USING DIALOGUE TEMPLATE IN DEVELOPING LOW PROFICIENCY
ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS' ORAL FLUENCY

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To my beloved parents, wonderful husband and supportive colleagues

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effectiveness of dialogue template (DT) in developing low proficiency English as a Second Language (ESL) learners' oral fluency. 20 low proficiency participants in pre-university level were randomly assigned to instructional intervention in control (n=9) and experimental (n=11) groups. Only participants in experimental group were subjected to DT use during fluency session. Obtained gain scores from pretest to posttest' subtraction were used in the quantitative analyses to gauge participants' oral fluency improvement in terms of speech rate, mean length of run and average length of pause. Significant gain made by experimental group was tested using independent t-test formula. This explanatory study also employed observation scheme and semi-structured interview as the basis for qualitative analyses. Quantitative results showed that the participants in the experimental group performed higher speech rate and produced more words between pauses (mean length of run) than the control group. These statistically significant results were supported by the teacher's observation and the participants' responses to the interview. The teacher observed that participants' speech rate improved throughout the instructional intervention and acknowledged the benefits of DT and chunks in developing their oral fluency. Participants' positive responses related to their fluency progress and DT features also support the quantitative findings, suggesting that DT was effective in developing oral fluency in two respects: speech rate and mean length of run.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menyelidiki keberkesanan penggunaan rangka dialog (DT) dalam meningkatkan kefasihan lisan pelajar bahasa kedua yang mempunyai tahap kefasihan yang rendah. 20 peserta kajian yang mempunyai tahap kefasihan yang rendah dan sedang belajar di peringkat pra-universiti dibahagikan secara rambang kepada intervensi pengajaran di dalam kumpulan kawalan (n=9) dan kajian (n=11). Hanya peserta kumpulan kajian sahaja menggunakan DT sepanjang sesi lisan berlangsung. Perolehan beza skor dari kaedah penolakan skor sebelum dan selepas ujian digunakan di dalam analisis kuantitatif untuk mengukur kemajuan kefasihan lisan peserta dari segi kadar pertuturan, purata panjang pertuturan dan purata panjang berhenti sejenak *(pause)* di dalam pertuturan. Peningkatan ketara yang diperolehi oleh kumpulan kajian diuji dengan menggunakan formula ujian t berdikari *(independent t-test)*. Kajian bersifat menerangkan *(explanatory)* ini juga memanfaatkan skema pemerhatian dan temubual separa-berstruktur sebagai asas kepada analisis kualitatif. Dapatan kuantitatif menunjukkan bahawa peserta di dalam kumpulan kajian mempamerkan peningkatan kadar pertuturan dan menggunakan lebih banyak perkataan di antara penghentian sejenak (purata panjang pertuturan) daripada kumpulan kawalan. Peningkatan statistik yang ketara dalam dapatan ini juga disokong oleh pemerhatian guru dan jawapan peserta ketika temubual. Guru mendapati bahawa kadar pertuturan peserta meningkat sepanjang intervensi pengajaran dan mengakui kepentingan DT dan gugusan perkataan *(chunks)* dalam meningkatkan kefasihan lisan peserta. Jawapan positif peserta yang berkaitan dengan kemajuan kefasihan lisan dan ciri-ciri DT juga menyokong dapatan kuantitatif sekaligus menandakan bahawa DT berkesan dalam meningkatkan kefasihan lisan dari dua aspek: kadar pertuturan dan purata panjang perkataan digunakan.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALP	-	Average length of pause
CLT	-	Communicative Language Teaching
DT	-	Dialogue Template
EFL	-	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	-	English as a Second Language
L2	-	Second language
MEC	-	Malaysian Examinations Council
MLR	-	Mean length of run
MUET	-	Malaysian University English Test
SPM	-	Malaysian Certificate of Education
SR	-	Speech rate
TESOL	-	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
VELT	-	Virtual English Language Tool

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter to the study concentrates on the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, research questions and hypotheses. Significance of the study, scope of the study and definitions of terms used are also included subsequently.

