

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE USE AMONG ORAL COMMUNICATION MERANAO STUDENTS AND THEIR LANGUAGE LEARNING ORIENTATIONS: THE MSU MARAWI CASE

ANNIE MAE C. BEROWA

Mindanao State University, Main Campus  
Philippines annieberowa@yahoo.com.ph

**Abstract:** This study investigated the frequency of English language use among Meranao students of oral communication subject in the different speech domains in the Mindanao State University (MSU), Marawi, and their orientation/s in using and learning the English language. Meranao which means “people of the lake”, largely settle in the region surrounding the basin of Lake Lanao who are adherents of Islam.

This study combined both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis procedure. This used purposive sampling method in gathering fifty (50) Meranao students of Oral Communication subject as respondents of this study. For instrumentation, questionnaire and focus group discussion (FGD) were employed.

It was found that, generally, the respondents sometimes use English language in the different domains and speech situations in the university. Furthermore, respondents were instrumentally oriented in their English language learning.

## INTRODUCTION

The majority of the people around the globe consider English as first, as second or as foreign language. This target language is used as the lingua franca or as the official language for diplomacy, trade, governance, media and technology. But learning this language is not an easy task. Affective factors are important, along with the support from the peers, the environment and the people around, to facilitate the target language learning and success.

In the Philippines, the Mindanao State University, Main Campus in the Islamic City of Marawi is the “Melting Pot of the South.” It provides quality education to the cultural communities of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan (MINSUPALA) regions, most especially to the Meranaos in the province of Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, and in Marawi City. Meranao which means “people of the lake”, largely settle in the region surrounding the basin of Lake Lanao who are adherents of Islam. The Meranao students dominate the university reaching more than half of its total population. This fact implies that the other half are from the different cultural groups who speak a variety of tongues—Filipino, Visayan languages, Iranon, Maguindanaon, and Tausug and even some indigenous languages. To this mix must be added the other official medium of instruction which is the English. In this rich tapestry of various ethno-linguistic backgrounds, Filipino as the national language and one of the official mediums of instruction is the assumed lingua franca.

With this kind of environment, the researcher was motivated to undertake this study to know the status of English language learning in a multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-lingual context among the Oral Communication Meranao students in the university. This is viewed in terms of the frequency of English language use in the different speech domains in the university and their language learning orientations. The researcher chose the Meranaos as respondents since they comprise the largest population that could create a picture of the general status of English language learning in the university. It is believed that mastery and proficiency in language are achieved through application in real-life situations. This is important for the researcher since orientation dictates the amount of effort that students will exert in learning the target language that can also affect the teaching methods and approaches.

## THE STUDY

Theorists agree that learning English is not a simple task. It is a complex skill which involves social and psychological factors. In the past, the aim of teaching English was the mastery of the structure of the language. Now, in this age of communication, English is playing a major role. The purpose of teaching has shifted from the mastery of structure to the ability to use the language for communicative purposes. The ultimate goal of language learning then is “authentic communication between persons of different languages and cultural backgrounds” (McIntyre et al. 2002).

Spolsky (1989) stated: “A language may be learned for any one or any collection of practical reasons. The importance of these reasons to the learner will determine what degree of effort he or she will make, what he or she will pay for the learning.” These reasons have been referred in language learning as orientations.

Gardner and Tremblay (1994) used the word orientation to refer to reasons for studying a second language. They identified two types of orientations--the instrumental and the integrative orientations. Instrumental orientation refers to the desire to learn a language for functional reasons such as getting a job, reading scientific papers, passing an examination, and the like. On the other hand, integrative orientation refers to the desire to learn a language in order to communicate with people of another culture who speak it, to identify with, and become part of that society or culture.

This study was undertaken to answer the following questions: A.) What is the profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, course and year level? B.) What is the frequency of English language use in the different domains in the university among the respondents? C.) What is/are the language learning orientation/s of the respondents?

