THE CORRELATION BETWEEN ENGLISH GRAMMAR COMPETENCE AND SPEAKING FLUENCY OF ELEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS IN SMAN 1 SIDOARJO

Agus Priyanto dan Lies Amin L.

S1- English Education, Language and Art Faculty, Surabaya State University,

Abstract

Among four basic skills of English, speaking can be considered as the most difficult yet the most demanding skill to master. Thus, experts have been trying to find the most effective way to enhance the learners speaking for decades. Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be a clear agreement among them. One method focuses more on the speech accuracy while the other emphasizes the fluency. In Indonesia, most English teachers seem keen of implementing grammar based learning even though they know that the curriculum expects that students are able to develop speaking skill which is not only accurate but also fluent. With regards to the aforementioned fact, this study aims to reveal whether there is a significant correlation between students' grammar competence and their speaking fluency. It is expected that the results of the study can help English teachers make better prediction regarding how far grammar competence correlate with speaking fluency. The study was conducted in SMAN 1 Sidoarjo which one of the leading schools in the province and used descriptive-quantitative research design. Sampling was done randomly with five students being drawn from every eleventh grade class. Based on the acquired data it was discovered that most of the students were fair in terms of English grammar competence and speaking fluency. In addition, the end result of the calculation of r value suggested that students' English grammar competence moderately correlates with their speaking fluency.

Keywords: English grammar competence, Speaking fluency, Eleventh graders, Correlation

INTRODUCTION

Of all English basic skills that must be equally taught to English learners, speaking skill seems to be the most demanding and important one. Compared to writing, speaking is a more common way of how people convey their messages to others.Brown (2001:267) proposes that foreign language learners will be considered as successful at accomplishing and achieving their learning goals if they can exhibit an ability of interacting with other speakers of the language through oral discourse. In short, all English learners generally share the same goal that is to speak accurately and fluently.

Despite being highly demanding, speaking is also the most difficult skill both to master and to teach. There are several factors underlying it. Firstly, not all students are extrovert; some of them might be the introvert ones who simply cannot get along with the idea of oral communication. Furthermore, teachers are bound to deal with large classroom which is no very conducive for teaching speaking. Moreover, there are a number of cultural values adopted by learners in certain countries which seem to inhibit them from speaking freely.

However, the major difficulties faced by English learners derive from the characteristic of speaking itself.

Not only do they have to deal with difficult pronunciation and various phonemes of English, but also the disagreement among experts, practitioners, and teachers alike regarding the importance of accuracy and fluency which often results in theunbalance of both aspects. Thornburry (1999:15) points out learners need to take accuracy into account and if they fail, their speech will be barely understandable. On the other hand, Brown (2001:268-269) suggests that good fluency represents the main characteristic of natural communication, thus, it should be given more weight in the teaching of speaking.

Regardless which practical aspect is more important, English teaching in Indonesia seems to devalue fluency as grammar-based teaching is far more prevalent especially in rural areas. Nguyen (2011:16) reveals that English teachers in Indonesia, in many occasions, give lectures dealing with grammar. Students are deliberately directed to learn grammar in order to pass the national examinations which basically derived from typical reading and grammar tests.The impact of this way of teaching is huge. Numerous students are fairly good at resolving grammatical problems or similar issues which require a good mastery of passive English. On the other side, they look very lackluster when they are required to perform their speaking skill Park in Nguyen, 2011:14).

Such phenomenon is contradictive with the government's expectation in regards to English teaching in senior high school. According to Genre-Based Curriculum, one of the main objectives of English teaching in senior high school, specifically for eleventh graders, is to make the students able to convey meaning orally dealing with both conversational and functional texts in the context representing common daily lives (Depdiknas, 2006). A meaning will be hardly delivered if students cannot maintain the flow of the speech.

There are a lot more factors other than grammar which have to be taken into account in order to improve students speaking fluency. Brown (2001: 275-276) points out things like learners' motivation and comprehension regarding a particular issue may increase their speaking fluency. Their capability to understand the surrounding context and to use various speaking strategies - such as how to use fillers, how to get an attention from the audience, and how to clarify – can also be an assistance to develop a better speaking fluency. In addition, Fred *et al* (2004, in de Jong *et al*, 2008) also propose that a high exposure to oral English can also significantly enhance oral fluency.

