

## The Impact of Wait Time Instruction and Teaching Experience on Teachers' Feedback in Moroccan Speaking Classes

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### Abstract

Instruction plays a major role in the development of speaking skills for second language learners. Different approaches and methods have emerged throughout the history of language learning/teaching based on the influence of different theories of language, psychology, and related domains such as psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics and cultural studies. Two major trends in language teaching emerged under the influence of these mentioned language theories, namely, accuracy based versus fluency based approaches. This article gives a historical sketch up to these trends in an attempt to provide a historical background and to empirically bring evidence that wait time instruction and teaching experience can impact classroom feedback in Moroccan classes. Relevant questions related to the role of teachers' experience in leading different types of feedback, the effect of the number of teaching years as well as the correlation between wait time instruction and the corresponding teaching experience are closely investigated. This article adheres to a mixed design or what has been identified in research methodology as ex-post facto (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2007). Therefore, it is both a qualitative and a descriptive one. For the type of instructions used, the results obtained show the insignificance of the impact of experience on this variable. On the other hand, results retained that wait- time instruction in comparison to other items recorded a higher significance of the impact of experience. Therefore, current article brings empirical evidence on how wait- time instruction plays a crucial role in spoken activity for second language learners.

*Key words:* impact of wait –time instruction, impact of teaching experience, speaking classes, teachers' instructions and feedback

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## 1- Instructional Approaches to Speaking Skills: A Historical Background

### *The accuracy based language teaching approaches*

Accuracy in language teaching is the outcome of viewing language learning as an acquired behavior based on drilling and error avoidance. Early linguists were hired to teach oral skills in laboratories where students were trained to utter new items mainly through repetition. In her article on language teaching approaches, Celce-Murcia (1991:6) mentions nine language teaching approaches that have characterized instruction in the twentieth century most of which focus on accuracy as a basic tenet in language teaching. In describing the grammar-translation approach to language teaching, for example, she states that the focus is on grammar or the inflection of words. The direct method also initiates learners to native-like speaking and the teachers should necessarily be native speakers with presumably native-like pronunciation.

Research in the area of language has shown how at first the reading approach prevailed, and reading comprehension was the only language skill taught the goal of which was to enable students to read the target language. This Reading Method lasted until the Second World War when the U.S government found it necessary to make people *speak* and *understand foreign languages* (Murcia, 1991:5). Hence, linguists were hired to this end, and from there on was the birth of a new language method “Audiolingualism”. The next part will be devoted to this important method because of the great impact it has on teaching oral skills.

### *Audiolingualism*

Founded essentially on structural linguistics, especially Bloomfield (1933) and behavioral psychology (Skinner, 1957), audiolingualism is one of the most important approaches to language teaching which advocates the primacy of speech in the language classroom. Among its major tenets “Language is speaking not writing”, “Language is set of habits”, and “Language is verbal behavior”. In this regard, Skinner (1957) states: “What happens when a man speaks or responds to speech is clearly a question of human behavior and hence a question to be answered with the concepts and techniques of psychology as an experimental science of behavior” (p.5)

Skinner thus advocated that, like all other behaviors, language is learned through repetition and reinforcement (positive or negative) adhering to notions such as stimulus-response and operant conditioning. Brown (1994) considers this to highlight the ‘immediately perceptible aspects of linguistic behavior, the publicly observable responses and the relationships or associations between those responses and events in the world surrounding them’. (p.17)

The idea that has characterized behaviorism- that observable behavior is perpetuated if reinforced- has affected language classroom. Therefore, teachers used to rely on reinforcement or positive feedback presumably used as a result of the ultimate success on the part of the learners having showed total grasp of a certain pattern.

