
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Sociocognitive and Metacognitive Perceptible University Artifacts of Language Proficiency in Scholars' Oral Activity

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| ABSTRACT

Oral activity serves interactional, transactional, and highly demanding language functions. It is an artifact that recognizes how proficient humans can deal with either socio- or meta-cognitive endeavours. However, while the socio-cognitive schools have emphasized cognitive over strategic ability in deciphering knowledge, the meta-cognitive approach focuses on learning about how humans acquire knowledge during oral activities, using strategies, for instance. This marks a dual processing emphasis not on the socio-cognitive aspect of oral activity, but on how both the act of learning itself and the act of knowing how learning is achieved necessitate tactics. Historically, some of these strategies have been thoroughly identified and investigated, but others remain under research. Therefore, for this knowledge achievement to take place, scholars resort to artifacts such as organisational mechanisms, empowerment tools, value delivery paradigms, teamwork, and reference management. Current research aims to investigate these artifacts in greater detail, shedding light on oral activity more specifically. This research is descriptive, associating what scholars do in specific situations with the impact this can have on their language proficiency. In sum, perceptible university artefacts of language in scholars' oral activity are an attempt to lay the groundwork for linking research on knowledge building to proficiency building.

| KEYWORDS

Sociocognitive strategies; metacognitive strategies; perceptible artifacts; language proficiency; oral activity

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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Introduction

Oral activity is one of the assets that serve multiple functions among social groups. It identifies social dimensions that foster interactivity and lead to more human understanding. Most of the activities done in classes, for instance, start with activities that are based on oral activities like brainstorming, semantic mapping and verbal questioning. University scholars, however, resort to these on the basis of the function's languages promulgated, like agreeing, disagreeing, expressing emotions or complaining, etc. A similar dimension is recognized in business transactions when people use oral verbatim to negotiate, bargain or complete various business dealings. In both cases, oral activity has been widely employed to showcase the importance of variables such as how word memory-retention works, how speech is formulated, and what models of speech production are involved during oral activity. Most of today's language productive skills have emphasized practice and communication over drilling, especially after shifting towards the use of technology and the broad interest in oral activity that has ensued. Still, many technology applications and platforms have been opted for, resorting to drilling and retention tasks. Cognitive psychology highlights the importance of these tasks and advocates for a more enabling or empowering approach that does not restrict cognitive ability at the expense of social interaction. The challenge might be that the sociocognitive and metacognitive perceptible university artifacts of language proficiency in scholars' oral activities set the ground for the social/cognitive and strategy/proficiency dual processing dichotomies during oral activities.

Literature Review

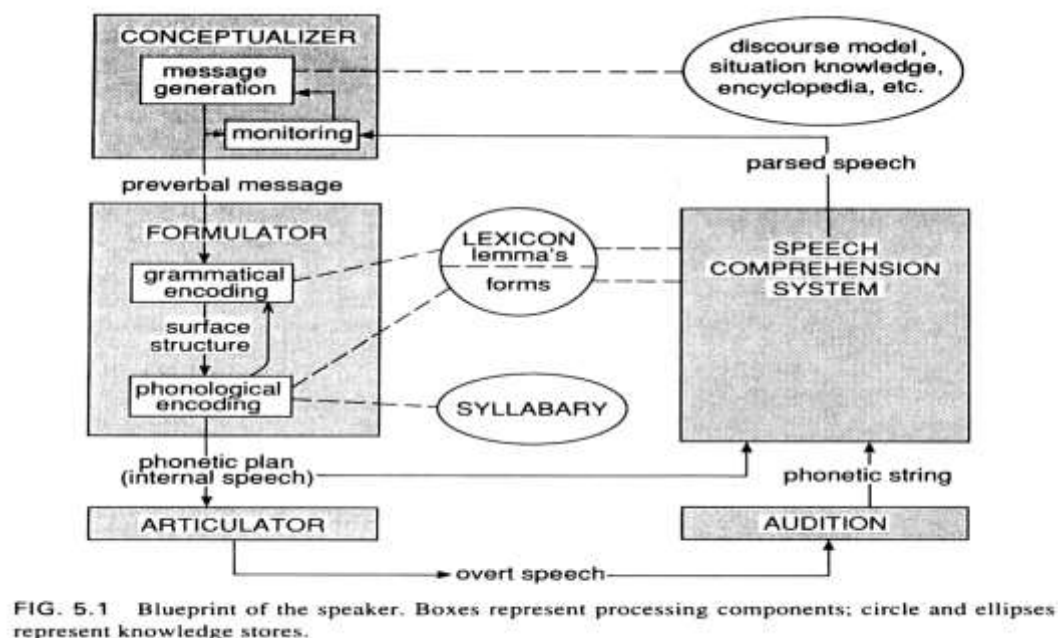
Socio-Cognitive Artifacts

Cognitive psychology has opened up new perspectives for studying the learning process in general, including L1 acquisition and L2 acquisition, which have benefited from research methods used in L1 acquisition. Piagetian work in psychology, for instance, has paved the way for a deeper understanding of significant processes underlying language acquisition from infancy to adulthood. Siann (1989:74) examines how Piaget has outlined a developmental approach in which humans utilize assimilation and accommodation principles to process information within a mentally organized structure. These mentally organized structures are prior conditions to any speech production or discourse operation. According to Funt (1971), in his study of Piaget and structuralism, mental or logical processes have been a significant focus of Piaget's work, who has consistently emphasized the impact of cognition and mental logic on the learning process. In this respect, Funt (1971:17) states that:

Piaget sees logical procedures as equivalent to or rather as growing out of natural processes and consequently as pre-linguistic or pre-discursive... logical functions are seen by Piaget in terms of operations, which are ultimately sensory-motor operations ...