In spite of it, however, grammar competence does have a role to some extent at determining whether English learners can have a good grip on oral English. According to Thornburry (1999:15), grammar is the fundamental discourse machine generator in every language in general. Without good grammar competence, learners will never be certain of what to speak and how to speak which in the end it'll result in a very halting speech. In addition, de Jong *et al* (2008) also points out good grammar ability may lead to higher articulation rate and better fluency. With this in mind, the researcher is interested to find out whether there is a correlation between students' English grammar competence and their speaking fluency.

The study was conducted in SMAN 1 Sidoarjo. It waschosen because in this school grammar-based learning still takes place frequently. Teachers still have big concerns regarding their students' grammar competence. This is because the school demands them to prepare the students for the English national examination – which very much resembles the characteristics of a grammar-based test – that they will face at the final period of their study.

On the flip side, SMAN 1 Sidoarjo is one of the most favorable schools in the province. It claims to be one of the first schools which is based on the international curriculum. All teachers are encouraged to speak English while teaching, regardless what discipline they handle. The school is also active in sending its students to every English debate competition held in the region. In fact, it has remarkable history in such field as several students managed to get good achievements. Therefore, it could be assumed that most students in SMAN 1 Sidoarjo are used to oral English and their speaking fluency should be above the average.

METHOD

The study attempted to find out whether there was a significant correlation between grammar competence and speaking fluency of eleventh grade students in SMAN 1 Sidoarjo. For that reason, correlational research design was used. According to Waters (2008), a correlational study is a study which still belongs to the variants of descriptive research in which the researcher has two or more independent variables. The researcher then tries to determine whether both variables are related to each other.

In this case, the variables are students' grammar competence and their speaking fluency. There was not any treatment meant to manipulate either variable. The researcher only administered a couple of tests: grammar test and speaking test. In order to ascertain that the collected data was reliable, those tests were administered in different time. Once the data had been acquired, calculation to define the correlation coefficient was carried on. From that calculation, the relationship between students' grammar competence and their speaking fluency was described.

The population was all eleventh grade students in SMAN 1 Sidoarjo. Provided that it was a quantitative-descriptive research, the sampling was done randomly; meaning every eleventh grader of SMA Negeri 1 Sidoarjo has an equal chance for being the sample. Specifically, the researcher used clustered random sampling technique in which he drew a certain number of students from each class randomly.In this case, the researcher drew 5 students from each eleventh grade class to be the sample of the study. SMAN 1 Sidoarjo has 10 classes of eleventh graders. Thus, there were 50 students who can be assumed to be representative to the huge number of the whole population.

The main instrument that was used in this study was test. There were two tests that were administered in different timing, each of which served different purposes. Grammar test was given to find out how good students' grammar competence is while the speaking test was meant to define the speaking fluency of the students.

The grammar test which was administered comprised of 50 test items which tackle various grammatical rules in English. Specifically there are 12 primary rules that were tackled upon constructing the test namely tenses, subject and verb agreement, noun modifier, pronouns, modals, passive voice, clausal structures, gerunds,

infinitives to, parallel structures, connectives, and conditional sentences. It was given in multiple-choice format and carried out on November 20th, 2012. Students were required to finish the test within one hour.

The validity of the test was determined using the concept of content validity. Each of the test items was referred to indicators and sub-indicators derived from the *Standar Isi* and *KompetensiDasar* for eleventh graders constructed by the National Education Department. There were 10 items which needed correcting on the first validation as they were considered too tricky. The test was perceived as valid, at last, after the second validation

The reliability of the test was measured using the split-half method. In this study, the researcher divided the test items into two groups based on the numbers: odd and even numbers. The test could be considered reliable if students' scores in both groups correlate accordingly. In order to figure it out, a try-out was held in November 17th, 2012. The number of participants was 30 all of whom were taken randomly from all eleventh grade classes. The calculation of the correlation coefficient was done using Pearson Product Moment formulaand the result was 0.84 which implied that the test was reliable.

The speaking test was held on November 22nd, 2012 and was in the form of storytelling. Students were given three minutes to tell their experience when preparing for the entrance test in SMAN 1 Sidoarjo,prior to which, they were given three minutes to prepare their story.A self-established rubric was made by the researcher to help measure the students' fluency. The issues that were tackled when making the rating scale include the number of words pronounced, how many times students stop, and how long those stops take place in average.