1.1   Introduction

Speaking English as a second language (ESL) involves a number of complex processing skills and strategies that are different from reading and writing (Díaz-Rico, 2008; Mauranen, 2006; Bygate, 2001). Using the language entails its speakers to select and choose between 30,000 and 60,000 words' alternatives while carefully infusing a plethora of grammatical structures to the utterances with 0.1 percent room for errors (Owens, 2008; Pinter, 2006). On top of that, these processes are simultaneously challenged with the need for the speakers to articulate their intended meaning as well as comprehending and responding to their interlocutor (Osborn & Osborn, 2006; Fulcher, 2003). Hence, most second language (L2) learners might find speaking difficult and as a result, they feel inferior in using the language out of fear

for committing language errors or being subjected to ridicule by their peers. Learners are more comfortable and mostly competent with receptive skills, namely listening and reading yet many still 'feel inadequate when it comes to speaking' (Richards, 2008). Learners might claim that they know a lot about the language but it may not necessarily translate to their ability to use the language, 'even if they may have studied English for more than ten years' (Yi, 2007).

1.2   Background of the Study

Learners' language proficiency encompasses three distinctive dimensions – fluency, accuracy and complexity (Robinson, 2001; Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005). Although each plays a pivotal role in developing learners' proficiency, a competitive relationship exists among these three dimensions in which one might be more dominant than the others at a certain point of time. Learners, for example, might display higher performance of accuracy at one point but it can seemingly detract them from being fluent and complex in language use at the same time (Larsen-Freeman, 2006). This encapsulates the view of language learning as a 'complex and dynamics process in which various components emerge at various levels, to various degrees, and at various times' (Marchman & Thal, 2005: p.150). Therefore, the proficiency components, albeit intertwined do not progress systematically and consistently in L2 learners. Each component is frequently given a different priority in the pedagogy of speaking skills, depending on the education policy, examination standards and prospective career demands. Thus, emphasis on each sub-skill differs in the classroom and might not be equally developed in L2 learners.

Accuracy in speaking has always been a thorny issue for language practitioners in Malaysia. Some advocate that accuracy should be the focus of teaching speaking skills. Syntax advocators believe that grammar is the cornerstone of English for they forecast that when learners are equipped with grammatical

knowledge, they are able to creatively manipulate these language rules and subsequently able to converse fluently with others. However, that is not necessarily reflected in reality. Some learners are too preoccupied with being accurate that it jeopardizes their fluency and to some extent, complexity. This is to illustrate the Monitor Hypothesis, theorized by Krashen (1985) and Levelt's (1989) self-monitoring process in which learners monitor their acquired oral output and make necessary corrections based on rules consciously learnt. Constant monitoring of one's grammar use might interfere with the natural flow of speech as learners might keep on correcting their utterances. Over emphasis on accuracy might also result in the speakers sounding unnatural (Richards, 2008) and too 'textbook-like' which in turn, defeat the aim of attaining near-native proficiency to some.

Another dimension of language proficiency is complexity. A relatively new perspective of language development, it requires learners to complexify and acquire new linguistic forms so that it can be added to their 'productive linguistic repertoire' (Richards, 2008). For example, learners might feel comfortable using present and past tense while speaking but when the perfect is introduced, they need some time to adjust and 'restructure' (Van Patten, 1993) due to the need to integrate this new set of data in their linguistic system. It is a lengthy and laborious process as learners have to restructure and sometimes reorganize this new set of complex system to their current linguistic bank. Complexity is possibly achieved after fluency and accuracy are attained by the L2 learners. However, not all learners achieve this level as some learners are more complacent with being fluent and accurate without the need to use complex language structures. Far more than that, the need for complexity in language usually arises in formal contexts, i.e. academic writing and oral presentation and not in everyday's conversation. Thus, complexity is somewhat reserved for more advanced use in tertiary education.

The third dimension of language proficiency involves fluency. Focus on fluency is dominant in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach since its inception in 1980s. CLT in language teaching and learning is primarily concerned with getting meanings across than drilling on linguistic forms. Suffice to say that L2

classrooms' instructions do not put heavy emphasis on accuracy and complexity compared to fluency. Learners are taught and encouraged to express their opinions freely without fear of making errors, as long as their intended meaning is conveyed. In overcoming the fear of fossilization, a state where learners constantly making errors despite progress made in other language areas (Lightbown and Spada 2006), an alternative view is given in which learners are engaged first with fluent processing and only subsequently that they 'integrate accurate language features into that fluent 'base'' (Bygate, 2001). Bygate's view echoes second language acquisition (SLA) theory whereby children learn language not by knowing all the rules but by getting their message across first. Normal children usually make conscious effort to articulate what they want even without the grammatical knowledge. Despite perhaps obvious grammatical errors, children are seldom corrected and their intention is usually understood by children and adult alike. In retrospect, it may be assumed that children develop their fluency first before advancing into other sub-skills (accuracy and complexity) of speaking. Fluency is developed through constant practice. This reflects Comprehensible Output Hypothesis proposed by Swain (1985) who advocates that 'to learn to speak, we have to actually speak' (Skehan 1998). Unfortunately, the platform for L2 learners to speak is seldom available and therefore, they are deprived of the opportunity to practice their fluency in speaking.

