

**Improving the English Speaking Competence of  
Students: Exploratory Study on The Students of  
Diploma III Translation program at  
Universitas Terbuka**

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**Abstract**

The aim of this research is to prove that the students' fluency in speaking English is not necessarily followed by the accuracy in using it. The research employed total sampling technique and 132 students were chosen as samples. Data was gathered by observation and documents. Analysis was done based on their speaking exam results which are divided between the fluency and accuracy scores (secondary data). The result of the analysis shows that the number of students whose fluency score is higher than its accuracy one is higher than those whose fluency score is the same as the accuracy one. It can be concluded that individual differences play an important role in building the fluency and accuracy of their speaking English.

**Background**

People tend to think that speaking ability in English can be seen from whether or not they speak fluently in that language. Whereas there is another important factor such as grammar accuracy. If the two factors are not synchronized, there may be some misunderstanding. People rarely pay attention to these two factors. Therefore, speaking

fluently is not necessarily followed by using grammar accurately. This is proved by the results of the speaking exam of the students of DIII Translation Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Terbuka (FISIP-UT).

Speaking is the most difficult subject for most of the students. They are always afraid that they cannot pass the exam since they think that they do not speak English fluently. Therefore, every semester, the number of students who sit the speaking exam is small. There are two reasons why this happens. First, they focus on the correct usage of words. This will affect their fluency in speaking. Second, if they focus on their fluency, this will affect their accuracy. They do these two things repeatedly when they are sitting the speaking exam that makes them anxious so it is not surprising if they do not speak fluently.

The research result will be beneficial for improving the quality of learning material in this case speaking modules. If their quality is better, the students' ability to speak English can also be improved and they may become competent and can compete with other regular universities' graduates.

### **The Concept of Competence**

Sofa (1999:123) states "A competency is composed of skill, knowledge, and attitude, but in particular the consistent applications of those skill, knowledge, and attitude to the standard of performance required in employment". In other words, competence does not only mean knowledge, skill and attitude. However, the more important thing is the application of them in work.

Robbins (2001:37) argues competence as ability, which is the ability of somebody to do various tasks in job. He adds that individual ability is formed by two factors, intellectual and physical abilities. Intellectual ability is the ability needed to do mental activities while physical ability

is the ability needed to do the tasks that require stamina, strength, skill and adept.

Gordon (1988:109), quoted by Mulyasa (2003:38) explains some aspects of competence which are (1) knowledge, which is cognitive awareness, (2) understanding, which is cognitive and affective ability owned by individuals, (3) skill is something owned by individuals to do the tasks or job given to them, (4) *value is behavioral standard* that is believed and psychologically attached to them, (5) attitude is feeling of happiness, unhappiness, like, dislike towards something that come from outside, and (6) interest is the tendency of individuals to do something.

## **The Concept of Speaking**

According to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary speaking is being able to use a language. Speaking is 'traumatic' subject matter for most students of the D III translation program. They are afraid that they cannot pass the exam because they think they cannot speak fluently. This is because when they speak they focus more on two things, first, they focus on the word usage, as they think they are being examined. This may affect the fluency. Second, their attention to grammar influences accuracy. These two things are done when they sit the exam which psychologically makes them feel anxious so that they cannot speak fluently.

Fluency is the condition of being able to speak a language easily and well while accuracy is the condition of being accurate to use grammar. Fluency is more stressed when they speak English compared to accuracy although it is also important. These two factors are important in speaking. As a result, marking component in the English speaking exams run by the Language and Literature Department in the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Universitas Terbuka is also based on the two factors. Besides, there is another factor that becomes basic marking such as mastering vocabulary and pronunciation. This

marking is to evaluate the candidates in understanding and responding to the instruction of the examiner in English like telling a little bit about their life, describing a picture, expressing their opinion about the issues the examiner raises such as sports, health, terrorism, environment preservation, etc. In addition, the other component marked is how the candidates interact with their examiner and whether or not the discussion is only one way or two ways (interaction and task achievement) (see attachment 1). This paper discusses fluency and accuracy so only the two components are stressed in this study.

The fluency component includes vocabulary, pronunciation, interaction and task achievement. If somebody speaks English fluently s/he has mastered vocabulary, pronunciation and is able to interact with his/her listener, although the accuracy is still questionable. For that reason, this research is aimed to prove that fluency is not necessarily followed by accuracy from the individual differences point of view.