Similar to grammar test, content validity was used to assess the validity of the speaking test. The content of the test was referred to an indicator which was based on one of the basic and standard competences mentioned in *Standar Isi* which describe about a necessity for students to be capable of expressing meaning orally in the form of narrative text. In this case, a story about entrance test preparation can be considered as personal narrative, thus, the test could be deemed valid.

The reliability of the speaking test was measured using the concept of inter-rater reliability, meaning that there were two raters in the test. In this case, the researcher collaborated with English teachers in SMAN 1 Sidoarjo. Students' fluency was scored based on the rubric that was specifically designed by the researcher to assess speaking fluency. In order to figure out how reliable the test was, a try-out was held in November 19th, 2012. The participants were the same with those who had taken part in grammar test try-out. The calculation of the correlation coefficient was done using

Pearson Product Moment formula and the result was 0.67 which implied that the test was reliable.

All of the necessary data was collected by means of both grammar test and speaking test administration. Once both tests had been administered, students' scores were tabulated. Then, the mean and standard deviation in both tests were calculated in order to help categorize the scores later. Having categorized the scores, the r value was finally calculated using Pearson Product Moment formula.

RESULTS

The grammar test was held on November 20th, 2012. It was discovered that students' scores were quite various. The highest score was 96 while the lowest one was 42. The mean was 73.28 and the standard deviation was 11.57. Scores categorization criteria for grammar test were established by defining the high score and low score limits. In this case, students' scores were categorized as high if they were higher or equal to 85 and low if they were lower or equal to 62. Other than those, the scores were considered fair.

Table 1. Grammar Test Scores Distribution

Category	The Number of students	Percentage (%)
High	7	14
Fair	37	74
Low	6	12

Based on the established criteria, there were 7 students or 14% of the whole sample who scored distinctively high in the test. Most of the students' scores (37 students or 74% of the sample) were fair. While there were 6 students (12%) who were found to score very lowly, overall, it still can be considered that eleventh grade students in SMAN 1 Sidoarjo were somewhat reasonable in regards to their grammar competence.

Meanwhile, the speaking test was held on November 22nd, 2012. Based on the data, the mean score was 70.80. In comparison to the students' scores in grammar test, their scores in speaking test were slightly less various. Standard deviation measured slightly lower which was 10.36. The highest score was 90 while the lowest one was 50. Similar to grammar test, the scores categorization criteria was established by defining the high score and low score limits. In this case, students' scores were categorized as high if they were higher or equal to 81 and low if they were lower or equal to 60. Other than those, the scores were considered fair.

Table 2. Students' Speaking Scores Distribution

Category	The Number of students	Percentage (%)

High	5	10
Fair	42	84
Low	3	6

Based on the aforementioned criteria, there were only 5 students or 10% of the whole sample who spoke with remarkable fluency. More than half of the sample, specifically, 42 (84%) students speak fairly fluently. In contrast to the findings in grammar test, the number of students who belong to the low category was fairly small. Specifically, there were 3 (6%) students who speak with unsatisfactory fluency. Overall, it can be inferred that eleventh grade students in SMAN 1 Sidoarjo were quite fair in terms of speaking fluency.

Prior to calculating the r value using Pearson Product Moment formula, it had to be ensured initially that the data has met three basic assumptions: normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. In regards to linearity, Lund (2012) proposes that it is the tendency for both scores distribution to relate in a linear sense. He also suggests that the homoscedasticity of two sets of data can be seen from how similar their variability is. The following figure represents both the linearity and the homoscedasticity of grammar test scores and speaking test scores of the students.
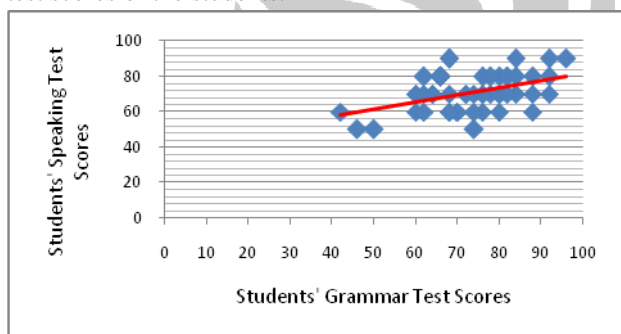

Figure 1. Linearity and Homoscedasticity

As for normality, Bartz (1976:111) points out a set of scores can be considered as being normally distributed if approximately 68% of the distribution lies between -1S and +1S, in other words, within the fair category. Table 1 shows that 74% of students' grammar test scores are categorized as fair. Meanwhile, those who score higher than +1S and lower than -1S are only 14% and 12% of the whole sample respectively. On the other hand, Table 2 describes that there are 42 students or 84% of the whole sample who spoke with reasonable fluency. With this in mind, both students' scores distributions can be considered normal.