The opportunities for learners to practice their fluency skills are usually limited even in the CLT environments as it is mostly difficult to get them to rehearse scripted speech and practice spontaneous speech. This problem is further aggravated with the lack of learner-friendly fluency tools and the lack of attention given to developing oral fluency *per se* in ESL classroom. Due to these persistent obstacles in developing ESL learners' fluency, the research seeks to investigate the effectiveness of dialogue template (DT) in developing low proficiency ESL learners' oral fluency.

1.3   Statement of the Problem

Bygate (2001) observes that speaking in a second language (L2) has always been marginalized in the history and development of language teaching as "for nearly 20 years, the TESOL convention has run annual colloquia on the teaching of reading and writing, but not on speaking or listening" (p.14). McCarthy (2006) shares the same sentiment with regard to speaking in which she claims that fluency in spoken language is 'under-researched'. Hence, problems that arise in developing oral skills among ESL learners are often left unsolved and perhaps deemed as negligible. In view of this conundrum, three pressing problems have been identified which plague the development of ESL learners' oral fluency. These pertain to (a) the difficulty to get ESL learners to rehearse scripted speech and practice spontaneous speech, (b) the lack of learner-friendly fluency tools that may complement and enhance ESL learners' oral fluency practice and (c) the lack of attention given to developing oral fluency *per se* in ESL classroom.

It is normally a difficult task to ask learners to rehearse scripted or even spontaneous speech and most language teachers can attest to this. The factors underlying the difficulties to get them to practice could be due to learners prioritizing other academic commitment, lack of monitoring devices, vague oral practice's outline and learners do not see its immediate need.

Learners might not practice or rehearse because they prioritize other academic commitment, i.e. reading and writing. They also know that these two components make up their overall academic score and that speaking skills constitute only a fraction of their academic results. In addition, it is difficult to get them to practice for oral skills do not leave visible trace and progress (Richards, 2008), unlike reading and writing. Improvement in these skills is easily reflected from their obtained scores through repeated exercises in the classroom as well as homework given. Apart from that, oral development rarely leaves tangible impression on the speakers' ability on paper as easily as writing and reading skills. Luoma (2004)

observes that 'expecting test scores to be accurate, just and appropriate' (p.1) in assessing speaking is a tall order as there are many factors that influence the impression of how well someone speak. Learners might also feel frustrated as they do not know where they stand in terms of their proficiency level when it comes to oral skills as test scores can differ depending on the context, topic and emotional state of the speakers at the time of assessment.

Lack of monitoring devices to chart learners' progress in oral skills has also contributed to the difficulty of getting learners to rehearse scripted speech and practice spontaneous speech. In this context, monitoring devices refer to any software, virtual assessment through websites, audio-video equipment and checklist of speech criteria that can monitor learners' progress in speaking. Ideally, the devices should be able to record, analyze and provide accurate assessment of the learners' level of proficiency while practicing oral skills and subsequently chart their progress. However, these devices are rarely available or accessible perhaps due to financial constraints on the part of learners and education system as a whole. In contrast to reading and writing whereby learners are able to see their progress based on the answer schemes or marks given after each practice, oral skills require more discrete and meticulous assessment which involves real-time processing from both the speaker and the listener. It is not possible for learners to do it independently for they need another interlocutor that might help gauge their performance and proficiency.

Apart from that, it is also difficult to get learners to practice as a result of vague instructions or outline given them. For example, learners are encouraged to practice speaking with their family and friends. They are given a list of suggested topics to talk when the needs arise and at times, lexical input is also provided to these learners to aid their speaking practice. Yet, learners are in limbo as they are unsure or not comfortable of using the language for they do not know what to make of with all the information or content of the topic. They are seldom given structure and specific direction of how they can practice the language in the classroom as well as outside the classroom. Thus, it is not a common sight to see some learners grappling to discuss the topic and sometimes, they do not even know how to go about discussing

the topic as they are unsure of how to initiate or extend the discussion despite relevant input provided by the teacher.