Undoubtedly, Piagetian insight into human psychology has yielded a profound reconsideration of the cognitive processes employed in speech production, which is analyzed as comprising a number of operations underlying any speech entity. From a psycholinguistic perspective, more recent psycholinguists have identified several processing components of speech. Levelt (1994:91), for example, advocates that speaking comprises at least three processes: (1) intentions and ideas, (2) words and sentences, and (3) sound production or articulation. These three levels of processing have their characteristic speed of operation. He has designed a working model of the main cognitive processing components that cooperate in producing fluent speech, as shown below.

Figure 1
Levelt's Language Production Model



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Levelt explains how the blueprint of the speaker englobes the main processing components that are set in motion while producing fluent speech. The slow strategic component is called conceptualizer, and as is the case with speaking functions, in trying to use speaking functions communicatively (e.g., to share a piece of information or to make the interlocutor perform a specific

action...etc.), the speaker must select the information that will reveal his message, and irrespective of the nature of this message, it has to be cast in a linguistic form called here the formulator which achieves two main tasks namely:

- a. Grammatical encoding: mainly choosing the appropriate words from the lexicon, and gathering them in corresponding syntactic order. This developing syntactic structure is a surface structure. In addition, there is
- b. Phonological encoding, which consists of generating an articulatory or phonetic shape for all words and the utterance as a whole. The result is an articulatory plan where the utterances are specified, and this phonetic or articulatory plan is what constitutes internal speech, which Levelt describes as:

The most astonishing feats of evolution that is developed through our most complex and species-specific motor system, the carrier of a language. In speaking, more than a hundred muscles are coordinated to create the highly overlapping articulatory gestures that produce intelligible speech." (Levelt, 2009: 92).

Levelt explains that just as speakers manage to make speech operate from its intentional phase to its overt utterance or wording phase, and since speakers are their own hearers, they might make errors during delivery and might want to use self-repair. However, this view remains reductive; in addition to the linguistic patterns that speakers use, there are also functions that speakers seek to fulfil in the real world. At this level, we would target the sociolinguistic component of language, where there is a growing need to decipher what speaking rules or functions make when interacting with the exterior world and being part of a social group. The fields of sociolinguistics/pragmatics have added new perspectives to the study of language, marking a shift from concern about the form of language to the functions it fulfils. Hymes (1966, 1972) was interested in studying the relationship between language and social context, influenced by Prague School Functionalism. He reacted vehemently to Chomsky's distinction between competence (the implicit knowledge of grammatical rules necessary to understanding and producing language) and performance (the actual use of language in context) and the unimportant status given to performance in Chomsky's theory. He proposed what he labelled "communicative competence", defined as the knowledge of the rules of language use in a social context, as a central notion in the study of language instead of Chomsky's linguistic competence.

Hymes was the first to use the notion of "ethnography of speaking" to refer to the system of rules that make up the structure of speaking or communication in a group and that are the basis for the social meaning of any utterance (quoted from Canale and Swain, 1980:16). Hymes' notion of 'ethnography of speaking' developed as a way of investigating the rules of speaking that are operative in particular language-using communities (Cameron, 2001, p. 55). This notion thus entails the governing judgments as to the appropriateness of a given utterance in a particular social context.

Hymes proposed three hierarchically ordered speaking units, namely speech situation, speech event, and speech act. Speech situation is used to refer to the social context in which speaking takes place. It comprises all the parallel activities that take place during speaking. As an illustration, Cameron (2001:55) provides the example of a family meal situation in which eating, drinking and feeding are all features governing this specific speech situation. As for speech events, they refer to activities or aspects of activities governed directly by rules of language use (e.g. argument, gossip, storytelling, etc.). These speech events components include Setting, Participants, Instrumentalities the channel/medium of communication used (e.g. speaking, writing, singing), and the code or variety selected from the speaker's repertoire; Act sequence speech acts that make up the speech event; Norms of interaction the rules used for producing and interpreting the speech act (e.g., loudness of voice, when and how to interrupt, the physical distance between participants); and purpose, the intention of the speech event (e.g., Cameron, 2001; Canale & Swain, 1980). Considerably, Hymes yielded much attention to speech acts. However, since Austin and Searle developed the theory of speech acts, the discussion below will focus on the framework developed by these two scholars. Also, given the importance of this theory when tackling oral activity, the next section will deal with it in more detail.

Speech act theory

Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1961, 1962; and Searle, 1969, 1979, etc.) has further contributed to establishing recognition of language as a social phenomenon. It holds that the effect of an utterance is analyzed in relationship to the speaker and listener's behavior. Speech Act Theory helps us analyze utterances and examine them from the perspective of their function rather than their form. In Kearns (1994:51) terms, speech acts are defined as:

Speech acts would simply be acts displaying the independently meaningful, independently structured expressions internal mechanisms in people generate the meaningful structured items, and then production mechanisms turn these into speech.

Any speech act will hold a functional meaning, most of the time preceded or based on a referential meaning. The performance of functions by speakers according to speech situations is a significant advocacy held by speech act research. Speech act theory has served this way to identify a set of functions speaking may serve in a set of circumstances amongst members of a given community.

A pioneer illustration is provided by Austin (1962:13), who adheres to the belief that we can indeed perform actions with words. Austin sees language as a kind of social activity instead of a matter of stating truly or falsely. Austin showed how language may be used to make promises or declarations, to baptize or to marry, to bargain or to express emotion. He also showed how such acts might fail. He called their failure, their being unhappy or infelicitous. Austin's view has yielded profound insights into the nature of speech, which is considered a deed or an act. He analyzed speech acts into three categories including (1) locutionary, which is the actual utterance; (2) illocutionary, which refers to acts performed through speech-performatives such as informing, ordering, warning or undertaking; and (3) perlocutionary to refer to the effect of the utterances on speakers like amusing, frightening or persuading them.

Searle (1979) holds a similar view, describing the form/function problem in relation to meaning and defining linguistic items in communication as units that hold a function (Bierwisch, 1980, pp. 1-36). Searle suggests five general ways of using language, namely (a) Assertives, where speakers assert how things are; (b) Directives, where speakers can direct their interlocutors to do things; (c) Commissives, where speakers commit themselves to perform things; (d) Expressives, where speakers express their feelings and attitudes; (e) Declaratives, where speakers' utter things that result in changing the world.

Speech act theory has thus led to the recognition that speaking should be treated in terms of the functions it serves within social groups, rather than solely in terms of its form or structure. In this way, the theory has paved the way for reconsidering and analyzing human speaking, oral activity and its entailed conversational skills in various ways and contexts, as exemplified in more research (Koury & Fitzgerald, 2003). Nevertheless, this theory has been criticized for being based on language not produced by participants in real interactional situations. It is, instead, language which is supposed to constitute plausible responses for hypothesized contexts. Weber (1993:11) reports how the function of any utterance is dependent on its sequential position in the talk in which it is produced, taking into account that functions are interactional units, not linguistic or grammatical ones.

Metacognitive artifacts

Several studies have examined the role of metacognition in foreign language teaching and learning (Anderson, 2002; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Anderson (2002), for instance, points out that metacognition skills make scholars more prepared to make conscious decisions than those without metacognition skills. He further adheres that employing metacognitive skills is what differentiates between strong and weak foreign language learners. Correspondingly, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) claim that scholars lacking metacognition skills "are essentially learners without direction" (p. 8).

Regulation of cognition, on the other hand, encompasses a set of metacognitive strategies which relate to how scholars self-direct their artefacts, including task management, through 'planning, monitoring, controlling, and evaluating' language learning (Whitebread et al., 2007). Metacognitive planning guide scholars set clear and achievable task goals through the integration of the metacognition aspects of the scholars' knowledge (Flavell, 1979). Monitoring involves the scholars' reflection on progress and whether or not the selected strategies serve their purpose. Metacognitive controlling entails the scholars' response as a result of reflecting monitoring. This includes strategy shift and goal adjustment. Monitoring and control, in this view, are inevitably associated strategies (Cunningham et al., 2016). Finally, metacognitive evaluation is the scholars' reflection on their success in accomplishing their tasks and employing effective strategies (Whitebread et al., 2007). Henceforth, metacognitive strategies involve not only abstract strategies but also conscious higher-order thinking skills, such as the ability to analyze tasks, produce rational solutions, and make assumptions to enhance the learning process (Trujillo et al., 2015). Furthermore, Öztürk and Aydoğmuş (2021) argue in their study that metacognitive reading strategies, for instance, assist scholars in identifying significant concepts, explicit and implicit information, allusions, and the meaning of unfamiliar words in texts. They also assist scholars in actively participating in their own learning, organizing and managing it, and reviewing new information. Therefore, they claim that employing such strategies is pleasant and important for meaningful learning.

Oral activity

Interest in guiding research in oral activity is relatable to the importance of its overall development throughout the history of language. In recent decades, research in foreign languages has highlighted the neglect that oral activity has been subjected to in comparison to writing or reading, for instance (Brown & Yule, 1983; Bygate, 1987; Bailey, 1999; Mauranen, 2006). This relative negligence is understandable given the complexity and heterogeneity of speaking skills, which make it one of the most controversial issues in language study. The production of speech involves a considerable number of cognitive, affective, and sociolinguistic competencies that the language scholar must develop, which are exemplified in any speaker-hearer interactional or transactional situation.

Historically, structuralism has favored speech over writing (Murcia, 1999; Bygate, 1987, 2001; Mauranen, 2006), with a focus on linguistic correctness as a basic premise, often at the expense of fluency or ease in oral production. As a reaction, subsequent second language theories shifted the focus to message comprehensibility regardless of grammatical errors speakers might commit. However, nowadays, the question of whether more importance should be given to the area of communicative fluency or that of grammatical accuracy in speech production remains a highly controversial issue. No consensus has been reached on this question yet. Additionally, at the pedagogical level, no clear teaching paradigms have been established or identified regarding the treatment

of oral activities in class. Thus, due to the lack of a standardized method for approaching it, oral activity instruction remains entirely dependent on the initiatives and attitudes of curriculum designers and teachers (Brown & Yule, 1983; McCarthy, 1998; Bygate, 1998, 2001; Folse, 2006). This led to uncertain teaching practices, given the lack of well-defined models or criteria to consider during the process of oral activity. As a consequence, teachers themselves may remain uncertain as to what aspects or skills to highlight, what classroom activities will be most effective in developing scholars' speaking skills, and whether to teach speaking as an integral part of other language skills or as a separate skill with its own tenets (Bygate, 2001). These divergent views on oral activity, together with fluctuating teaching paradigms, necessitate a closer examination of the issue to identify the variables that interfere with this process, particularly in the Moroccan context, and the strategies that may lead to its improvement.

Controversial Views about Proficiency in Oral Activity

Cameron (2001:31) describes spoken discourse as 'evanescent' or consisting of sound waves in the air that seem to fade away as soon as they are produced. To test proficiency and for speech to be transcribed or analyzed, there are a number of particularities that interfere with the process, for instance, the existing non-parallelism between writing, which is more finite and tangible and speaking, which needs a permanent record to be analyzed. Therefore, it is imperative to study and analyze sentence-based transcription as a valuable tool for demonstrating how people handle spoken discourse.

From a discourse analyst perspective, the dichotomy of linguistic form versus communicative meaning is highlighted (Thompson, 1993; Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2005; Hughes, 2006). Mauranen (2006:144), for example, highlights the importance of a sentence-based model of discourse analysis as a much more organized model than the traditional clause-based one. Indeed, the focus of recent research has been redirected towards language in use and reports how a linguist's field of interest may now go beyond the clause into text and the context of the situation. Here again, Mauranen (2006) emphasizes how discourse particles have served to redefine the gap between pragmatics and semantics and how the analysis of dialogue has foregrounded the redefinition of lexical as well as grammatical structures while detecting proficiency.

In her analysis of the differences between spoken and written modes, Mauranen (2006:145) states that pragmatic aspects of language reveal significant differences between writing and speaking. Mauranen (2006:146) mentions the following distinctive features between speaking and writing:

- a. The nature of interaction: Speaking is interactively co-constructed, which expects the speaker to have a broader range of skills to build meaning than in written discourse.
- b. Continuous meaning co-construction: native speakers, as well as L2 speakers, are involved -while interacting- to produce meaningful exchanges on an ongoing or continuous basis, even when faced with multi-party encounters with nonstop alternating interaction.
- c. Use of repair strategies: In speaking, self-repairs are frequent, and skilled L2 speakers employ both proactive strategies that prevent misunderstandings and retroactive repair strategies that acknowledge a specific problem.

However, research has shown that the greatest challenge to proficiency in spoken discourse is grammar. As inaccuracies are common, especially in multi-party situations, it is hard to control speakers' errors or correct them as soon as they arise. Therefore, recent research has linked grammar to spoken discourse as a challenging area of interest. As cited in Mauranen, Du Bois (2003:54) advances the notion that "spoken discourse most transparently reveals grammar in use." McCarthy (1998) also discusses grammatical structures, such as subject-verb inversion, in relation to clauses that have distinctive uses in spoken English discourse. According to Mauranen, characteristics of spoken grammar, such as rules of Preferred Argument Structure, are universal and do not need to be introduced to L2 learners, as they are deeply rooted in human cognitive processing. In contrast, characteristics that are language-specific require consideration. However, the teaching should not be based on old transcriptions of writing-based grammar, taking into account that pedagogic grammars delimit themselves to that which is perceived to be the most fundamental in the language structure.

Controversy arises between those who approve and those who object to the special treatment of oral activity. The Separatist approach is held by those who believe that spoken language should be afforded special treatment and, therefore, advocate for a separate speech grammar. In contrast, the Integrated approach, as outlined by Leech (2000), embodies the belief that spoken language should not be given privileged treatment. Instead, it postulates a standard grammar for speech and writing, admitting that empirical findings on speaking can broaden the standard grammar. Leech's argument (2000) on behalf of the integrated approach leads us to think that the supremacy of writing in grammatical descriptions remains unquestionable and that his recognition of the unique character of speech may result in merely patching up with new findings from speaking, but not having spoken language as a model in grammatical transcriptions. For Mauranen, however, given the primacy of speech in human language, models should be established based on spoken language. Then, we should see where writing fits in and to what extent it needs a unique description. This revolutionary view entails a complete reversal of the roles of writing and speaking in models of grammatical descriptions and language proficiency.