Provided that both sets of data have met the three basic assumptions, the researcher proceeded to calculate the r value using Pearson Product Moment formula. It was discovered that the coefficient correlation between grammar competence and speaking fluency of eleventh

grade students in SMAN 1 Sidoarjo was 0.44. In order to interpret the correlation strength which the value represents, it was referred to the correlation criteria established by Bartz (1976:205). They are described as follows:

Tabel 3. Correlation Criteria

The Criteria	The Description
Very High r	.80 or above
Strong r	.60 to .80
Moderate r	.40 to .60
Low r	.20 to .40
Very Low r	.20 or less

Based on the Table 3, it was found out that the value of r coefficient that was acquired as the result of correlation analysis between grammar competence and speaking fluency of eleventh students in SMAN 1 Sidoarjo can be categorized as moderate. The r value of 0.44 lay in the range of moderate r which starts from 0.40 up to 0.60. In addition, the value of the r-table with 5% level of significance and 48 degree of freedom is 0.279. Thus, the observed r value is higher than the r-table which means the correlation is significant. That fact also suggests that in the whole population, students' grammar competence moderately correlates with their speaking fluency 95 times out of a hundred.

Aside from that result, there were another couple of findings which do not seem to conform to the generalization described above. Among the sample, there were several students who scored quite high in the grammar test yet performed poorly in speaking test. In contrast, some students were also found out to have remarkable speaking fluency even though their grammar competence is nowhere special. Table 4 and 5 below list these students.

Table 4. Grammar Test Scores Are Far Higher than Speaking Test Scores

No	Students	Grammar Test Scores	Speaking Test Scores
1	S8	74	50
2	S13	84	70
3	S14	80	60
4	S21	88	60
5	S23	92	70
6	S24	88	70
7	S28	76	60
8	S30	92	80

Table 5. Speaking Test Scores Are Far Higher than Grammar Test Scores

No	Students	Grammar Test Scores	Speaking Test Scores
1	S15	42	60

4

2	S35	68	90
3	S36	66	80
4	S38	68	90
5	S40	62	80
6	S43	66	80
7	S46	66	80

DISCUSSION

The results of this study seem to be in accordance with the report published by de Jong et al. in 2008. In a series of studies they conducted in order to discover the best way to foster students' speaking fluency, they found that students who seemingly had better grammatical ability, as opposed to their peers, spoke with higher articulation rates and longer fluent runs. While there might be several factors that come into play as well, such a finding clearly suggests that students' grammar competence does relate to some extent with their speaking fluency.

How grammar competence and speaking fluency correlates to each other is yet to be revealed. However, a speculation can be made based on the research results, several theories suggested by experts, as well as findings during the preliminary observation. In the researcher's opinion both grammar competence and speaking fluency of the students are pretty much influenced with students' exposure to English and the way the English teachers conduct the class. Basically, the higher the students' exposure to English is, the better their English is, including but not limited to speaking fluency.

Freed et al (2004, in de Jong et al, 2008) point out that learners' fluency shows an increase after a period of immersion or study aboard. SMAN 1 Sidoarjo, itself, is an international standardized school where English is exposed almost to every aspect of the school. Given that fact, it is rather expected that grammar competence and speaking fluency of the eleventh graders in SMAN 1 Sidoarjo correlates to each other.

Furthermore, as far as the definition of grammar is concerned, the results of this study should look only natural in a sense that it is already expected and not quite surprising. Grammar is a set of fundamental rules of a particular language which governs how people should use that language. With good understanding over such rules, it is expected that people can communicate and use that language more effectively to produce either oral or written discourse (Thornbury, 1999: 15-17). The term "effectively" itself should not be only limited to the accuracy of the discourse because effective communication spells one that is both accurate and fluent.

Moreover, Thornburry (1999:16) also suggests that by having a good grasp of English grammar, students can somehow develop creativity upon constructing a communicative discourse. With such creativity, it is very unlikely for them to be influent when speaking. It is pretty much analogical with an artist. If an artist is creative, he will not likely need considerable amount of time to finish his current work and move on to the next project. He should be able to produce more artworks within certain period compared to less creative one.