This study used the qualitative-quantitative research paradigm to probe the English language use among Oral Communication Meranao students and their language learning orientations in the context of the Mindanao State University, Marawi. The quantitative aspect of the study involved the use of questionnaire to determine the frequency of English language use in the different speech domains and situations in the university and their orientations. On the other hand, the qualitative aspect of the study involved focus-group discussion (FGD) to expound and elaborate the quantitative results.

The study was conducted in the Mindanao State University, Marawi City. The Mindanao State University in the Islamic City of Marawi is the "Melting Pot of the South." It is a veritable mosaic or salad bowl type of society in which students of diverse religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds--the Muslims, the Christians and the Lumads or indigenous people are thrown together to study and live in harmony. A mosaic is a society in which ethnic groups retain their separate identities but together form a larger community. One finds the Mindanao State University a cauldron of diverse cultures and Babel of tongues.

This study gathered fifty (50) Meranao students of oral communication subject during the second summer of the school year 2014-2015 as respondents. As required of the study's respondents, Meranao means born of Meranao parents both mother and father. Tracing this fact does not go beyond the immediate parents, which means that even the participants/respondents whose mother or father, either or both, are only half-Meranaos qualified as participants. It used purposive sampling and the instruments used were questionnaire, semi-structured interview schedule for focus-group discussion and the video recorder.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

1. With regard to the profile of the respondents, it was found that out of fifty (50) Meranao respondents, there were thirty-seven females and thirteen (13) males. Also, there were 42 respondents aged 16-17 years old, 5 respondents were aged 17-18, and 3 respondents were aged 19-20. Furthermore, majority of the respondents were taking Bachelor of Science in Public Administration with a population of thirty-seven (37) and the other thirteen respondents were taking Bachelor of Science in Arabic Studies. And lastly, most of the respondents were first-year college students with a population of forty-two (42), five (5) were second-year students, and three (3) were third-year students.
2. In terms of the frequency of English language use in the different speech domains in the university among the respondents, results revealed that in English classes, thirty-eight (38) of them or 76% sometimes use English, while five (5) or 10% always use English. There were three (3) or 6% who seldom use English, while three (3) or 6% rarely use English. There was one (1) or 2% of the total number of respondents who never use English.

The data reveal that most of the respondents sometimes used English in their English classes. As explained by some of the students during the focus group discussion, communicating in English is "absurd." Since they shared the same first language, speaking in English in English classes did not make sense to them. Respondents generally found the use of English language even in English classes as "absurd" because English language for most of the respondents is difficult. Respondents were also pushed to make more candid comments such to hide their linguistic insecurity, or language ego and to save faces. This attitude or insecurity is common in a bilingual setting, as pointed out by Dulay and Burt (cited in Ovando and Collier, 1985). Using the target language in a formal setting like the classroom is a daunting and tension-filled experience. The result of the inquiry on this particular problem correlates or lends support to Abdulgaffurs's study (2010). This could also be influenced by the negative impression associated when one uses English language and the difficulty that comes along with using the language.

With regards to English language use in the respondents' non-English classes, such as history, psychology, mathematics, chemistry and other subjects except Filipino and other languages courses, it was found that forty (40) or 80% used English sometimes, seven (7) or 14% use it always, and one (1) or 2% of the total population for each of the frequency: never, rarely and seldom.

The results show that respondents sometimes use English language in their subjects other than English courses such as mathematics, physics, psychology and others. Respondents revealed that most

of their teachers/ instructors in these content courses did not encourage them to use English because of the idea that these are not language subjects or courses. Most of their teachers/instructors and even the respondents themselves believe that concepts and topics taught are not comprehensible when taught in English.

This result defies or goes against the Bilingual Education Policy (BEP) in the Philippines which is defined operationally as the separate use of Filipino and English as the media of instruction in specific subject areas. As embodied in the DECS Order, Filipino shall be used as medium of instruction in social studies/social sciences, music, arts, physical education, home economics, practical arts and character education. English, on the other hand is allocated to science, mathematics, and technology subjects.

Thus, teachers in science and mathematics have to be equally prepared to perform their tasks not only by mastering their own subject area but also by achieving competence in the use of English as the medium of instruction. Designated as a second language in the Philippines, English takes the central role of bridging knowledge and skills in mathematics and science to learner competency in these areas. The teacher's preparation should not just be in terms of knowledge and skills in their specialization but also in their attitude towards the tools that they use in teaching their subjects. Attitude towards the use of English as a medium of instruction plays a significant role in determining the success of the science and mathematics program in the university.

The dire consequence of the progressively shrinking domain of English in Philippine schools is doom writ large on the wall, for the English language. The language, learned as second language, does not get enough reinforcement or support outside of English classrooms. In other words, the limited range of functions of English implies doom than destiny for the quality of English spoken in Philippine campuses.

In the library, thirty-four (34) or 68% sometimes used English in the library. On the other hand nine (9) or 18% answered never, four (4) or 8% said seldom, two (2) or 4% responded rarely, and one (1) or 2% said always.

Also, when talking or dealing with the college officials which include the dean, assistant dean, college secretary, and others, twenty-four (24) or 48% of the respondents said that they sometimes used English when dealing with the college officials. There were seventeen (17) or 34% percent of the respondents answered always, while three (3) or 6% of the respondents responded for each of the following frequency: never, seldom and rarely.

It would seem that many of the respondents could at least be credited with a medium of sociolinguistic competence. The age, rank or position of people they interact with prove to matter. When they have college officials as fellow interlocutors, the respondents adjust their code, or feel compelled to use English. The use of English in such a speech situation is a tacitly acknowledged rule.

When talking or dealing with the university and college personnel and staff including the administrative head, clerk, janitors and others, forty-two (42) or 84% percent answered never, while three (3) or 6% was the answer for rarely and seldom. Among the respondents, two (2) or 4% of the respondents answered sometimes, and nobody answered always.

Compared to the preceding result—i.e. English language use with College officials—the result concerning English language use with college personnel and staff does not show as high as a willingness to communicate in English. College personnel, after all, are not required to observe the English Only Policy (EOP). They are not likely to carry out exchanges with students in English; hence, the latter do not see a compelling need to use English with them.

In dealing with university officials, including the President, Vice-President, Vice-Chancellor, Director, University Registrar and others, twenty-seven (27) or 54% answered that they sometimes used English when dealing with the university officials, while nineteen (19) or 38% answered always. There were three (3) or 6% who answered never, one (1) or 2% who answered seldom, while nobody answered rarely.

The large proportions of respondents who answered “always” and “sometimes” again suggest as in the case of speech situations involving college officials, effort on the part of the respondents to show sociolinguistic competence. Use of the English language in intercourse with high-ranking officials is dictated by the context of the situation. A kind of tacitly acknowledged principle (something like decorum or “appropriateness”) operates in such instances.

During the focus-group discussion, respondents were asked if they use English in the other speech domains in the university which were not included in the questionnaire since the researcher believes that the MSU being a residential campus some domains are not present in a typical university setting. Respondents revealed that they seldom use English language in the commercial center because they fear that people would have negative impressions on them. It is not surprising to note that in the

campus, when one uses English, it is either he/she is proud or seeking for an attention or it could be both. The following were some of the remarks made by the respondents.

