An innovative Approach to Understanding Oral Problems in Foreign Language Learning and Communication

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Abstract
Oral communication problems can be major challenges to effective foreign language learning and communication. Despite years spend developing their knowledge of vocabulary and structure, learners often experience frustration at not being able to participate effectively in second language (L2) communication. The goal of this paper is to bring together several lines of isolated research and provide a comprehensive overview of the various problems in L2/EFL (English as foreign language) oral communication. Using interpersonal communication theories and models, this paper distinguishes three main sources of oral communication difficulties: (a) communicators (speakers/hearers), (b) the process of creating meaning and responding to a message, (c) context and situation. This new approach offers a systematic framework to achieve a coherent process-oriented description and a deeper understanding of the complex and multidimensional nature of EFL oral interaction problems. This paper challenges the traditional approach to the learners' role in oral problems with a new approach and will help language teachers and researchers to become more aware of the other underlying causes and processes contributing to problems in EFL communication.

Keywords: Foreign language pedagogy, EFL, oral Communication, speaking problems, learners' perception, Context of learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Ever-increasing use of English in international communications makes it necessary to learn how to use the language effectively. In our world without borders, English has become the 'international language' used in business, technological and academic communication. This trend of English globalization, as a worldwide phenomenon, makes it necessary to communicate with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and in a variety of settings. Nowadays, the majority of English users can be found in countries where the language is employed as a foreign or second language. Effective use of English as a second language (ESL) or foreign language (EFL) in oral communication is, without a doubt, one of the most common, but also highly complex activities people need to learn for their interpersonal

communication. For most people, learning how to speak in a second language (L2) is seen to be much more important than reading and writing (Ya-ni, 2007).

Achieving fluency in oral communication (i.e. speaking) is the main dream and the main motivation which a large percentage of learners bring to language classes (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Moreover, students of second/foreign language education programs are considered successful if they can communicate effectively in the language (Riggenback & Lazaraton, 1991). However, foreign language learners, despite spending years developing their semantic and syntactic competences, have all probably, at some point, experience the frustrating feeling of not being able to participate effectively in L2 oral communication. They often struggle with lack of the very resources needed to communicate their intended meaning, so that what they '*want* to say' must often be moderated by, or even subordinated to, what they *can* say (Ervin, 1979: 359). Anxiety, apprehension, nervousness and stress are common feelings reported by EFL language learners in L2 oral communication (Tanveer, 2007).

Although most EFL learners and perhaps some of the teachers believe that oral communication problems can be solved through "more practice" in vocabulary and structure, I think this is a simplified approach to such a complex and multi dimensional phenomenon. To develop the knowledge to deal with oral communication problem in an EFL context, researchers first need to know the real nature of those problems and the circumstances in which 'problems' are constructed. Unlike the communication among 'native/non-native' speakers (NS/NNS), 'non-native/non native' (NNS/NNS) speakers and their problems in L2 oral communication has up to now received little attention from language researchers. Reviewing briefly the process of interpersonal communication and problem-construction in EFL communication, this paper hopes to go deeper than current knowledge which is mostly limited to lexical problems of communication between NS/NNS.

A. *The nature of communication*

Communication can be defined as a social systematic process of creating symbolic meaning and responding between communicators, constructed in a specific context (Adler & Rodman, 2003). 'Social systematic' covers the multidimensional nature of interaction among 'communicators', 'symbolic meaning' and 'context'. Each communicator (speaker or hearer), as a main sub-system, needs *'input'* (past and present stimuli that give communicator his/her information about the worlds) to create meaning and respond to others participants in the process of communication surrounded with a 'fluid context' which is created and changes moment to moment depending on contextual variables (Tubes & Moss, 1994: 8).

For successful communication the message and meaning intended by the communicator should be correctly received and interpreted by the listener. In this paper, effective communication can be seen as a complex, creative activity that takes different forms depending on a variety of factors, including the characteristics of the communicator (perception of self, attitude towards language learning, the level of self expectation in language use, perception of others), the process of creating meaning and responding (linguistic components, the purpose of the interaction), and the context in which the interaction occurs.