The fact that students' grammar competence positively correlates with their speaking fluency implies that a treatment meant to enhance the former can very likely have positive impact for the latter. This is somehow contradictive with large number of studies which suggest that the inclusion of grammar in English teaching must be kept to a minimum or stopped completely as it is found to be surprisingly harmful for the students' English overall.

Probably, it is not the teaching of grammar that should be disputed and doubted by experts for years. It is maybe the learning activities, which the teachers choose to teach grammar, which are disputable. Commonly, English grammar is taught using a traditional and unintuitive method that is by asking the students to do some exercises. In an interview with several Indonesian students who continued their study in Australia, Nguyen (2011:16) discovers that most English teachers in Indonesia often give lengthy lectures and written assignments dealing with grammar.

Such a way of teaching grammar likely leaves no meaningful experience for the students and they will tend to forget it immediately after the class is up. Weaver (1996:146) points out students seem to benefit the most from learning activities if they perceive them as useful or interesting personally. The lengthy lectures as well meaningless written assignment regarding a particular grammatical rule seem quite far from being useful and personally interesting. Perhaps, this is what makes a number of experts doubt the significance of grammar to teach speaking.

As for the reason why correlation coefficient is not very high, it is because of the eminent variability of the students' score distribution. Specifically, there are three types of students who were included in the sample: 1) those whose grammar test score correlates with their speaking test score; 2) those whose grammar test score is far greater than their speaking test score; 3) those whose speaking test score is far greater than their grammar test score.

Table 4 shows several students who performed quite well in grammar test but turned out lackluster during speaking test. It is very likely that while they comprehend many English grammatical rules, they fail to take into account various speaking strategies which are crucial to the overall fluency of their speech. Moreover,

it could also probably be that the numerous grammatical rules they understand, in the contrary, inhibit them to speak fluently as they struggle to find which forms or structures to use. Lastly, they may just be some introvert students who never come easy when dealing with speaking assignment.

In contrast, Table 5 shows a number of students who performed poorly in the grammar test but were surprisingly fluent in the speaking test. It is maybe that their little understanding over the wide range of grammatical rules in English enabled them to speak a lot faster, thus more fluently, as they did not spend much time, bothering about which correct forms or structures to use. On top of that, these students seem to have a good grasp on various speaking strategies as well as native fillers. They did not just stop in silence when they hesitated or thought about what the next thing was that they wanted to tell. Both findings are indeed interesting but it needs further investigation to clearly explain what underlies both phenomena.

CONCLUSION

From the calculation using the Pearson Product Moment formula, it was discovered that the r value was 0.44. The value of the r-table with 5% level of significance and 48 degree of freedom is 0.279. Thus, the observed r value is higher than the r-table which means the correlation is significant. In addition, based on the criteria of correlation established by Bartz (1976:205), the r value of 0.44 implies that the correlation that lies between two variables is moderate. In other words, there is a correlation between English grammar competence and speaking fluency of eleventh grade students in SMAN 1 Sidoarjo. While it does not signify a causal relationship, it can still be inferred that good grammar competence tends to go with good speaking fluency and so the otherwise.

REFERENCES

Bartz, Albert E. 1998. *Basic Statistical Concepts in Education and the Behavioral Sciences.* Moorhead: Prentice Hall.

Brown, H. Douglas. 2001. *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy, 2nd ed*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.

de Jong, N; Halderman, L. K.; Perfetti, C. A. 2008. *Fostering Fluency in Second Language Learning.* Retrieved on 13th April 2012, from www.learnlab.org/research/wiki/index.php/Fostering_fluency_in_second_language_learning.

Depdiknas. 2006. *Standar Isi, SKL, BNSP.* Jakarta.

Lund, Adam. 2012. *Pearson Product Moment Correlation*. Retrieved on 2nd December 2012, from https://statistics.laerd.com/statistical-guides/pearson-correlation-coefficient-statistical-guide.php.

Nguyen, Cao Thanh. 2011. Challenges of Learning English in Australia Towards Students Coming from Selected Southeast Asian Countries: Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia. *Canadian Center of Science and Education, 4*(1). 13-20.

Thornburry, Scott. 1999. *How to Teach Grammar.* Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited.

Waters, Janet. 2008. *Correlational Research.* Retrieved on June 16th, from www2.capilanou.ca/programs/psychology/students/research/correlation.html.

Weaver, Constance. 1996. *Teaching Grammar in Context.* Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook.