therefore, the higher the frequency rates, the more improved the sentences were for the subject. The subject used SDs not to "hold the floor" but to improve her English-speaking skills by responding using better phrases and sentences, and hence, her disfluencies became her 'fluency'. Functions of the subject's SDs will be further discussed using the following excerpts.

Although the subject's SDs did not entirely thwart the comprehension of the conversation, it did however make the researcher unable to be actively responsive because of the subject's ambiguity. Consequently, this could cause breakdowns and misunderstandings if spoken with a different conversation partner or situation.

The subject was also using SDs as a defence mechanism against her nerves and anxiety to cover-up her inferiority, making it as the second function of the subject's use of SDs.

It can be seen from the data that the subject started using SDs for a different purpose. She used SDs to recollect her thoughts to improve her answers and produce more analytical sentences. Therefore, it leads to the third function of the subject's use of SDs, to create a sociable environment that can improve the subject's thought processes.

In summary, it can safely be concluded that the subject's SDs were not a hindrance in getting her meanings across, and more functions of the subject's SDs in Phase 2 will be investigated in the following subsection.

In Phase 2, there were three to four participants involved in five meetings. From the findings, SDs are quite common indeed in any spontaneous conversations. Here, the subject also used SDs as a defence mechanism against nerves and anxiety, as well as a cognitive processing mechanism to produce more analytical answers and sentences.

In Phase 2, it is very apparent the rate of the subject's SDs was about the same percentage as the other participants involved in the conversations.

In conclusion, although SDs are typically viewed in a negative light in a speaker's speech utterances, in the case of the subject, SDs function in a positive manner. To summarise, the functions of the subject's SDs are:

- a) to produce language in situations that are unfamiliar, when faced with words that are unfamiliar or to prolong a conversation,
- b) to cover-up her nerves, anxiety, and inferiority,
- c) to recollect her thoughts to improve her answers and produce more analytical sentences, and
- d) to construct and rephrase her questions.

4.3 Bahasa Malaysia Words and Phrases in Spoken Malaysian English

This section discusses the functions of *Bahasa Malaysia* (Malaysian language, hereinafter referred to as BM) words and phrases in the subject's spoken Malaysian English. The use of BM words and phrases in spoken Malaysian English is the second element in the process of acquiring communicative competence in this study.

The excerpts presented in the previous sections comprise of spontaneous English conversations spoken by the subject, the researcher and a few of the participants of the generic English society in Malaysia. Although the excerpts are in English, the structure of the conversations is not of the Standard British English (S.Br.E) or American English (Am.E). The English structure in the presented excerpts is from one of the many varieties of World English, and that is the Malaysian English (ME).

Given that both the subject and the researchers are Malaysians, BM is a language used and understood by both. Therefore, the subject included some BM words and phrases into her spoken English speech.

The frequency of occurrences of these words and phrases was grouped together to get the result. The functions and developments of her using BM words and phrases will be further discussed.

As discussed, although code-mixing may be a bit of a problem if dealt with a person with no knowledge of *Bahasa Malaysia*, in the case of the study, it is a sign of the subject's progress in acquiring communicative competence. This is largely because by code-mixing and code-switching, a person tends to feel more familiar to the person code-mixing and code-switching as well (Riehl, 2005; Nilep, 2006; Pagano, 2010). In the case of this study, once the subject started feeling more familiar with the person(s) she was conversing with, it was noticed that she started becoming progressively more confident in her spoken English.

This consequently led to the subject to becoming more adventurous in word selections as well as in being more interactive in the conversation. As such, the subject no longer felt inhibited or self-conscious when she had to speak to a member of the generic English-speaking society in which she lives in, regardless of the person's educational or English background. Being able to speak and function in English, even with code-mixing and code-switching, with any member of the generic English-speaking society in which the subject socialises in is another positive development that emerged in the subject's journey of acquiring communicative competence.

Hence, the functions of the subject's use of BM words and phrases are:

- i) to replace both high- and low-frequency English words and phrases, and
- ii) to code-mix with other participants of the generic English society which she socialises in.

Along with the functions, the developments of the subject's use of BM words and phrases are:

- i) using BM words and phrases to recall and then translate the word into English without assistance, and
- ii) being able to speak confidently and function effectively in a conversation with any member of the generic English society in which she socialises in, regardless of the member's educational and English background.

To conclude, these excerpts in both Phase 1 and Phase 2 taken together have shown that, for the subject, using BM words and phrases in everyday social conversations is not a huge hindrance in acquiring communicative competence. It is, instead, an advantageous practice for the subject, and possibly for individuals such as the subject, serving as a stepping stone to further become highly effective and functional in their everyday spoken English.

4.3.1 Ungrammatical Utterances in Spoken Malaysian English (Phase 1)

This section will discuss the functions of the ungrammatical utterances in the subject's and the participants' spoken Malaysian English. Ungrammatical utterances in spoken speech is the third element in the process of acquiring communicative competence that was identified in this study.

Unlike written speech, in a spontaneous spoken speech, there is not much time for beforehand preparation, and imperfections in pronunciation, word choice as well as grammar will highly likely be present (Shriberg, 1999). This goes to show that these imperfections occur in spontaneous speech even by the speakers of Standard British English (S.Br.E) or American English (Am.E). Hence, for a country where English is learnt as a second language and several English varieties are present, it is not a surprise that Malaysian English speakers can make ungrammatical utterances in their social spontaneous conversations (Maros, Tan & Salehuddin, 2007).