In this regard, Williams and Burden (1997:10) in explaining how behaviourism has largely influenced language teachers, noted that within the audiolingual approach framework, much analysis had been done to consider the role of the learners who should be positive respondents to teachers’ stimuli using such mechanisms as repetition and substitution. Blair (1991), on the other hand, clarifies how from an audiolingual perspective, language was considered as: “a definable set of structures with lexical exponents, which could be learned inductively, pattern by

pattern, by means of a rigorously planned and carefully executed program of instruction based on the laws of conditioning and reinforcement”. (p.24)

Thus, audiolinguists advocate a considerable control over learners’ oral production. A great effort is deployed to manipulate learners’ errors in such a way that structural or grammatical correctness is the ultimate motive during the learning process. Thus, learning how to speak a language is seen as acquiring a set of mechanical habits or as Gass (2008) puts it “learning a language involved imitation as the primary mechanism, the language that surrounded learners was of crucial importance as the source for imitation”.(p.49)

### ***Cognitive code learning approach***

Based on both Chomsky’s -transformational-generative grammar (TGG) (Kyle, 2004) and Gestalt theory (Green, 2000), the cognitive-code approach was critical of both Grammar Translation Method (GMT) and Audio Lingual Method (ALM). This criticism is due on the one hand to the neglect of the spoken skill and the other hand to excessive emphasis on behavioral techniques such as repetition, drilling and memorization. Therefore, cognitive-code approach, proposed mainly between 1960s and 1970s by Carroll (1966) and Chastain (1970), advocated that language learning involved active mental processes, and that it was not just a process of habit formation (as assumed by the ALM).

Thus language classes were still concerned with grammatical structures, but teaching/learning was based on understanding the meaning, hence the importance of meaningful practice. Lessons consisted in presenting examples of the target structures to make students understand the grammatical rule before practicing it in meaningful contexts. Teachers elicited dialogues which contained examples of the target structure, encouraging thus students’ speaking through the elicited dialogues.

To sum up, while the ALM advocated the primacy of speech over writing, the Cognitive Code Learning (CCL) approach used both written and oral skills. However both were more concerned about accuracy at the expense of fluency in student’s language production. This trend will start to change towards a fluency-based trend to language learning/teaching with the introduction of language as a system of communication. This shift is due to the impact of new fields such as sociolinguistics / pragmatics (e.g. Hymes, Searle, and Austin) and functional linguistics. This shift has been beneficial to the position of speaking in the language classroom.

### ***The fluency based language teaching approaches***

Under the influence of research in the above mentioned fields, and with the introduction of communicative language teaching/learning approach, basic perceptions about speaking started to shift towards message comprehension, interaction and communication. The rise of this new awareness marks the turning point or the start of a revolution in research on oral skills in general. Indeed, the move towards a fluency-based theory becomes the major advocacy of researchers. Focus on how research defines fluency and the major significance it holds for speaking is discussed henceforth.

As cited in Al-Sibai’s research (2004) on promoting oral fluency of second language learners, Richards et al. (1985) characterize fluency as ‘the features which give speech the qualities of being natural and normal, including native-like use of pausing, rhythm, intonation, stress, rate of

speaking, and use of interjections and interruptions'. As for Murcia (2008:732), fluency is simply defined as 'interacting according to target language conventions and speaking comprehensibly at an average rate without long pauses or undue hesitation'. On the other hand, Folse (2006:30) judges fluency to be 'the amount of language produced in a task.'

Fluency-based language teaching basically aims at meaning comprehension while accounting for the ease or the non-hesitant flow of the spoken utterances during the message transmission and the correlating interaction between the speakers. In describing communicative fluency activities for language teaching, Klippel (1994:3-11) points to the importance of a message-oriented communication which, as he states, has its origins in the German language 'mitteilungsbezogenekommunikation' and which was coined by Black and Butzkamm (1977) while referring to 'those rare and precious moments in foreign language teaching when the target language is actually used as a means of communication'. (p.120)

In this regard, Proficiency guidelines of the American standardized test American Council for Teaching English as a Foreign Language (ACTFL) base fluency on speech criteria including (1) the total number of words spoken in a fixed time, (2) the number of silent pauses for thinking, (3) the number of repetition of words, phrases or clauses, (4) the number of repair or reformulation for correction, and (5) the mean length of utterance (MLU) as cited in Breiner-Sanders et al. (2000). As will be shown below, communicative language teaching approach has played a major role in promoting the status of the spoken skills in language classes stressing message comprehension and interaction.

### ***The Communicative approach to Language Teaching (CLT)***

A number of factors led to the emergence of the communicative approach to language teaching. Such factors include: first, developments in the fields of sociolinguistics, pragmatics, philosophy of language and communication theory (Hymes, 1972; Austin, 1961, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1979). Second, the work of applied linguists around the eighties, both British and American who were unsatisfied with the theories and methods of teaching, which prevailed in language classrooms before the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), to name but a few linguists: Wilkins (1974), Halliday (1976), Littlewood (1981) and Savignon (1972,1983,2008). Third, there are also historical factors that occurred similarly for example the Council of Europe was interested in promoting new language teaching approaches that could help European citizens learn the main languages of the European community more effectively. Under these different influences, awareness was raised that language, above all, functions as a system of communication among social groups, and therefore, language teaching /learning should focus on the communicative functions of language.

With the introduction of this new perception, the teaching of spoken skills in L2 classes gained a new status; the focus was now on training learners in speaking for communicative purposes targeting fluency rather than accuracy. A major concept that underlined CLT and triggered much research in language pedagogy for communicative purposes is Hymes' communicative competence. Other trends that have also contributed to the shift from accuracy to fluency based language teaching / learning include task-based language learning as briefly discussed below.

### ***Task based Learning and Wait time instruction***

In the recent years, research has shed light on task-based learning. In Nunan's (2009) view, for instance, real world tasks that do not involve the use of language at all and are non-linguistic are different from pedagogical tasks that imply necessarily the use of language and have to do with the transformation of *life-like situations into the classroom* and become pedagogical. He provides this definition to the notion of a classroom task:

A pedagogical task is a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form.(p.4)

The focus in this instance is at the same time on message comprehension, manipulation, interaction and production during a definite time. From a pedagogical perspective, research has identified some of the basic principles for task-based language teaching/learning (Nunan, 2009) that are applicable in class for productive skills. Such pedagogical stands have tremendously helped in marking the move towards fluency based learning. But for the application of such principles in the classroom, and for the importance it occupies in establishing the link between accuracy and fluency, teachers' feedback to students plays a major role.

### ***Feedback***

With the introduction of Swain's concept of 'comprehensible output', the idea of 'being pushed up' implied in comprehensible output has paved the way for more research on the area of teacher-student feedback. Swain (2008:471-484) reports Mackey's (2002) experiment which showed that students' perception of being pushed is highest when the feedback comes from the teacher.

Reporting Mackey's findings in that area, Swain registers that the fact that learners received teachers' feedback or what she identifies as '*being pushed up*' made the students establish *modifications* to suit their interlocutors with varying degrees according to setting, type of interaction and whether they interact with native speakers or nonnative speakers. Taking into account these findings, Swain concludes that "the students' perception of being *pushed* is *highest* when the feedback comes from the teacher and that it is *least* when it comes from a non native speaking peer".

## **2- Research Questions**

These empirical findings show the importance of teachers' feedback in the classroom in pushing students to make more repair or modification in their speaking which results in fluency and density of negotiation. A relevant question to raise here is: "What is the role of teachers' experience in leading this type of feedback?" and "does the number of teaching years affect the type of feedback teachers provide? The present article attempts to respond to these questions through empirical findings.

In the same vein, Williams (2008:684-691) points out that the main virtue of negotiation is focus on both form and meaning or the establishment of form-meaning connection. She refers to the distinction set by Lyster (1998) between the negotiation of meaning and the negotiation of

form. The latter is usually initiated by the teacher and in which case, message comprehensibility is not the problem, rather it is the different forms of feedback on error in message form.

Obviously, literature lends support to the crucial role of feedback for instruction in the learning process of language skills including speaking. The FonF theory, for instance, evokes the importance of input in *noticing* which Williams defines as ‘*the registration of a form or word that has not been attended to before*’. She also puts forward that ‘*what gets noticed*’ is influenced by a number of factors like *frequency*, *salience*, *situational factors*, and *time pressure*. Williams explains how for a new form to be recognized or noticed, these factors should be manipulated during an activity.

Besides, research makes it evident that instruction is tied to feedback in that feedback is what makes noticing possible. As a matter of fact, research about speaking identifies negotiation and feedback as criteria of judging good instruction where noticing takes place.