Any shortage and interruption in any of three components of communication (communicators, meaning creation, and context) can result in 'unsuccessful communication'. Ogili (2005: 2) supports this idea but classifies the main sources of unsuccessful communication as the 'sender and receiver' instead of 'communicators', the 'message to be sent' and 'the channel for carrying the message' instead of 'symbolic meaning creation and responding'. This will be completed in this paper by adding 'context' as the third main source of misunderstanding.

B. Communicators-Oriented Problems in L2 Communication

Communicators in the process of communication are influenced by several 'inputs' and a deficiency in the quality of any of these 'inputs' can prevent successful communication. According to Adler and Rodman (2006), communicators' personal and social background, perception of 'self' and 'others' and verbal and non-verbal language skills are the main inputs influencing the process of communication. Communicators' personal background factors such as age, motivation, literacy and social class make the language learning experience of all individuals unique (Odlin, 1989: 129).

Learning and using language in a foreign context is strongly connected to the learner's constructions of self (Arnold, 2000). Most EFL communicators, due to their lack of opportunity for real life communication in the target language, identify 'how they speak' based on their 'image of self' constructed during their language training. Self perception and attitudes toward language are major inputs which pose a great challenge to learners' effective performance in L2 oral communication (Horwitz & Young, 1991: 28). However, Wenden (2001) argues that the effects of foreign and second language learners' beliefs in language acquisition have been a neglected variable. As success in learning a foreign language is particularly influenced by learners' attitudes toward the native speakers of the language (Gardner, 1985: 146), a review of some of the EFL learners' beliefs towards 'native speakers' of English will be useful (Gabrielatos, 1993):

➢ The native model of communication is perfect and native speakers are the only people who have full knowledge of oral communication in their language;

➢ EFL learners' model of communication is full of fault which makes them focus more on accuracy instead of whole language experiments;

➢ There is 'one and only one' correct way of producing responses and expressing ideas in foreign language communication;

➢ 'Native –like' expression is the only correct way of conveying meaning in an L2 oral communication;

➢ To perform as a 'perfect speaker' in L2 communication, the EFL learner must imitate the 'native speakers' performance';

➢ Imitating 'scripted' dialogues and interviews extracted from native discourse is the only method of learning 'native-like' expressions.

In fact, the above assumptions encourage the EFL learner to be a 'perfectionist' who speaks flawlessly, with no grammatical or pronunciation errors, and as easily as a native speaker (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002: 563). But the real features of speaking among English natives do not conform to the above assumptions. Brown and Yule (1983: 4) describe native English speakers with the following features:

➢ Most English native speakers usually produce utterances syntactically simpler than written language;

➢ Most utterances are connected by simple coordinate connectors such as *but*, *and*, *then*, *so*, *when*, *because*;

➢ Native speakers frequently use pausing and rhythm in their speech, and their speech is full of 'ungrammatical and incomplete sentences', 'general and non-specific phrases ("fillers")such as *sort of*, *that's right*, *somehow*, *...*', and 'interactive expressions like *well*, *oh*, *uhuh*'.

Reviewing the above characteristics of English native speakers show us how far EFL learners' attitudes are from the reality of English communication in its natural context. Such impossibly high performance standards create the ideal conditions for preventing learners from speaking unless they are certain of their success in self expression or comprehension of others (for details see Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002: 563). When they succeed, EFL learners speak more 'correctly' than native speakers do, since they have learnt to use complete sentences instead of authentic spoken English.

Learner's unrealistic attitudes towards L2 oral performance can be reinforced by neglecting the common characteristics of other EFL speakers. Dörnyei and Kormos (1998: 354) described L2 communicators based on de Bot's (1992) paper as people who '... tend to speak more slowly and hesitantly than L1 speakers do...., (their) knowledge of the target language is rarely complete, ...The L1 often influences the L2 verbalization process either by means of transfer or by intentional code switches.'

False attitudes toward language learning can result in negative feelings of self and performance among EFL language learners (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). Language scholars (e.g. Young, 1991: 428; Ohata, 2005: 138) found a direct relationship between erroneous, unrealistic beliefs and frustrating, anxiety-inducing experiences of language use. Language learners, in Choy and Troudi's (2006: 124) research, described their English language learning in secondary school as dependent on teachers, as difficult to learn, and as causing unwillingness and anxiety when using English. Ellis (2001) studying the metaphorical constructions of second language learners supports the previous results and found that language learners describe themselves as *sufferers* of inhibitive feelings of 'anxiety, pain and hardship', *strugglers* with and *problem-solver* of language difficulties and obstacles. One interesting result of this study was the similarity between researchers and learners in describing language learners as 'problem-solvers'. This means that the EFL learner's attitude toward language learning has basically a problem-oriented nature which enhances a low level of self-confidence and feeling of anxiety.

The perception of self and attitudes towards language along with learners' desire to be 'perfect' speakers can be considered as different parts of an interrelated and multi-dimension phenomenon related to learners' performance in the target language. Schunk (1991) and Bandura (1997) found that low self-confidence among language learners is related to their 'low performance' in language use. While negative feedback can cause lack of self-confidence and a breakdown in communication, positive feedback enhances communicators' performance and improves their self-confidence (Tubbs& Moss, 1994: 41). Gardner (1997) claims that the pupils who performed 'the best' were 'the confident ones'. Choy and Troudi (2006: 128) compared students' attitudes towards language learning with their attitudes after they arrived in college. They found that students became more interested in language learning and use in college because they received more respect, confidence and higher status in college from their success in English. Kurman (2001) also supports the idea that students' success in English learning and use will be reinforced by the prestige and benefits this success brings among families and social groups.

Perceptions of self, personal attitudes and background in language are not the only challenges to EFL communicators. Language as a part of the learner's identity is employed 'to convey this identity to other people' (Williams, 1994: 77). Learner's perception of others is another main input constructing the communication process in the target language. 'Others' in an EFL context are mainly teachers, classmates and friends as interlocutors in and out of school. The fear of 'losing face' in front of others is one of the sources of problems in EFL oral communication. Face is still of great importance to most EFL context such as the Far East and the Middle East. 'Saving face', not wanting to embarrass oneself by making mistakes prevents many students from speaking (Cohen & Norst, 1989, Zhu, 2003, Liu, 2005: 215). The embarrassment caused by any language imperfection in front of others can enhance negative feelings in EFL learners and affect their self construction and confidence. In addition, Abu-Ghararah (1990) in his study on Arab students found that in language classes 'the fear of being laughed at by classmates' is one of the factors preventing learners from speaking in class.

Although 'face' encourages learners to work hard to keep it in front of others, most of learners' time is wasted hiding their mistakes and weaknesses for fear of losing face. This psychological dilemma in L2 communication between willingness to speak up in the classroom and fear of losing face in front of others seems to be a ubiquitous phenomenon in second/foreign language classroom settings (Cohen & Norst, 1989). To protect themselves from being laughed at, learners prefer to be quiet, reticent and reluctant to speak English. This process results in the following vicious circle: 'the less they speak, the less they improve their speaking skills, and the more they are afraid of speaking' (Jianing, 2007).

Language teachers are most significant 'others' in EFL communication. EFL speakers' perception of their errors and their teachers' reactions to those errors in class activities can also discourage EFL learners from speaking. The learners, who believe they must speak a language with a perfect accent and grammatically accurate sentences, if receiving constant correction of their mistakes, may feel foolish in front of others (for details see Young, 1991). The problems will be more serious if the learner's partners (i.e. teachers or others in communication) perceive them as L2 'proficient' or 'fluent' rather than as learners of L2 with low level of L2 comprehension (Gass & Varonis, 1991). When communicators assume that they will be understood by their partners completely, they will less likely check their partners' understanding, and this can be the most 'dangerous' in EFL discourse.

The EFL learner's concept of 'self' and 'others' based on unrealistic assumptions and attitudes toward language and themselves can be considered as a source of lack of self confidence and breakdown in L2

communication. Following any failure in conveying meaning, the EFL learner's self image becomes more vulnerable which reinforces the vicious circle: 'the less they speak, the less they improve their speaking skills, and the more they are afraid of speaking'.

'Language skill' is another communicators' input whose deficiency can threaten effective communication. Problems in language skill refer back to the communicators' inability to overcome difficulties at different stages of speech production, and being fast enough to reply to what an interlocutor has just said. In fact, problems may be result from interruption in speakers' intention, lack of willingness and ability to cognise and encode, and hearers' perception and decoding essentially involving unsuccessful mappings of intention and linguistic form (Dua, 1990: 122 cited in House, et al. 2003: 4).

Dornyei and Scott (1995) also classified the sources of problems in language skills into four main categories: resource deficits, processing time pressure, own-performance problems, and other-performance problems.

'Resource Deficits' includes problems in producing a process of 'self-expression' caused by a deficiency in the speakers' L2 linguistic knowledge. Studies in L2 speech production usually focus on problem of resource deficits at different stages of speaking (i.e. Poulisse, 1997, Dörnyei & Kormos, 1998). This lack of resources in L2 speaking is due to:

- The L2 system of speech production not being as complete as the L1 system,
- The process of retrieving the words or structure not being as automatic as L1 speaking,
- The knowledge of L1 transfers and interrupts L2 production.

First language (L1) can be considered as one of the 'interrupters' in L2 communication. The role of L1on L2 performance refers to 'L1 transfer' which has long been of interest to second language acquisition researchers. In fact, L1 transfer has also been identified as a factor contributing to difficulties in effective L2 oral communication (de Bot, 1992, Do¨rnyei and Kormos, 1998, Poulisse, 1997).The 'similarities and differences between L1 and L2' (Odlin, 1989: 27) and 'the acquired knowledge of L1' (Ringbom, 1987: 44) have been studied as two issues related to 'L1 transfer' influencing learning and accurate use of a foreign language.

'Processing Time Pressure' includes problems of time pressure in the 'communication' process when L2 speakers are faced with speaking in natural, real-life communication. Oral communication in an L2 is

normally performed in real time, and this poses considerable challenges to EFL learners, who often have learned the target language in the classroom without any or with only limited opportunity to practice spontaneous L2 interaction. EFL learners tend to spend a great deal of time and effort negotiating their meaning and struggling to compensate for their L2 deficiencies (Dornyei & Scott, 1995). They often tend to give up and keep silent when they are faced with a problematic situation in L2 communication, or might even switch to their first language (L1). Although their knowledge of language is enough to communicate and exchange ideas, EFL speakers are unable to process language 'on time'- quickly enough to manage the conversation socially and to accomplish their communication goals. This problem becomes serious if we consider that usually non-native speakers are faced with the additional constraint of resource deficits in constructing their messages in a limited time. As been mentioned before, they wrongly believe they need to (or are told to) "learn" more vocabulary and grammar, "memorize" more native like conversation models, and "practice" speaking faster in order to avoid these difficulties in the future. However, Dornyei (1995) believes they require devices to give them the opportunity to save time in communication and to get back 'on-line'. L2 communicators need to plan ahead and to manage their problems, rather than just avoiding them.

'Own-Performance Problems' includes deficiencies perceived in one's own language output, after producing 'self-expression' and during the continuous process of monitoring one's own speech. The speaker realizes that what has been said is not correct, and these perceived errors of speech can occur in three forms (Dornyei & Scott, 1995): (a) expressing incorrect speech, (b) expressing less than perfect speech, and (c) the speaker's uncertainty about correctness or meaningful speech. The most useful strategy to compensate this problem is 'self-repair'.

'Other-Performance Problems' include comprehension problems perceived in the interlocutor's performance. One reason for this can be that the L2 speaker has not acquired the words, idioms, or grammatical structures the conversational partner is using. Tubbs and Mass (1994) classify the source of other-performance interferences into two categories: 'Technical' and 'Semantic'. Technical interference covers factors that cause trouble in the receiver's perception of message, either because of the sender's problem in sending clear message, or because of physical and environmental factors disrupting the perceived message. Semantic interference, on the other hand, occurs when a receiver interprets a different meaning to the intended message. The symbolic nature of message and different interpretation of same symbol have been mentioned as the main reason for the above problems. Dornyei and Scott (1995) in another study categorized other-performance problems into two groups depending on what the speaker

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finds problematic: a) something perceived to be incorrect (technical interference in Tubbs and Mass,1994), (b) lack or uncertainty of understanding something fully (semantic interference in Tubbs and Mass,1994).

C. *Creating and Responding Meaning*

The 'process of creating symbolic meaning and responding' consists of the following themes (Wood, 2004: 23; Verderber & Verderber, 2003: 7):

- 'Symbolic' refers to symbols or signs as abstracts, arbitrary and ambiguous representations of things, ideas or events,
- 'Meaning' are ideas and feelings, which communicators use symbols to create (Verderber &. Verderber, 2003: 8),
- 'Creating and responding' involves creating a relationship by simultaneously sending, decoding and receiving messages, intentionally and unintentionally.

Symbols, as words, sounds and actions communicators used to present meaning, are 'arbitrary constructions that represent a communicator's thoughts' (Adler & Rodman, 2006: 77). Having an 'abstract' and 'arbitrary' nature, symbols are not concrete, tangible constructions and do not have an intrinsic, natural relation to the phenomena they refer to. Thus, the meaning of symbols depends on the people using it in the process of interaction.

Interruption in any of the three stages of process of creating symbolic meaning and responding' can result in, at least, two groups of difficulties: problems in expressing messages (self-expression), and understanding messages expressed by other people (comprehension). Self expression problems include difficulties in 'what to say' and 'how to say an expression' carrying a message in L2 communication. L2 speakers usually need to pay more attention than L1 speakers to express their intended message, particularly when they are at the initial stage of communication and expressing their meaning. Self expression has been recognised by Rababah (2005) as the main communicative problem of Arab students when she reviewed her colleagues' research on Arab learners of English. 'Comprehension' problems refer to difficulties in receiving and interpreting the meaning of message sent by speakers. This can be a result of a lack of language knowledge in the receiving, the sender's problem in sending a clear and comprehensible message, or contextual interruption. As complete understanding requires complete

agreement on the meaning of symbols between different users, it is not an unusual if communicators experience misunderstanding in communication. For L2 communication in which people using L2 symbols with different perceptions, the problem of misunderstanding is more serious.

D. Misunderstanding and Symbolic Meaning

Language use and communication are pervasively and even naturally flawed, partial, and problematic (Coupland *et al.* 1991: 3). Communicators who do not share a native language, or who share a native language but are speaking in their L2, may have to deal with misunderstanding. Misunderstanding has been studied in the fields of speech act theory, sociolinguistics, artificial intelligence, discourse analysis, and second language acquisition. Tzanne (2000: 4) defines it as follows: 'A misunderstanding occurs when a communication attempt is unsuccessful because what the speaker intends to express differs from what the hearer believes to have been expressed.'

Misunderstanding in recent years has attracted more attention from second language acquisition researchers. According to Adler and Rodman (2003), complete understanding between communicators is not necessary and not possible. Coupland *et al.* (1991: 2) argue that communication researchers pay little attention to the fact that most communicators are sometimes 'sceptical, crafty and less than veracious'. They believe that although the rationale underpinning most communication research considers misunderstanding and problems as a matter of 'transient annoyance', 'misunderstanding' may play a positive role, contributing to the process of ongoing interaction and human communication. However, this role of misunderstanding in communication has been totally ignored in previous studies.

Turning to lack of understanding, these phenomena can be characterized in the following way: 'lack of understanding occurs when a receiver cannot connect incoming information with stored information'. There seems to be at least two ways in which this situation can arise:

1. Relevant information is missing;
2. A relevant strategy for connecting incoming with stored information is missing (e.g. one knows what a bed is but one has no strategy for connecting the Swedish word säng (bed) with this information) (Allwood & Abelar, 1984).

In a more extended perspective, communication scholars introduce two approaches to study misunderstanding: intra-personal / linguistic; interpersonal/ interactional (House, 2003: 23; Gass &

Varonis, 1991: 142). Intra-personal/linguistics approach includes interruption in the referential meaning of individual utterances caused by the linguistic and sociolinguistic differences between languages.

Inter-personal/interactional misunderstanding, on the other hand, refers to the socio-cultural difference between communicators which are established interpersonally and cannot be attributed to either participant in communication. In fact, socio-cultural differences can produce difficulties in conversational inferences and misinterpretation for communicators, even though both participants share a referential meaning. Thinking about the link between external context and the process ongoing in interaction, Tzanne (2000) classified an external source of misunderstanding as follows: 'Discourse roles associated with participant structure, e.g. hearers as auditors, bystanders, and audience; Social roles classified into societal, professional activity and personal roles; Situational frames; and Physical properties and settings.'

Different socio-cultural rules and the lack of participants' sociolinguistic knowledge have been identified as problem-constructors in L2 communication. Summarizing studies on socio-cultural misunderstanding between non native speakers (NNS) and English native speakers, Gass and Varonis (1991) pointed out the differences in the socio-cultural rules (politeness, apologies and request) between Hebrew and English as sources of misunderstanding on the part of NNS. They make this conclusion as an agreement with Milory (1984: 24) that 'the locus of miscommunication may be specifically 'pragmatic' rather than 'structural' due to participants' reference to their L1 rather than L2'.

However, few studies pay attention to this problem in the EFL context. One reason might be that in EFL situations where socio-cultural rules are the same or nearly the same, misunderstanding will occur if the communicators do not share the common pragmatic (socio-cultural) rules, i.e. speakers from different society or with different social background. However, to show what kinds of problem can be caused by socio-cultural rules, I will briefly describe the common characteristics of the EFL context and the particular rules governing the language learning and use in this context.

E. Contextual factors in English Learning and Using as foreign language

Learning and using a language takes place in, and even depends on, a social context (Choy & Troudi, 2006: 121). The EFL context is constructed by the teachers, peers, and the whole educational system, and is shared by most language learners. The educational system, as main context for learning and practicing L2 communication, shapes EFL learners' background as potential L2 communicators. EFL learners generally share a common mother tongue and have little or no natural exposure to the foreign language

outside the classroom. Therefore, the classroom constitutes the primary (or only) target-language speech community for most of the language learners, who are remote from a larger target-language community. Non-native-speaking teachers and learners form the basis for most of their interaction in the target language. They are required to use a language in class that is different from the languages spoken in their home and community. Thus, language learners are frequently and increasingly each other's primary resource for language learning.

In this system, communicators usually learn to use English from compulsory primary education to university level. EFL learners, at all of these stages, have to study English for credit. They are required to learn English a few hours a week during each academic year. The Ministry of Education in the EFL context usually plays major role in planning and supervising the learning English in schools. In addition, the Ministry of Education often sponsors, authorizes, finances and coordinates the compiling of English textbooks for all levels. However, there is an extended and still growing private sector, providing English courses for a variety of learning groups, even at primary school and even pre-school levels. In almost all private schools functioning within the three levels of general education in my research setting namely-primary, junior and high schools, English receives striking attention and probably extra hours of practice (Talebinezhad & Aliakbari, 2002: 21).

In spite of this, opportunities for interaction with NSs are all too infrequent and often simply impossible, and the written skill has received primacy over its spoken forms in EFL educational contexts. This orientation may result from a focus on learning using traditional grammar-translation methodology, since grammar only explains how to write correctly (Malmberg, 1993: 164, c.f. Skold, 2008: 1). Learners of English sometimes notice that they speak more accurately than native speakers do, since they have learnt to use complete sentences instead of authentic spoken English.

At university level, English is also an obligatory course for all students, usually taught for a specific academic purpose, and not for oral communication. During the period of English learning, they can practice English through English newspapers, English movies and Internet communication. Therefore, when students graduate, they have been learning English for several years. However, even for students studying in the Department of English and Language Studies who have probably been exposed to English for a longer time, L2 oral communication remains mostly limited to class interaction rather than real communication.

Based on a review of current literature on interpersonal communication, context may consist of the following factors (Verderber &. Verderber, 2003: 7):

- Physical (environmental factors such as place, time and other physical condition; the distance between communicators, seating arrangement),
- Social (different class groups, different genders, different racial or ethnic groups, different social roles and norms, dominance, status and power),
- Psychological (the moods and feelings each participant brings to communication, intimacy, affiliated need, willingness to make commitments),
- Cultural (the beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, social hierarchies, religion, notions of time, and the roles of the group of people),
- Historical and Relationship (the background of the previous communication between communicators, the nature of the relationship existing between the participants, the participants' view towards relationship, the way and the purpose of their relationship).

The physical environment in the EFL context limits communication to the classrooms most of which are not physically appropriate (i.e. the distance between communicators, seating arrangement) and to a few hours per week.

Social and cultural values and beliefs in the EFL context can prevent communicators from interacting in L2. Since learners' beliefs about teaching methods are dominated by a non-communicative approach in other subjects on the curriculum, EFL learners will often resist a communicative language teaching approach which asks language learners to practice communication in group of peers or in front of the class. In an EFL setting, peers may discourage learners from speaking English in class (Abu-Ghararah, 1990, Liu, 2005, p.215). Jiaing's (2007) findings from his observations of EFL classes show that even a little impatience signalled by the learner's classmates or other audiences can be immediately received by the speakers, which in turn, greatly inhibits their willingness to communication. Even worse, in some EFL contexts, language teachers do not always ask students to speak in the target language (Abu-Ghararah, 1990), do not promote pair or group discussion in the to practice L2 oral communication skill and do more error correction rather than facilitation in the language classroom (Tanveer, 2007: 17). These contextual elements based on cultural and social beliefs prevent EFL learners from L2 oral interaction.

Historical and Relationship environment, due to the similarity of communicators' experience in learning and using language from the same educational system, this has a loose relationship with EFL communication. Communicators' view of relationships in L2, their background of practicing in L2 communication, the way and the purpose of their relationship in L2 are constructed with little diversity. The situation constructed based on these contextual factors influences the atmosphere of communication in the classroom. EFL learners "learn" English in an artificial setting in language classes. As they do not have much opportunity to communicate in L2, their English speaking is not fluent nor proficient enough to use in real L2 interactions.

II.   CONCLUSION

How are problems constructed in EFL oral communication? This paper launched a communicative perspective to understand the nature of oral problems in foreign language learning and communication, a perspective which provides a means of being more familiar with the complexities of problem-construction in EFL oral communication. Using a systematic approach to go deeper in understanding the nature of problem-constructing process, this perspective consists of the three components as main sources of problem-makers: Communicators (speaker and listener), Message, and Context. Oral problems can be caused by L1 transfer, lack of L2 vocabulary and structure, false attitudes toward L2 and its native speakers, perfectionism, lack of self confidence in language proficiency, and fearing of loosing face in front of others. These factors become 'inputs' for the creating meaning and responding process where communicators probably are faced with problems in self-expression and comprehension of others to convey their meaning in an unsupportive and artificial L2 context.

An appropriate model of English teaching is therefore one enabling EFL communicators to convey their meaning despite the problematic conditions of English comprehension and self-expression. To have a more appropriate model for teaching in an EFL context, the following changes in approach, perception, methodology and curriculum are needed:

The feature and structure of EFL learning and communication discourse differ from those occurring in other discourse e.g. ESL or NS-NNS interactions, and language teachers need to become aware of the 'uniqueness' of EFL discourse and make their students aware of it, too; the perception and approach to language and language education in the EFL context needs to be reconstructed based on a unique EFL discourse to support and encourage students to use language in context for their communicative needs;

class climate needs to be balanced between 'challenge' and 'support' to decrease learners' unreal attitudes toward L2 communication, fear of spoken errors and losing face in front of others; teaching methods require a variety of techniques to support pair and group discussion in L2 and help learners to understand that language errors are a normal and acceptable part of everyone's language learning experience; the curriculum requires localizing the content of English materials to make links with the students' needs and culture; strategy training for dealing with problems in L2 communication should be integrated into current material of language education and give students opportunities to practice them in classroom activities.

Studies on EFL oral communication and learning are still scarce. Future research needs to focus on studying the features and structure of EFL discourse, its similarity and differences with lingua franca (language using by people with different mother tongues) discourse and the effects of globalization on making problems and strategies used in L2 communication. The 'intelligibility and comprehensibility' in EFL communication even with the problematic foreign accent and intonation in L2 speaking is one of the issues requiring more attention from language researchers. Language teachers in an EFL context need to do action research to familiarize themselves with their learners' most pressing needs and the different problems they face in language communication. The educational system in the EFL context needs to adopt the above changes to deal with the challenges of globalization.

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