The next section discusses and compares the subject's and the participants' (in Phase 2) features of ungrammatical utterances.

4.3.2 Ungrammatical Utterances in Spoken Malaysian English (Phase 2)

Ungrammatical utterances are inevitable in spontaneous speech, especially for non-native speakers of English such as Malaysians (Maros, Tan & Salehuddin, 2007). This is evident from all the data collected in this present study. In Phase 2, a phase involving participants other than the subject and the researcher, sentences with ungrammatical utterances are counted.

All the participants involved produced ungrammatical utterances in their social spontaneous conversations. In Phase 1 the subject was hesitant to speak in English. She started to become more confident in Phase 2.

With the right tools, the subject's positive progress is evident when she was not the one with the highest number of ungrammatical utterances in the Meeting 1 and Meeting 2 in Phase 2. Instead, the third parties involved for both meeting were the ones who produced the highest number of ungrammatical utterances (Meeting 1: 58.3%; Meeting 2: 80.4%).

4.4 Personal Journal Entries

This section will discuss Phase 3 which is the development and the aspects of the subject's spoken English competency by examining her English writing competence. This study sets out to determine whether communicative competence in a target language is able to be acquired

without the need to be in a classroom environment, and by conversing in social and informal conversations, therefore, the tone of the subject's writings was also seen fit to be informal. These informal writings were in the form of personal journal entries and will be discussed in the following subsection.

4.4.1 The Effects of Grammar and Vocabulary on the Content of the Entries

This section discusses and analyses the effects of the subject's grammar and choice of vocabulary on the understanding of the content of her entries. As mentioned, the tone of the subject's journal entries is like the tone of her spoken speech which is informal. The main reason behind the tone of the subject's entries being informal is because the entries are intrapersonal speech. The entries were written by the subject for her to reflect on her feelings and express her emotions. Therefore, given the personal nature of the entries, informal writing (in terms on grammar, choice of vocabulary, and even spelling) is seen fit for this study. These entries were assessed, graded, and commented by a panel of five examiners.

It is found the subject faced difficulties in selecting words to express her thoughts clearly and effectively. Although the subject was able to function effectively in her spontaneous Malaysian English speech, in her first journal writing, she was deemed incapable to successfully convey her intended meaning by Examiner 1.

It was also noticed that the subject started to feel more comfortable in using English in her personal writing. Although errors in grammar and vocabulary were still present, both examiners were able to fully comprehend the subject's overall meaning. As such, the subject's effort in using English in her writing was highly commendable.

During the duration of Phases 1 and 2, the subject would ask the researcher on matters such as the proper grammar, pronunciation and meaning of words outside of the meetings. In Phase 3, even though the subject was busy with her work (freelance modelling, acting, and her post in the company at the time of this study) and was therefore unable to meet up with the researcher as often, the subject would still consult the researcher if she had issues on grammar, vocabulary and even pronunciation. This clearly resulted in her progress in her written English, even in such brief period.

Looking at the sentence structure in this third selected entry, there was a significant increase in the subject's grasp of grammar rules. Although the sentences were structured in a simple manner, the subject managed to apply grammar rules successfully. There were of course, errors present, however, these errors seemed very minor as opposed to the previous entries. In addition to having lesser grammar errors in her sentences, the subject also used paragraphs in this entry. Each paragraph narrated one thought, instead of the previous entries where thoughts, feelings and emotions were narrated together in one big paragraph.

Judging by the comments from both Examiner 1 and Examiner 2, it can be concluded that the subject has been successful in acquiring communicative competence in her intrapersonal writing.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This present case study has given an account of the process of an LEP adult acquiring communicative competence in Malaysian English. This study has also explained the possible reasons for the said adult's developments in her acquisition process. It is a highly data-driven study in examining and analysing the LEP adult's spoken and written competence in spontaneous and informal Malaysian English. This study is a response to Tarone's (2010)

statement that most studies on second language acquisition have focused on educated, highly-illiterate learners. The approach of this study differs from other studies in SLA for it allows room for errors and analyse these errors in a positive manner, enabling the LEP adult the opportunity to experience true human-to-human, real life language.

The finding of this study has confirmed the ability for an LEP adult with limited educational background to be successful in acquiring communicative competency even without a formal language acquisition environment. From the investigation, several elements in the process of acquisition have been identified as contributors to the success of the subject.

These elements are: 1) speech disfluencies, 2) *Bahasa Malaysia* words and phrases, and 3) ungrammatical utterances. Although these elements have been typically viewed in a negative manner, this study has proven that these elements have the capability to lead to positive and successful results.

Apart from the three mentioned elements, self-motivation and self-confidence also contribute to the success in acquiring communicative competence. Although these two traits are not easily possessed, these traits are possible to develop in an adult. This study has shown that with the right materials and teaching methodology, the task of developing motivation and confidence in a learner is possible.

It is recommended that further studies be undertaken by applying this method into a classroom setting in a class full of LEP adults. Given that the number of studies on LEP adults using real-life language is little; such studies could contribute to the field of second language learning.

To conclude the study, it is believed that reporting on the current state of the subject is appropriate. Currently, the subject can use the English language fairly fluently, albeit with some grammatical errors, especially in informal and social settings. The subject no longer feels inferior to use her spoken English skills, as well as her written English skills, among her friends, peers, colleagues and even families.

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