Methodology

Research design

This paper adheres to a descriptive study, which can be used to elaborate on a theory, relate problems to current practice, gauge current action or practice, and associate with what others in similar situations are doing. Therefore, it captures the events, provides a factual and accurate description of the population being studied, and records the statistical frequency of occurrences within the population (Kultar, 2007, p. 65).

Research Objective

The overall objective of this paper is to investigate how scholars utilize artifacts such as organizational mechanisms, empowerment tools, value delivery paradigms, teamwork, and reference management. Current research aims to investigate these artifacts in greater detail, shedding light on oral activity more specifically.

Research questions

Two major questions have been aligned with the above-mentioned research objectives, namely:

- 1- How do sociocognitive and metacognitive language learning strategies differ during oral activity?
- 2- What impact do intervening artifacts have on scholars' language proficiency when using these strategies?

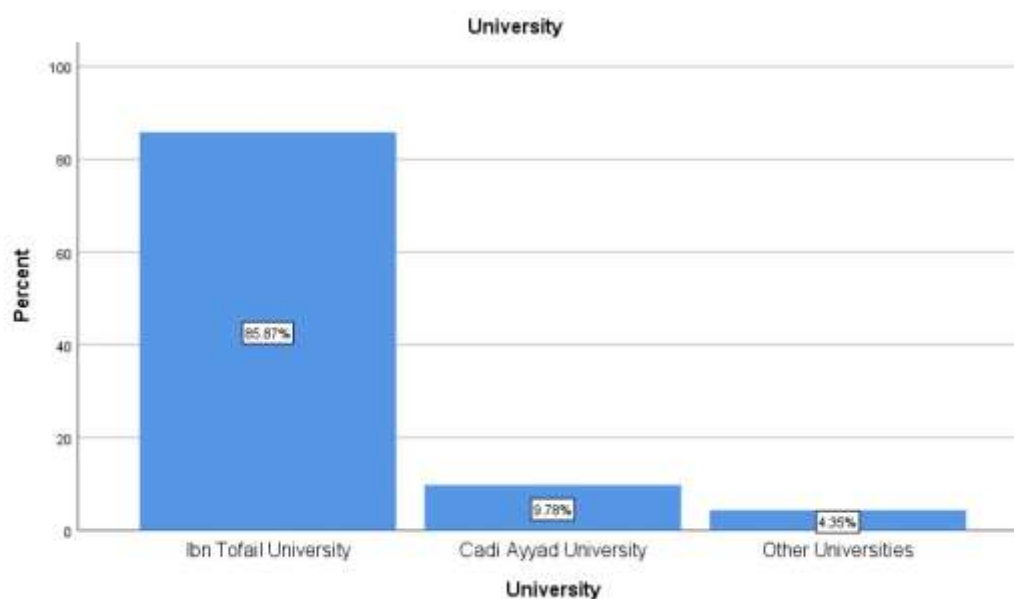
Instrumentation

A Google Form, namely a closed-ended questionnaire, has been advocated to collect data. Scholars come from different Moroccan universities. Demographic information has revealed that a higher proportion of scholars come from Ibn Tofail University, while a higher percentage of males was recognized.