Learners might not practice or rehearse speech as they do not see the immediate need of the language in their surroundings. Befitting the status of the language as a second language, learners do not see the purpose of practicing the language as it is not crucial for use outside the classroom. When they know that they can survive without the language in their environment, they do not see the need to practice the language. In contrast, immigrant and study-abroad learners in English-speaking countries would mostly practice their oral skills because 'successful integration into a new cultural environment depends in some degree on newcomers' ability to interact comfortably with members of the host society' (Derwing, Thomson & Munro, 2006: p. 183). Simply put, the language is not the requirement for them to survive in their world and they realize it so they do not see the purpose of practicing or using it.

Most studies on oral fluency (Leedham, 2006; Wood, 2007; Romova et. al., 2008, Larsen-Freeman, 2006) rarely focus on fluency tools and only a few researchers attempted to study the use of technology-based tools to aid fluency. (Ho, 2003; Blake, 2006; Samuel & Bakar, 2008; Xiao-Liang, 2008). As a result, there seem to be lacking learner-friendly tools which can complement learners' fluency practice. Although technology is progressing rapidly around the world, its accessibility in language classroom is still debated. Thus, most teachers assume that as long as learners are speaking, they are practicing the language when in fact; it does not necessarily denote so. Learners might speak aimlessly just to fulfill the task at hand without even noticing the purpose or features of what they are uttering. Their oral performance is sometimes devoid of structure and organization that their flow of speech lacks fluidity and smoothness for they have to arrange and rearrange their thoughts while speaking. There are also learners who blindly speak up whatever comes to mind without much consideration given to meaning and their listeners' comprehension. Hence, sometimes teachers are frustrated for they perceive that these learners have failed to meet their expectations on oral performance when what the

learners need is a handy tool that can guide and scaffold their practice while speaking.

Apart from that, most workbooks or textbooks only focus on speech acts or topics which need to be discussed without relevant tools to guide them through the speaking practice. A study by Holtgraves (2007) suggests that speech act activation is not an automatic component of comprehension for people acquiring a second language. On the contrary, native speakers were found to be able to automatically recognize speech acts (e.g. to apologize, to promise, to offer, to agree) when they comprehend utterances (Holtgraves & Ashley, 2001) which indicates these speakers' 'procedural knowledge' (Anderson and Lebriere, 1998). Despite perhaps adequate volume of speech acts for application in speaking, there seems to be lacking a concrete structure for learners to organize all these acts into one coherent and cohesive oral presentation or even conversation. Therefore, it is no surprise that their speaking might not be fluent for the learners are struggling to string correct and meaningful sentences while making sure that the meaning and intention is clear to the listener. The overwhelming knowledge of speech acts also impede learners' ability to speak for they have to carefully select and use those that apply to their oral contexts. Many seem to downplay the role of fluency tools for they believe that fluency is all about practice and as long as the learners practice speaking, they should not face any problem. On the contrary, the learners, especially limited users or low proficiency learners of English seriously need a handy tool to refer to while speaking.

Mauranen (2006) argues that 'spoken language should take precedence over written' (p. 154) and it is crucial to adopt it as 'point of departure' in any language teaching model. Yet, in reality, little attention is given to oral skills, particularly fluency *per se* in ESL classroom. This could be due to the fact that fluency encompasses too wide of a definition which sometimes includes overall proficiency, i.e. content, information structuring, registers, accuracy, complexity and pragmalinguistic features (Tarone, 2005). Thus, teachers might not feel comfortable teaching it in its own right because they might not know which aspect to focus on

and most of the time, accuracy triumphed over fluency. One possible rationale for the prioritizing of speaking sub-skill could be because accuracy is easily detected and corrected as it is mostly about syntax and as language rules are predetermined and systematically arranged, any errors or mistake made by learners are visible.

Fluency is also not given its due attention as focus is usually on examination based skills such as reading and writing. This is to bow to examination pressure as such, fluency is not seen as important as other skills. In addition, most teachers believe that as learners are taught in CLT environment, these learners must have sufficient exposure and practice in the language. In fact, many researchers in the 1990s concluded that exposure to and interaction in CLT enable learners to attain L2 speaking fluency (Hinkel, 2006) when in reality, it may not necessarily translate to fluency practice as learners are not specifically trained to be fluent in the ESL classroom. Far more than that, the lack of opportunities for ESL learners to use oral English in and out of the classroom (Díaz-Rico 2008; Samuel & Bakar 2008; Ho 2003) does hamper fluency development despite the subject being slotted formally into the school timetable and English is somewhat used outside the classroom.