According to J.B Carroll (1965) individual differences consist of three aspects which are: general intelligence, aptitude and motivation. Intelligence is the student's ability to understand instruction and what is needed from him/her in the learning process. Understanding the instructions in the speaking exam includes task achievement component and this involves the candidates' intelligence. From the data available if the task achievement score is low, the other four component scores such as fluency, structural accuracy, vocabulary and pronunciation are low as well (see the attachment 2). On the contrary, if the task achievement score is high, the other four component scores are high as well (see the attachment 1). The marking process of this task achievement component is based on the marking of other four components: Therefore, it is not possible that the task achievement score is high while the other four components scores are low or vice versa.

Aptitude is talent that consists of:

1. Associative memory (ability to connect between word in mother language and word in the language is being learned). For

example: the word 'realita' the native speaker of Bahasa Indonesia can connect that word with 'reality' in English. The word 'administrasi' with 'administration', 'evaluasi' with 'evaluation', 'situasi' with 'situation', and 'gravitasi' with 'gravity', etc. The bigger associative memory is, the faster s/he can connect a word in Bahasa Indonesia with a word in English.

2. Inductive language learning (ability to know the relationship between meaning and syntactic form, for example: gerund (call-calling, kill-killing), singular and plural (death-deaths; life-lives), etc).
3. Grammatical sensitivity (ability to know grammatical functions), for example: phonemic coding ability (ability to spell and pronounce). For example: to spell the word 'colleague' (c-o-l-l-e-a-g-u-e) and pronounce it /'kɒli:g/.

The accuracy of grammar use in the speaking exam includes the accuracy component and the candidates' aptitude. Carroll points out that grammatical sensitivity relates closely to trainability. So, the more often somebody uses grammar, either through exercises or tests, formal or informal, the more his/her the grammatical sensitivity which is marked by the lesser s/he makes grammatical mistakes. Although, according to Skehan (1989), grammatical sensitivity does not include aptitude because the lack of evidence of this case. Right spelling and pronunciation do not just come out but through a series of intensive exercises.

## **The Research Results**

The research results taken from the speaking exam results of the students of the DIII Translation Program of 2001.2, 2002.1, 2003.1, 2004.1, 2004.2 and 2005.1 exam periods. They are analyzed employing total technique where all data is analyzed. The seven periods were chosen because of two reasons. First, only on these seven exam periods that the data from the students who sit the exam and the exam results

are available. Second, after the 2005.1 exam period, the execution of speaking exams are moved to the regional centers (Jakarta, Jogja, Makasar, Surabaya, Medan, Palembang) and the academic staff in the Language and Literature Department are no longer involved at all steps in the examination. For the sake of marking consistence, the writer only uses data from the exam results examined by the staff in the Department.

The data gathering technique was observation and documents. The data analyzed was the secondary data with descriptive qualitative technique.

In the speaking exam, it is clear that fluency and accuracy are two different things. This is proven by the speaking exam results of the students of the DIII Translation Program. In the 2001.2, 2002.1, 2002.2, 2003.1, 2004.1, 2004.1, 2004.2 and 2005.1 periods as seen in Diagram 1.

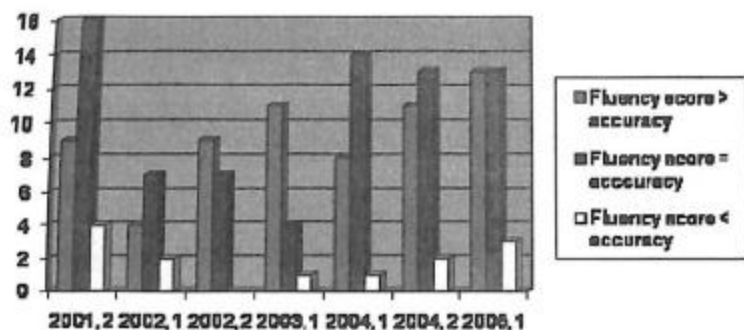


Diagram 1 The students' fluency dan accuracy scores in the speaking exam

It is noted that either fluency or accuracy scores ranging between 1-5 (see the attachment 1) where score 1 or 2 for each component show that they do not speak fluently and the grammar they use is not accurate. Therefore, they will not pass the exam. Score 3 shows their ability to speak is good enough and this shows that they pass the exam with average score, while score 4 and 5 indicate excellence.