To conclude, interaction enhancement and negotiation density do indeed establish the interconnection between accuracy and fluency. Many speech strategists and specialists have demonstrated how instruction and the way teachers provide feedback do play a major role in learners’ speaking skills including the need for negative evidence. Empirical research in the present research tries to provide basic similarities or discrepancies in these theoretical bases and empirical findings with the Moroccan context. In this respect, the present research assumes that teachers’ experience does impact their instructional methods and feedback. Results of the empirical study conducted provide important correlating answers as will be shown hereof.

### 3. Sampling

A total number of forty teachers have contributed to this research throughout the whole process. Twenty teachers have received the researcher as an observer in their classes. This served for the filling in of the checklists while twenty other teachers have been individually interviewed. All these groups are included in the total of forty teachers who have accepted to report their experience through the teachers’ questionnaires. Under teachers’ request and for ethical considerations, the teachers’ names and place of work remained confidential. As to their gender, twenty three female teachers and seventeen male ones have taken part in this study among which eight males and twelve female teachers have also been visited in their classes. As to teachers’ teaching experience and for the importance it holds as an independent variable, it is described in detail in this table:

**Table 1 Teaching Experience**

Years of experience	Frequency	Percent
less than ten years	21	52,5
more than ten years	7	17,5
more than fifteen years	2	5,0
more than twenty years	10	25,0
Total	40	100,0

The table shows that nearly half of the teachers’ sample have an experience of more than ten years with a total corresponding percentage of 47.5% ( 17.5 plus 5.0 plus 25.0) including a significant proportion of

teachers 25% who have a considerably long experience as EFL teachers (more than 20 years) while 52.5% have an experience of less than ten years.

**Teachers’ interview**

An unstructured diagnosis interview has been issued in this research whose aim is to detect teachers’ perceptions, practices and problems while teaching speaking in secondary schools. The choice of an unstructured interview is based on the belief that it allows more freedom to teachers to pinpoint any remaining aspects that might serve research aims and which the closed-form questionnaire has not revealed.

The interview comes in two parts: the personal information part and the part related to questions. Part one helps to find out whether teachers’ experience as an independent variable does indeed interfere with their teaching performance and the feedback they provide during the teaching/learning process of the speaking skill. A ten-year-period teaching scale is ascribed. The derived answers are based on teachers’ responses in part one of the interview.

Part two of the interview aims at having teachers articulate their perceptions of this skill; talk about the difficulties they face while teaching it; the type of activities they teach; and the way they give instructions and feedback to the students when they carry out a speaking activity in their classes.

**Teachers’ questionnaire**

A closed-form questionnaire (Ary,Cheser&Razavieh,1990: 175) was also issued to complement the interview. The choice of a closed-form questionnaire is based on the belief that it can provide ample opportunities to direct teachers more towards the researcher’s aims, and also to consolidate and clarify the data extracted from the interviews. Practically, teachers’ questionnaire came to consolidate and provide more data after the first interviews conducted. Therefore, to prevent over generalised and unfocused data, the closed-form questionnaire is issued to complement the unstructured interviews and orient the investigation towards the research objectives. Involving two instruments serves, thus, to reinforce the validity of the data collected.

**4. The effect of experience on teachers’ instructional methods and feedback**

In this section, the focus will be on juxtaposing different types of teachers’ instructional methods and feedback with teaching experience in a linear by linear association to reveal whether there is any effect of the latter on the instruction and feedback provided to students. This will, thus, answer this research question:“Does experience have an influence on teachers’ instructional methods and feedback while teaching speaking skills?”

**Impact of experience on instruction and feedback**

Table 2 shows the procedure teachers use while giving instructions to their students with detailed frequencies and percentages. The p and q values sorted out reveal whether or not experience does affect the type of instructions used:

**Table2 Type of instructions and the impact of experience**

How do you give instructions to students in class?	A	U	S	R	N	M	T	q	p
1-You give instructions	25	10	3	1		1	40	9.230	.416

orally and you repeat them if necessary	62.5%	25%	7.5%	2.5%		2.5%	100%		
2-You write them on the black board	6 15%	7 17.5%	14 35%	8 20%	3 7.5%	2 5%	40 100%	9.336	.674
3-You give them once then you ask a student to repeat them or paraphrase them	2 5%	7 17.5%	9 22.5%	9 22.5%	11 27.5%	2 5%	40 100%	12.242	.426
4-You allow the use of Arabic or French to clarify your instructions	2 5%	2 5%	11 27.5%	13 32.5%	9 22.5%	3 7.5%	40 100%	10.738	.551
5-You wait enough time after asking students a question	12 30%	15 37.5%	7 17.5%	4 10%	1 2.5%	1 2.5%	40 100%	27.455	.007
6-You incite them to give responses right away	1 2.5%	4 10%	11 27.5%	11 27.5%	10 25%	3 7.5%	40 100%	7.361	.833
7-You interfere and you give the right answer		5 12.5%	8 20%	12 30%	11 27.5%	4 10%	40 100%	5.047	.830