Findings

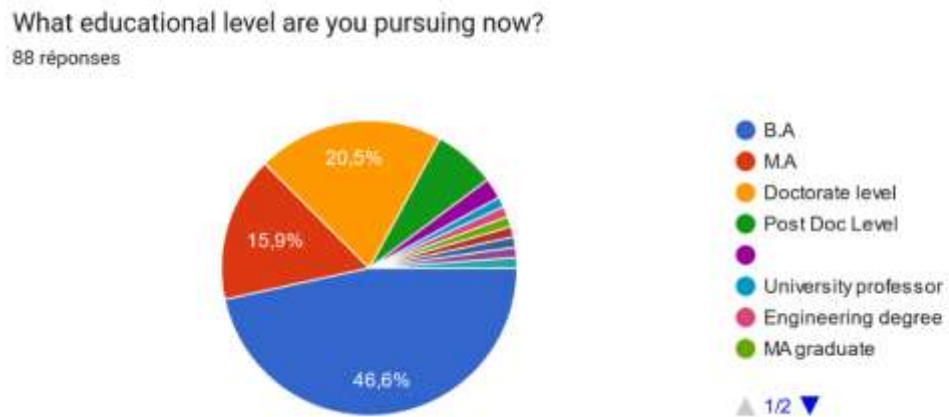
Figure 2

Pie- chart Frequencies, Histogram and Cross-tabulation



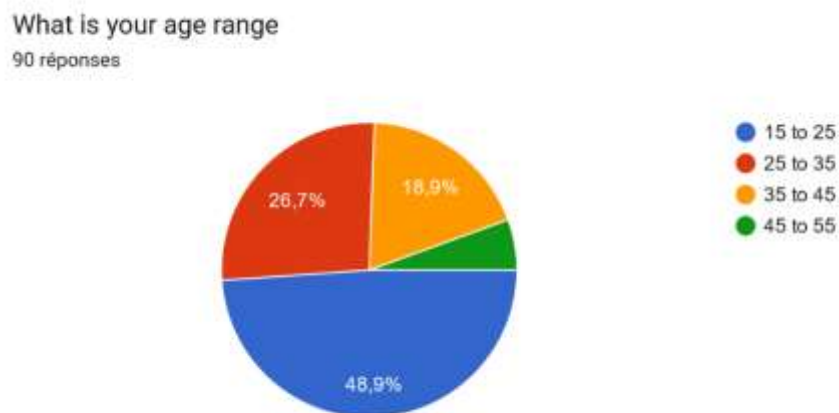
As the histogram demonstrates, the most represented university is Ibn Tofail in Kenitra, followed by Caddi Ayyad university in Marrakesh and then other universities from all over the country

Figure 3



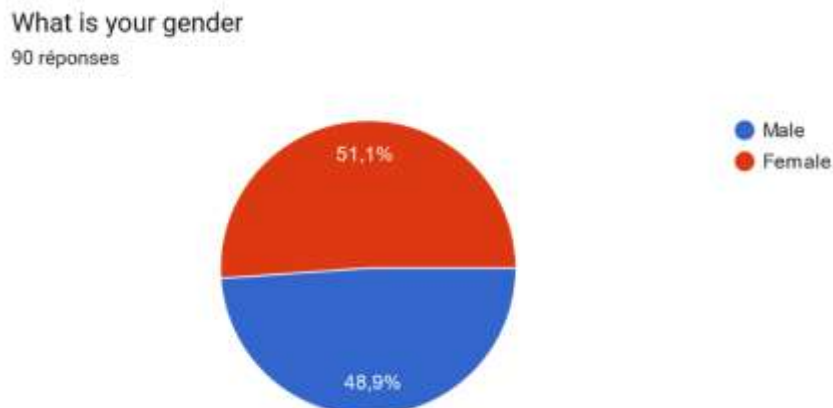
The above pie chart indicates that a wider proportion are pursuing their higher education to get a Bachelor of Arts Degree, followed by a rather moderate proportion of students who are at the Doctorate Level, while Master's level or Master's graduates, university professors and post-doc level individuals have contributed to a lesser extent.

Figure 4



Almost half of the respondents' age range is between 15 and 25

Figure 5



A higher proportion of male respondents have been recognized

Figure 6

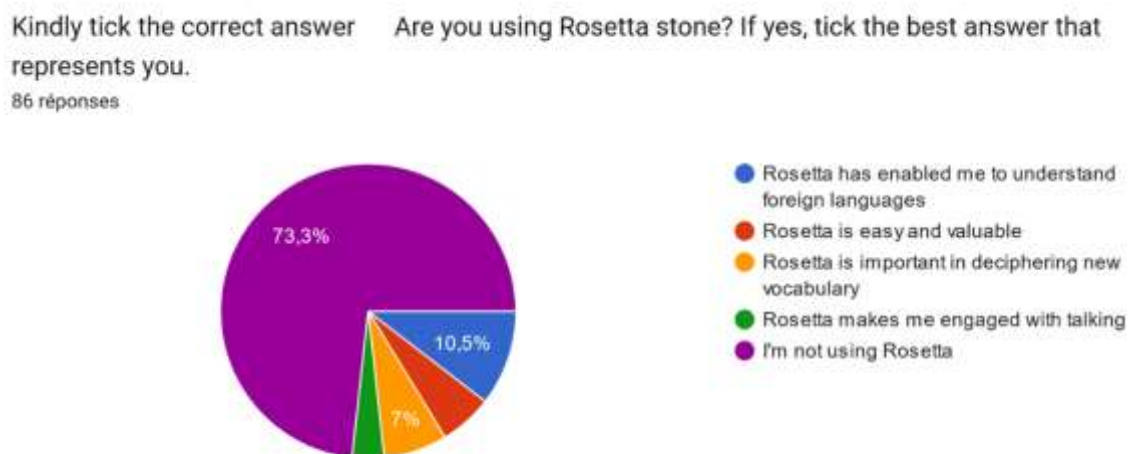


Figure 6 demonstrates how only about 10,5% have stressed the fact that Rosetta has enabled them to understand foreign languages

Figure 7

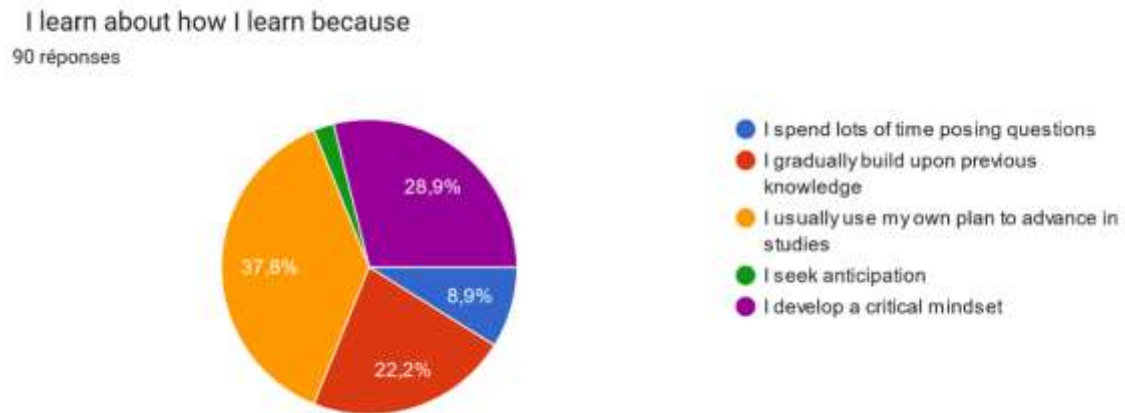


Figure 7 demonstrates how scholars resort to artifacts such as organization and scheduling mechanisms (spending time asking questions), empowerment tools (resorting to personal strategies and tools), value learning paradigms (developing a critical mindset and seeking anticipation), team working and reference management (building upon previous studies and knowledge)

Figure 8

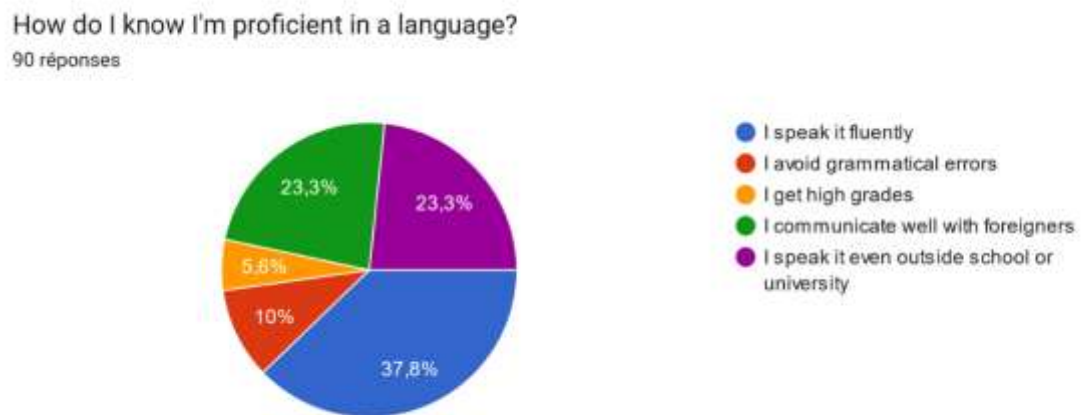


Figure 8 captures how the highest proportion of respondents have related their being proficient in a language to fluent speaking.

Figure 9

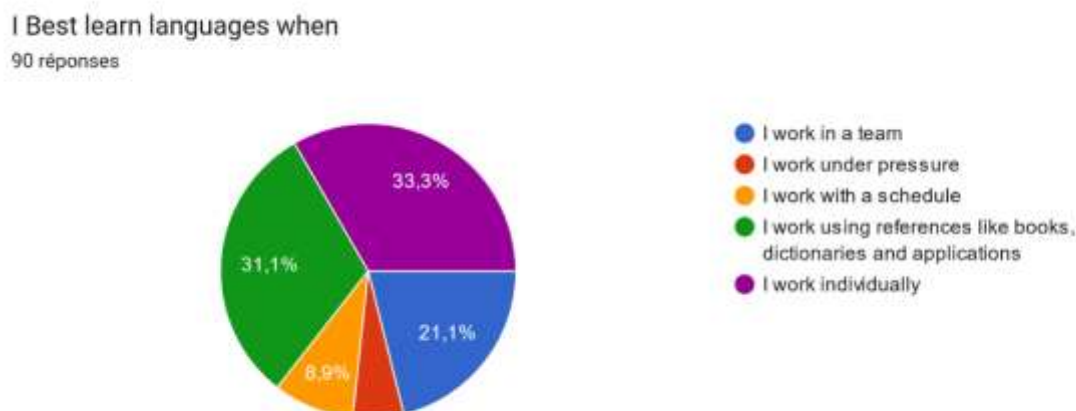
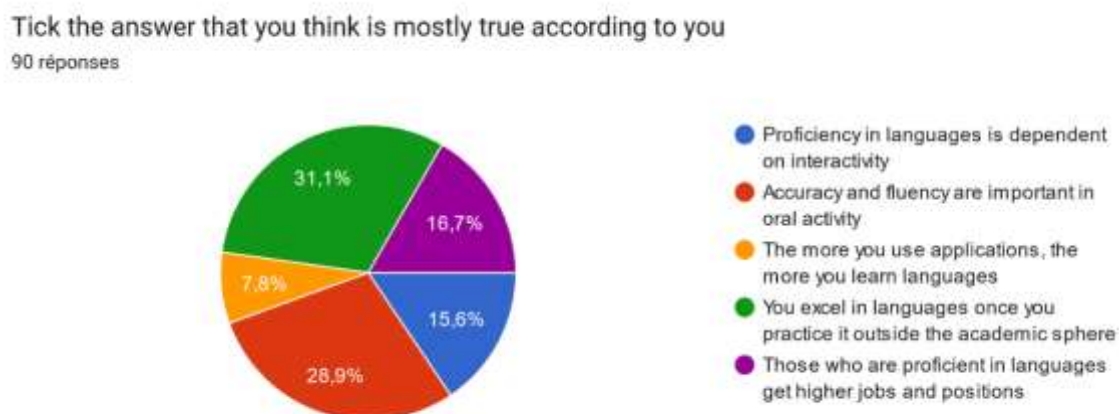


Figure 10



The above pie chart illustrates how perceptions about oral activity have linked excelling in language to practical applications outside the academic sphere. Another significant proportion has pinpointed the importance of both accuracy and fluency. All in all, scholars' perceptions have retained an inclination towards using both sociocognitive skills like interactivity, teambuilding, using platforms, practising outside the academic sphere etc., and metacognitive artifacts like asking questions, resorting to personal or creative strategies and tools, developing a critical mindset, seeking anticipation and building upon previous studies and knowledge. All of these help improve their language proficiency during oral activity. In general, the above findings also demonstrate a tendency to favour activities that involve interactivity among peers. These needs not only stress the importance of interaction in class but also reveal an underlying appeal to the relevance of the sociolinguistic and conversational analysis (CA) theories about oral activity. In other words, the results indicate that students appear to be highly concerned with the conversational interactions that occur among interlocutors in class. Building on these findings, other research has emphasized that sociolinguistics employs a micro-level of social and linguistic analysis (Cameron, 2001; Mackay, 2002; Williams, 2008).

Pedagogically, adaptations of conversational analysis can offer numerous benefits in the classroom. Markee (2008), for instance, views the QAC (question-answer-comment) sequence as a resource for achieving the educational purposes of classroom talk. Markee extends her proposal by stating that teachers, by being teachers and acting as such, utilize talk that allows them to nominate the next speaker, designate topics, ask questions, and assess learners. Moreover, students have the institutionally restricted duty of answering teachers' questions. She introduces a speech fragment that she transcribes according to the QAC sequence to show that this sequential structure has the effect of constraining when and how repair may be carried out and by whom, especially in comment turns within a sequence of talk.

Discussion

In terms of learners' proficiency, the highest proportion have correlated speaking the language fluently with practicing it with foreigners and outside the academic sphere. This typically corroborates with another previous research. Swain (1985, 2000, 2008), for example, recognizes the density of negotiated interactions as fruitful since they provide non-native speakers with opportunities to receive input through negotiation. Besides, they provide speakers with instances to modify their speech so that the output is more comprehensible.

Swain's findings concerning French immersion learners revealed the importance of output as a factor in the L2 learning process. For Swain (1985, 2000, 2008), output pushes learners to process language more deeply. She advances that: With output in speaking learners can stretch their interlanguage to meet communicative goals. Output may stimulate learners to move from the semantic, open-ended, strategic processing prevalent in comprehension to the complete grammatical processing needed for accurate production. (p.99)

Based on empirical studies done with French immersion students, Swain has provided support for the reliability of the output hypothesis. The tested English-speaking students obtained similar scores to those of the francophone students in receptive skills (listening and reading), but their productive skills (speaking and writing) were essentially dissimilar. These findings questioned the validity of the abundance of comprehensible input in language acquisition. Swain (2008) reports that immersion students did not talk as much in the French portion of the school day as they did in the English portion, indicating a tendency to use their L1 more than their L2. On the other hand, teachers did not 'push' students to talk in a manner which was grammatically accurate or socio-linguistically appropriate.

Thus, Swain advocates the necessity to push learners to produce messages that are not only coherent and appropriate but also linguistically correct (accuracy). She initiates what she calls *collaborative dialogue* in which speakers are engaged in problem-solving and knowledge-building. The theoretical rationale for this advocacy is based on the work of Vygotsky and others, who argue that individual mental resources develop from collective behaviour. Swain (2000:104) considers language as one of the most important semiotic tools which help us perform different mental activities and mediate our interaction with the physical world and social environment. In her studies of dialogues undertaken by learners of French as a second language, she points out that:

Verbalization objectified thought and made it available for scrutiny...collaborative dialogue. -saying and responding to what is said is language learning (knowledge building) mediated by language (as a semiotic tool).

Indeed, Swain holds that collaborative dialogues help foster speaking in L2 classes. At the same time, she shows concern about language correctness or accuracy.

Conclusion

All in all, current research findings extend Swain's findings. In fact, these knowledge-building techniques she has advocated are a necessity and pave the way for proficiency building. In this particular study, for instance, learning about how learning takes place demonstrates how scholars' resort to artifacts such as:

- 1- Organization and scheduling mechanisms (spending time asking questions and anticipating)
- 2- Individual empowerment tools (resorting to personal strategies and tools)
- 3- Value learning paradigms (developing a critical mindset and seeking clarification)
- 4- Team working and reference management (building upon previous studies and knowledge)
- 5- Technological platforms and applications (Rosetta Stone as an example)

In summary, perceptible university artifacts of language in scholars' oral activity attempt to link research on knowledge building to proficiency building.

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