In the 2001.2 exam period, the percentage of the students who got the fluency score higher than the accuracy score was 31% (9 students). Only two of them passed. Although the percentage of those whose fluency and accuracy scores were the same was higher (55%), but from the score point of view, there were more of them who did not pass. From the above percentage (55% or 16 students), 8 of them did not pass (30 %). 4 students had average score (13 %), 2 students who got good score (6 %), and 2 students got excellent score (6 %). Thus, the number of those who passed and their fluency score was higher than their accuracy score was 7 students out of 9. While the number of students whose fluency and accuracy scores were the same was 4 students out of 16. There were 4 students (13%) whose fluency score was lower than the accuracy score and they did not pass.

In the 2002.1 exam period, the percentage of students who got the fluency score higher than the accuracy score was 31% (4 students). All of them passed. While the percentage of those whose fluency and accuracy scores were the same was higher which is 54% (6 students), and all of them passed.

In the 2002.2 exam period, students getting the fluency score higher than the accuracy score was 56% (9 students). All of them passed. The percentage of those whose fluency and accuracy scores were the same was lower, which was 43% (7students) and all of them passed.

In the 2003.1 exam period, the percentage of students who got the fluency score higher than the accuracy score was 66% (10 students). All of them passed. While the percentage of those whose fluency and accuracy scores were the same was lower, which was 26% (4 students), and all of them passed. There was 1 student (0.06 %) whose fluency score was lower than the accuracy one and s/he passed.

In the 2004.1 exam period, the percentage of students who got the fluency score higher than the accuracy score was 33% (6 students). 4 students passed. While the percentage of those whose fluency

and accuracy scores were the same was higher, which was 73% (11 students), and all of them passed. There was 1 student (0.06 %) whose fluency score was lower than the accuracy one and s/he passed.

In the 2004.2 exam period, the percentage of students who got the fluency score higher than the accuracy score was 44% (12 students). 10 students passed. While the percentage of those whose fluency and accuracy scores were the same was higher than the accuracy score which was 48% (13 students), and 12 students passed.

In the 2005.1 exam period, the percentage of students who got the fluency score higher than the accuracy score was 44% (13 students). 11 students passed. Those who got the same fluency and accuracy score were 44 % (13 students), and 10 of them passed. There were 3 students (10 %) whose fluency score was lower than the accuracy one and one of them passed.

Fluency is not necessarily followed by accuracy proves as well if we see the Diagram 1. from the above seven exam periods, it proved that in four exam periods, the number of candidates whose fluency score was higher than the accuracy score or vice versa was higher than those whose fluency score was the same as the accuracy score. Their exam results proved that fluency has not been always followed by accuracy.

As stated above, fluency is important in the speaking exam because this is the first thing the examiner pays attention to before the others. Therefore, fluency is the first component put in the assessment sheet. The fact that fluency is not always followed by accuracy supported by qualitative data in the form of some comments made by the examiners as follows:

- *Showing fluency, but limited range of grammar.*
- *She speaks quite good but often makes some basic mistakes.*
- *She used present tense when she should use past tense.*
- *She speaks English quite well but she lacks of grammar.*
- *He was active but many grammatical mistakes occurred.*
- *She works for an hotel in Pakanbaru. She speaks quite fluent with*



*some grammatical mistakes.*

- *Living in Boston, USA, for years.*
- *Fluent but needs prompt, moderate control of grammar.*
- *Actually her English is good but she often makes mistakes in using grammar.*
- *Fluent, but sometimes lack of grammar control.*

The first phrases from the examiners' comments such as:

- *Showing fluency*
- *She speaks quite good*
- *She speaks English quite well*
- *He was active*
- *She speaks quite fluent*
- *Living in Boston, USA, for years*
- *Fluent but needs prompt*
- *Actually her English is good*
- *Fluent*

show that the above candidates spoke fluently but not accurately in using grammar as shown in the second phrases of the examiner's comments as follows:

- *...limited range of grammar*
- *...often makes some basic mistakes.*
- *She used present tense when she should use past tense.*
- *... she lacks of grammar.*
- *... many grammatical mistakes occurred.*
- *... with some grammatical mistakes.*
- *... moderate control of grammar.*
- *... she often makes mistakes in using grammar.*
- *... sometimes lack of grammar control.*

The low accuracy in speaking English can be caused by the lack of grammar exercises for them. However, at the same time they were forced to speak English because of the English speaking environment. For example: there was a student who sat in the speaking exam in 2003. He spoke English fluently but his grammar sensitivity was low. This can be seen from his structural accuracy score which was lower

than the fluency one (fluency = 4, structural accuracy = 3). In fact, he had studied up to middle school in Australia for about 7 years. There was a case where a student worked in Riyadh. He spoke fluently but his grammar was not so good (fluency = 5, structural accuracy = 3). From the two cases above, it is clear that they were forced by their environment where they should be able to speak but they are not forced enough to use appropriate grammar. This is because as long as their listeners understand what they are talking about, they are not aware enough of their grammatical mistakes.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

In learning language, fluency and accuracy are two different things in terms of their achievement. Factors like intelligence, talent of each individual play an important in the achievement. Although two different persons who happen to be Indonesians are in the same environment which happens to be an English speaking country, their ability to speak English would be different because of the above two factors. The same thing happens to two persons who happen to be the graduates from the same English institution, their ability to speak English would be different.

Speaking stresses more on fluency than that of accuracy because the nature of the speaking itself which is direct and there is possibility of repetition and clarification. While, writing stresses more on accuracy, unless there will be misunderstanding. In fact, fluency and accuracy play an important role in speaking. If distance learning program especially in learning speaking English which is based on fluency and accuracy, this may produce quantity competent graduates and in general this may increase the quality of education.

The conclusion that can be drawn is the speaking modules should stress on the fluency. This can be achieved by adding them with exercises that emphasize on the mastery of vocabulary which is enough for daily speaking. The modules in the Language and Literature Department

have provided sufficient English vocabularies. If the students truly learn them, they are not likely to have insufficient vocabularies that can help them speak. Besides, fluency can be achieved by a lot of exercises in repetition either at the word, phrase, or sentence levels.

#### Suggestions

1. It would be necessary to stress on fluency in speaking as to increase the quality of the graduates.
2. It would be necessary to stress on accuracy in writing either printed or non-printed materials so that there would be no misunderstanding in speaking.
3. To increase the quality of speaking, the students need to learn to speak by forming a study group.
4. Choose the speaking learning materials of high quality and based on high accuracy.

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Publishing, Warriewood, NWS**

## Example

CONTOHCCONTOH

SPEAKING EXAMINATION/BING3309

Examiner's assessment sheet

Candidate's name	XXXX
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NIM	111222333
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**Examiner's Identification** ZZZZ  
**Date and comment** June 11  
 Her English is very ok. She ever stayed in Bangladesh for years.

Examination Period	2005.1
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Fill in the appropriate lozenge on each mark scale in pencil and write the figure in the column on the right

<b>Fluency</b>	0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input checked="" type="radio"/>	<b>5</b>
<b>Structural Accuracy</b>	0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input checked="" type="radio"/>	<b>4</b>
<b>Vocabulary</b>	0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input checked="" type="radio"/>	<b>5</b>
<b>Pronunciation</b>	0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input checked="" type="radio"/>	<b>5</b>
<b>Interaction &amp; Task achievement</b>	0 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input checked="" type="radio"/>	<b>5</b>
		<b>24</b>

## Example

CONTOHCCONTOH

### SPEAKING EXAMINATION/BING3309

Examiner's assessment sheet

Candidate's name	AAAA
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NIM	444555666
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**Examiner's Identification** CCOC

**Date and comment** June 12

**He speaks fluently and naturally. He does not have problem with difficult topic and can find the appropriate vocabulary.**

Examination Period	2005.1
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Fill in the appropriate lozenge on each mark scale in pencil and write the figure in the column on the right

<b>Fluency</b>	0	1	2	3	4	5		<b>3</b>
<b>Structural Accuracy</b>								<b>2</b>
<b>Vocabulary</b>								<b>2</b>
<b>Pronunciation</b>								<b>3</b>
<b>Interaction &amp; Task achievement</b>								<b>4</b>
								<b>14</b>