1.4   Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of dialogue template (DT) in developing oral fluency of low proficiency ESL learners by analyzing the temporal levels of fluency, specifically on speech rate (SR), mean length of run (MLR) and average length of pause (ALP). To complement and enrich the quantitative data obtained, the study also explores the effects of using DT on low proficiency ESL learners by utilizing observation scheme and semi-structured interview.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of the study is to determine the effectiveness of dialogue template (DT) in developing oral fluency of low proficiency English as Second Language (ESL) learners. Four corresponding objectives that form this study are:

1.5.1 To determine the significant gain made by low proficiency ESL learners in speech rate (SR) measure of temporal level of fluency after DT use.

1.5.2 To determine the significant gain made by low proficiency ESL learners in mean length of run (MLR) measure of temporal level of fluency after DT use.

1.5.3 To determine the significant gain made by low proficiency ESL learners in average length of pause (ALP) measure of temporal level of fluency after DT use.

1.5.4 To explore the effectiveness of DT in developing oral fluency of low proficiency ESL learners.

1.6 Research Questions

The primary research question is:

Is dialogue template (DT) effective in developing oral fluency of low proficiency English as Second Language (ESL) learners?

Four inquiry questions that form this study are:

1. Is there a significant gain in low proficiency ESL learner' speech rate after DT use?

2. Is there a significant gain in low proficiency ESL learners' mean length of run after DT use?

3. Is there a significant gain in low proficiency ESL learners' average length of pause after DT use?

4. How effective is DT in developing oral fluency of low proficiency ESL learners?

1.7   Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that the participants in experimental group, who receive the dialogue template (DT) treatment, will outperform the participants in control group after oral fluency analyses on speech rate (SR), mean length of run (MLR) and average length of pause (ALP). These hypotheses are derived from previous findings on the same fluency measures (Blake, 2006; Garcia-Amaya, 2008; Romova et. al., 2008) and are tested at the significance level of .05.

Hypothesis 1:
Ho: μexperimental, posttest SR - μcontrol, posttest SR < or = 0
H1: μexperimental, posttest SR - μcontrol, posttest SR > 0

Hypothesis 2:
Ho: μexperimental, posttest MLR - μcontrol, posttest MLR < or = 0
H1: μexperimental, posttest MLR - μcontrol, posttest MLR > 0

Hypothesis 3:
Ho: μexperimental, posttest ALP - μcontrol, posttest ALP < or = 0
H1: μexperimental, posttest ALP - μcontrol, posttest ALP > 0

1.8   Significance of the Study

McCarthy (2006) laments that "the nature of fluency in spoken language is under-researched, despite the fact that the term is deeply embedded in lay linguistic perceptions as well as in professional considerations'(p.2). In view of this notion, the present study is beneficial to (a) ESL empirical literature on fluency, (b) ESL classroom practice, (c) ESL learners' learning strategies and (d) ESL material writers.

This study is a valuable addition to ESL empirical literature on fluency as through extensive readings, fluency studies were mostly concern with type of task (Bygate, 1996; Ejzenberg, 1992; Skehan & Foster, 1999; Derwing et. al., 2004), planning time (Ortega, 1999; Wigglesworth, 1997; Yuan & Ellis 2003, Rouhi & Marefat, 2006), learning contexts (DeKeyser 1991; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Freed et. al., 2004; Temple, 2005) and longitudinal effects (Leedham, 2006; Wood, 2007; Romova et. al., 2008, Larsen-Freeman, 2006). Only a few focuses on fluency tool and these studies were mostly technology-based (Ho, 2003; Blake, 2006; Samuel & Bakar, 2008; Xiao-Liang, 2008) when the present study proposes to employ simple yet practical tool to fluency practice. Therefore, the study is significant as it helps to fill in the gap in fluency studies.

Besides that, this study approaches fluency in relation to low proficiency ESL learners as compared to most studies that focused on intermediate or advanced level learners as it has long been 'assumed that fluency is relatively homogenous in beginners' (Derwing et. al., 2004: p. 674). However, Ranta and Derwing (2000) found that there were significant differences in individual fluency. Thus, this study would be seen as enriching empirical literature on fluency and low proficiency learners.