*“Using English in the canteen/cafeteria among friends will only create negative impression from those people who are there. But sometimes, we use English when making jokes or funny quotes. For example, ‘Don’t English me, I’m panic!’” haha.*

*“I only speak in English when citing a verse in the Bible, but I speak in local dialect when explaining it, heehee.”*

*“Why should I speak in English with a stranger? He might think that I am sosyal, he will kidnap me, hehe.”*

*“I cannot construct even simple conversation in English with friends, how much more with a stranger. Nose-bleed huh!”*

*“Why English? To impress that stranger? No, he might hire me as his tutor! Haha!”*

*“Commercial center is the only source of fun in the campus, so, I don’t want to spoil it by talking in English. When you use English, you are not building bridges, you are burning bridges!”*

*“I never tried talking to the jeepney driver in English. I might not reach my destination! Haha”*

*“The jeep might fall down the Saguiaran bridge if I talk to the driver in English!”*

Initially, some respondents reacted negatively, but after careful probing, they clarified that their answers associated this negativity with their insecurity in speaking the English language. Other respondents thought that non-native speakers who use English at home and in places beyond the school want only to impress other people with their competence in the language. They perceived these users to be “maarte” (exaggerated) and “OA (overacting)”.

3. In terms of the language learning orientations, respondents strongly agree to the statements that “Learning English would help me to pass the subject and to graduate” ranked first with the mean of 4.8; “Learning English will be useful for me in getting a good-paying and high-ranking job after graduation” which ranked second with the mean of 4.6. Also with the statement “Learning English is important for me because it will make me more knowledgeable” with the mean of 4.3 which ranked third. Respondents agree that “Learning English language is necessary for me to learn to understand English novels, story books and appreciate English movies” which ranked fourth with the mean of 3.7; and the statement “Learning English will help me to understand better the native English speakers and their way of life” which ranked fifth with the mean of 3.5. Respondents were undecided in the statement “Learning English will help me to go for higher studies abroad” with the mean of 3.36 and the statement “Learning English language helps me to think & behave like the native speakers” with the mean of 2.7 which ranked sixth and seventh respectively.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. In this study, it is not surprising that there were more female respondents than their male counterpart because it is an acknowledged fact that females outnumber males not only in the country but even in other countries. The data indicate that majority of the respondents were 16-17 years old, which are the typical age for first year college students. These first year students comprise the English 3 course. The result also suggests that majority of the respondents fell into the typical 16-17 age bracket which could only mean that they are “on schedule,” so to speak. MSU students usually take their English 3 course requirements in the first two years. Only repeaters enroll late in these courses, an “anomalous” or abnormal situation that sound or conscientious advisement should present. It is also not surprising to reveal that majority of the respondents were first year students. This is the year which equips students with speech communication skills for interacting with English speakers in their community and beyond.

This course does not only foster the development of a functional command of spoken and written English, it also helps prepare the students get ahead in school and in future workplaces.

2. In sum, respondents' use of the English language depends on the context of situation, which in Hallidayan language consists of field, tenor, and mode. Briefly, field refers to subject matter while tenor refers to the interlocutors involved in the speech event or situation. The third, mode, which means channel has no relevance in this inquiry. Between field and tenor, however, the latter has greater relevance or explanatory power regarding English language use. The determining factor is the kind of people involved in a particular speech event or situation, and the kind of situation, that is, whether formal or informal.  
 In more formal settings, for example, classroom, offices of college officials and top-echelon, University executives, students "step their best foot forward" by using English. In informal settings like jeep, dormitories and the like, they do not feel obliged or compelled to use the English language. In fact, to do otherwise is to invite ridicule or such harsh criticisms as "being affected," "being a show-off," "pretending what one is not."
3. Generally, the respondents' English language learning orientations were instrumental. The responses were led by passing their subjects in the university since almost all of the subjects are taught and written in English and for future careers especially that most of the jobs today require knowledge and proficiency in English. Most, if not all, of the students view English as a school subject that they need to master--grammar, accent, and vocabulary--for them to pass the class and find a job. It should be emphasized that English is not just a pen and paper activity. These students' awareness need to be raised by supplying them with information about the history of the spread of English, the current status of the English language, and its native and nonnative varieties. This way, student can have a better understanding of the English language and the purpose of learning it.

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