\*p> .05 \*q= 9.230; 9.336; 12.242; 10.738; 27.455; 7.361; 5.047 respectively

According to the chi-square tests obtained, items 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 show the insignificance of the impact of experience on the type of instructions based on the corresponding q and p values registered (q = 9.230; 9.336; 12.242; 10.738; 27.455; 7.361; 5.047 respectively] and p= [.416; .674; .426; .551; .007; .833; .830 respectively] . From a look at the significance columns, a recognizable deviation of p level which is > .05 captures this insignificance. However, though item 5 in the chi-square test reveals the insignificance of experience for the type of instructions used, the corresponding values registered (q= 27.455 and p= .007) testify that waiting time instruction in comparison to the other values is a more significant one as the p level is just slightly beyond .005. For this specific item, the following chi-square test and crosstab have been included as an example:

**Table 3 Chi sq/test corresponding to wait- time instruction crosstab (4) below**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	27,455 <sup>a</sup>	12	,007
Likelihood Ratio	18,856	12	,092
Linear-by-Linear Association	5,527	1	,019
N of Valid Cases	39		

a. 18 cells (90,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,05.

**Wait Time Instruction Crosstab**

**Table 4 juxtaposition of teaching experience and wait time instruction Crosstab (4)**

	You wait enough time after asking students a question					Total
	always	usually	sometimes	rarely	never	

How long have you been teaching English?	9	7	3	1	0	20
less than ten years						
more than ten years	2	3	1	1	0	7
more than fifteen years	1	0	0	0	1	2
more than twenty years	0	5	3	2	0	10
Total	12	15	7	4	1	39

The above crosstab shows the juxtaposition of the time allowed for students to answer a question with teachers' experience. The frequencies registered show that novice teachers allow students enough time after asking them questions (F= 16 totaling 9 always and 7 usually) more often than the more experienced teachers (F= 5 who report that they usually do so). The corresponding chi-square has been sorted out in parallel using a linear by linear association:

After this brief presentation to the results pertaining to teachers' instructional tasks, the following section will shed light on implication of above results for research.

### ***The effect of teachers' experience on their instructional methods and feedback: implication for research***

The research question findings were concerned with testing the hypothetical effect of teachers' experience on their instructional methods and feedback while teaching the speaking skill. Generally speaking, the results obtained show the insignificance of the impact of experience on the type of instructional method teachers use based on the corresponding values and tests registered.

However, the values do show that wait- time instruction in comparison to other items records a higher significance as the juxtaposition of the time allowed for students to answer a question with teachers' experience registers a higher deviation. In addition, results show that novice teachers allow students enough time after asking them questions more often than the more experienced teachers do. For this specific item, previous empirical research has investigated how wait-time instruction may indeed be linked to learners' achievement especially during verbal interaction (Tobin, 1987; Duell, 1994). It could be stated according to research findings that wait-time instruction might be determinant in letting learners more time to prepare their speaking and modify or add on new things which may lead to improvements in their oral production.

### **Conclusion**

This research has traced the position and the route of the speaking skill as been historically recorded basing on various theoretical trends which have impacted its apprehension including the linguistic theories, the psychological and the sociolinguistic ones. It has also dwelt on the various pedagogical perspectives on speaking and demonstrated the impact of such interrelated areas as fluency and accuracy in language teaching. It has, thus, tackled the instructional approaches to the speaking skill according to these correlative approaches in an attempt to empirically measure the impactful significance of teaching experience and wait time instruction on teachers' feedback in Moroccan classes. The research findings reveal how wait time instruction is indeed crucial in letting learners make more improvement in their oral production.

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