ESL classroom practice would also benefit from this study. English language practitioners have always lamented on their learners' lack of fluency in speaking despite being immersed in CLT approach. This study would offer them an alternative tool for fluency practice for most teachers would feel confident to use 'evidence-based teaching tool' (Anthony, 2008) Most teachers are pressed for time and therefore, this tool hopefully will assist them in developing the learners' fluency. The results of the study would offer confidence for teachers to use tried-and-tested tool that can aid fluency as well as bridging the gap between theory and practice.

ESL learner strategy in developing oral fluency would also be enriched through this study. Most of the time, learners are pressured to practice without any solid tool that they can hold on to. In relation to this study which uses dialogue template (DT) as fluency tool, learners are given an alternative strategy which may complement their interactional and psycholinguistic perspectives of communication strategies (Nakatani & Goh, 2007). Interactional perspectives are related to strategies used during interaction that help improve negotiation of meaning and overall effectiveness of the content while psycholinguistic view pertains to mental processes that deal with lexical and discourse problems. Thus, the tool would help in terms of easing learners' cognitive load in selecting and applying a plethora of communication strategies in order to become fluent for the tool may assist them to do so.

Finally, this study is important to ESL material developer for it can guide them to design a better tool that can effectively develop learners' fluency. In addition, they are also given an indication of how the tool helps the learners through the findings from the observation scheme completed by the teacher and semi-structured interview from the participants. With this knowledge, developers may want to tap into what kind of material design that can attract learners' attention to oral skills as well as effectively improve learners' fluency. Thornbury (1998) insinuates that material writers were 'daunted' by the sheer volumes of chunks or 'partially pre-assembled patterns' and the implications this might have on syllabusing and pedagogy.'(pg8). Therefore, this study might be viewed as one of the

first steps to quash that notion so that learners would benefit from effective yet economical materials.

1.9   Scope of the Study

Participants of this study were Malaysian Form Six learners in one of the secondary schools in Johor Bahru. They had sat for their school-based Malaysian University English Test (MUET) test – an English proficiency test that assesses tertiary education learners in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills – and received their mid-year results. Only those who scored band 1 and 2 were selected for the study and they were considered as extremely limited user and limited user of English based on the band criteria given by the Malaysian Examinations Council (Band 1 is categorized as extremely limited user of English whereas Band 6 is considered as very good user). These learners were from various socio-economic backgrounds who had been exposed to formal English language teaching in Malaysian primary and secondary classrooms. They learnt MUET for eight periods per week of which two periods were specifically allocated for speaking skills. This came out to 80 minutes (a period lasts for 40 minutes) per week for the purpose of learning and practicing speaking.

1.10   Definitions of Terms

1.10.1 Oral fluency

Definitions of oral fluency are varied and without explicit definition, what it means is usually not clear (Freed, 1995; Fulcher, 1996) and is subjected to interpretations (Esser, 1995). Lennon (1990) simplifies fluency's multifaceted definition by categorizing it into *broad* and *narrow* sense. The broad context to fluency denotes a person's overall speaking proficiency (Luoma, 2004; Blake, 2006) and virtually synonymous with the notion of communicative competence in which speakers posses a holistic range of competencies that include grammatical, lexical, semantic and pragmatic. In contrast, a narrow approach to fluency only includes a few features that relate specifically to the manner of speakers' oral production (i.e. pausing, hesitation, speech rate, length of utterances). With regard to this study, oral fluency is operationalized in terms of narrow approach in which three variables of temporal level are analyzed: (i) speech rate, (ii) length of run and (iii) pause. Blake (2006) rationalized this approach as 'precise and thereby more conducive to empirical research' (p. 11).

1.10.2 Temporal level

Temporal level of fluency is usually associated with its abundance of speech, speed and rate as well as amount of 'disfluency-sounding pauses' (Collentine & Freed, 2004). However, it is worth noting that there are more than 50 variations of fluency variables cited in the literature from 1974 to 2004 as Blake (2006) had presented in his study. These include speech rate, mean length of run, phonation time ratio, articulation rate, average length of pauses, amount of filled pauses, and percent of T-unit. As it is not feasible to attempt and measure all the fluency variables in the

present study due to the nature of its process, temporal variables used are operationalized in terms of speech rate (Kormos & Denes, 2004), mean length of run and pauses (Segalowitz & Freed, 2004). These three variables had been used in various studies and most learners or listeners almost always associate fluency with these. Even naïve listeners were able to associate fluency with these distinct variables as Freed *et. al.* (2004) reported that through an informal survey, first year-undergraduate students defined 'fluency' as "speaking quickly and smoothly", "speaking without saying um, without hesitation" and "richness in vocabulary" (p. 277). Therefore, only these three variables were analyzed in assessing learners' oral fluency.

- Speech rate (SR) was computed as words per second.
- Mean length of run (MLR) was calculated by dividing the total number of words produced in the speech sample - excluding filled pauses - by the total number of runs produced in the speech sample whereby a run is defined as a speech segment occurring between pauses of .25 seconds or greater.
- Average length of pauses (ALP) was calculated by dividing the total length of pause time (both silent and filled) by the total number of pauses. Filled pauses include repeated words, self repairs and words like 'well', 'er', 'um', 'ah, 'and'.

1.10.3 Dialogue template (DT)

Dialogue template (DT) is a fluency tool, specifically designed for the purpose of scaffolding learners' fluency in fulfilling two tasks – individual presentation and group discussion (Appendix A). DT is the researcher's coined term based on the nature of the two tasks (monologic and dialogic) that are slotted within a template. These two task types are chosen and integrated as template for they represent most research on fluency task type (see Bell, 2003 and Derwing et. al 2004). Most oral tests require learners to present their opinion and engage in an interview or discussion which indirectly indicate learners' communicative needs in

and outside classrooms. As such, chunking theory (Chase & Simon, 1973b; Newell, 1990; Servan-Schreiber & Anderson, 1990) was incorporated within the template theory (Gobet & Simon, 1996) to form an A4 size DT that was used as a fluency tool for speaking practice. DT starts with two horizontal spaces for 'topic' and 'useful language chunks'. These spaces are filled in during the brainstorming phase in the fluency session of the teaching format (Appendix G). Two columns with headings 'Individual Presentation Template' and 'Group Discussion Template' are placed directly below the spaces. Each column has starter chunks (Appendix J) with guided slots for the participants to fill in. Prior to DT use in the study, it was pilot tested with learners of similar age and background but these learners were not used as participants in the study.

1.10.4 Low proficiency English as Second Language (ESL) learners

Brown (2001) defines ESL learners are those who are learning in a context where 'the classroom target language is readily available outside' (p. 116). ESL learners in this study live in an environment whereby they are exposed to the second language outside classroom but the use of it is minimal as mother tongue dominates the daily use either in commerce or pre-tertiary education. In the context of this study, Form Six learners were chosen as they mirrored this definition. These learners had been exposed to communicative language teaching (CLT) throughout their entire schooling years and were subjected to two oral tests in secondary education. Low proficiency learners were purposely selected for this study based on their school-based MUET (Malaysian University English Test) examination in their pre-university level. These learners were categorized as Band 1 and 2 English users which indicated that they were extremely limited and limited users of English.

1.10.5 PRAAT

PRAAT (which is a Dutch word for 'talk') is a scientific speech analysis software program designed by Paul Boersma and David Weenink of the University of Amsterdam. It is able to convert sound files into a three dimensional spectrogram that allows the transcription and analysis of very small segments of recorded speech. This software was used in a few studies (Blake, 2006; Trofimovich & Baker, 2006; Deterding, 2001) and evidently, it was able to measure all the temporal variables intended for this study. In addition, the software is free as it can be downloaded from the internet. The website (www.praat.com) also provides a list of active PRAAT users in a Yahoo group whereby problems and solutions pertaining to the software application are actively discussed by various academic users around the world.

1.10.6 Chunks

Chunks are generally referred as 'multi-constituent units that perform grammatical and discourse functions' (Taguchi, 2007: p. 434). The term is also known as 'lexicalised sentence stems' (Pawley & Syder, 1983), 'formulas' (R. Ellis, 1994), 'slot-and-frame patterns' (N. Ellis, 2003), 'micro-units' (Foster, Tonkyn & Wrigglesworth, 2000) or 'formulaic expressions' (Norton, 2001). In this study, the language chunks which are strategically placed in DT refer to Lewis (1997) classification of chunks that are known as sentence frames and head or in this study, it generally means 'starter chunks'. These chunks are normally used to structure and aid oral individual presentation and discussion which include 'In my opinion', 'I think', 'I agree', 'My first reason is' and 'In conclusion'.

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