THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN METALINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE AND SPEAKING ANXIETY OF ELT STUDENTS

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Abstract
The term metalinguistic knowledge that refers to the knowledge of technical and semi-technical linguistics terms is a highly tested proficiency in high-stake proficiency tests, especially those which assess grammatical accuracy, such as TOEIC and TOEFL CBT. In the light of recent studies showing positive correlation between metalinguistic knowledge and language proficiency, this study aims to investigate two things: i) What metalinguistic features of English can be recognized by ELT students? ii) What is ELT student teachers’ speaking anxiety level? iii) Is there a relationship between ELT students’ metalinguistic knowledge and English speaking anxiety? This is a quantitative study that employs survey method. The data was collected from 126 ELT teacher-students studying at Aksaray University in 2016-2017 academic year spring term through metalanguage test developed by Tokunaga (2014) including five sections, (namely parts of speech; parts of sentences; tenses, voices, and moods; other and grammaticality judgement ) and 40 items and English Language Speaking Anxiety scale with 18 items. The results presented that majority of the students had average level of metalinguistic awareness although they were expected to be competent in metalinguistic knowledge because of the grammar courses they received during their training. It was also seen that majority of the participating students had intermediate level of speaking anxiety. A statistically significant correlation was not observed between metalinguistic knowledge and overall speaking anxiety scores of the participants. However, a negative moderate relationship was obtained in grammaticality judgement test and speaking anxiety.

Keywords: Speaking anxiety, Metalinguistic knowledge, ELT students

INTRODUCTION
It has been acknowledged in the literature that there is a close relationship between foreign language learners’ linguistic knowledge and their language proficiency. Hymes (1972) coined the term communicative competence as our competence which helps the learners to convey and interpret messages and negotiate meanings and claimed that linguistic competence is one of the vital components of it (as cited in Brown, 2000). It could be argued that linguistic knowledge apparently contributes to the learners’ language capacity as it encompasses core elements for building up sentences and giving meaning to the utterances. However, metalinguistic knowledge which was defined by

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Venuti (2015) as being conscious of the peculiar properties of language, being able to grasp patterns in different languages, knowing the metalanguage that is the common vocabulary to talk about language, having a sound knowledge of language structure which turns into high levels of Expectancy Grammar and finally being able to verbalize it and its role in the learners’ linguistic performance is still under discussion.

Although there is a confusion about the importance of metalinguistic awareness in the research community, its contribution to language learning is a stubborn fact. Euch and Huot (2015) states that it is essential to promote the development of metalinguistic awareness of learners as it helps them be in control of their communication skills in the oral and written modes. Gombert (1997) suggested that it is metalinguistic knowledge that may assist second language learners to give their attention on written and oral linguistic input effectively.

A. Metalinguistic Knowledge and Language Proficiency

The literature offers contradictory findings in terms of the relationship between metalinguistic awareness and language proficiency and so there is no clear consensus among the researchers if they are really interrelated or not. Although the number of studies on metalinguistic awareness is relatively few as it is shadowed by the popularity of Communicative Language Teaching and its variations which push explicit grammar instruction into the background, it is still possible to encounter with studies underlining the significant relationship between metalinguistic knowledge and success in learning another language.

Elder and Manwaring (2004) conducted a study on 91 first and second year students studying Chinese as a foreign language in Australia and tested if there was a relationship between knowledge of Chinese grammar and success in studying Chinese. The findings revealed that Chinese grammatical knowledge is a good predictor of success in studying the language at the university level. More recently Roehr (2006) investigated metalinguistic knowledge in terms of correction, description, and explanation ability and written measure of second language proficiency correlation using a language test and metalinguistic test which were administered in different sessions. The participants were 60 mostly L1 English-speaking learners enrolled as full-time undergraduate students at a British university studying advanced German. Roehr (2006) observed that a strong correlation existed between metalinguistic knowledge test and language proficiency test in the participants’ answers and speculated that metalinguistic awareness of language may lead to success in that language. In his wide scale study Tokunaga (2014) followed the same procedure as Roehr (2006) and compared the test scores of 1200 first and second year non-English majors who were administered a metalinguistic knowledge scale which was developed by the writer himself and TOEIC BRIDGE test. On the basis of the collected data, Tokunaga (2014) found a significant correlation and concluded that metalanguage awareness may assist second language learning process. On the contrary, the literature presents some other studies on language awareness and language proficiency following similar procedures but offering contradictory findings contrary to those mentioned above which could be attributed to the contextual factors and learner differences.

As an example, Alderson et al. (1997) administered a metalinguistic knowledge test and language aptitude and French linguistic proficiency tests to 509 first year undergraduate learners of French and came up with a weak relationship among them. Although Alderson expected that students with higher levels of metalinguistic knowledge perform better at French, have greater level of accuracy, or that they improve their French proficiency at higher rates than other students, there were no findings supporting the presumed theory. In a similar vein, Alipour (2014) applied tests of metalinguistic knowledge and linguistic
knowledge to thirty-eight university students and looked for the accuracy in both tests. The data provided moderate positive correlation between second language learners’ metalinguistic awareness and their ability to correct, describe and explain second language errors and their second language proficiency. In this respect, it is possible to claim that linguistic awareness and its meta-dimension have impact on the language learning process to some extent as it is presented by the relevant literature.

B. Metalinguistic Knowledge and Speaking Anxiety

In the past three decades there has been a great deal of research into second or foreign language anxiety and the findings clearly indicated that too much anxiety has a debilitating effect on the language learning process (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Horwitz & Young, 1991; Aida, 1994; Saito & Samimy, 1996) and this negative outcome is mostly associated with the learners’ oral language performance. Although the researchers tried hard to find out the underlying reasons behind foreign language anxiety, it appears that language learners may experience some inherent levels of anxiety which could result from personal concerns when participating in oral activities as mentioned by Horwitz (2001).

In spite of numerous studies on general foreign language anxiety and its effect on foreign language performance, research exclusively focused on the relationship between metalinguistic knowledge and foreign language speaking and speaking anxiety and has been scarcely any. Nevertheless, it is possible to encounter with some studies underlining the role of metalinguistic knowledge and accelerated metalinguistic awareness in bilingual children who were superior to monolingual children at speaking tasks (Campbell & Sais, 1995).

In this respect, this study has grown out of the concern if there has been a relationship between English speaking anxiety of English Language Teaching (ELT) students at Aksaray University and their metalinguistic knowledge as it has been observed that speaking anxiety is a common phenomenon among ELT students and producing error free accurate utterances was put forward as the most frequently pronounced reason behind.

Within this context this study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What metalinguistic features of English can be recognized by ELT student teachers?
2. What is ELT student teachers’ speaking anxiety level?
3. Is there a relationship between ELT student teachers’ metalinguistic knowledge and English speaking anxiety?

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employs a quantitative research design and survey method that is generally used to measure or evaluate the general characteristics of a topic, universe or program (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Creswell (2013) states that quantitative studies employ a deductive approach in research as the researcher advances a theory at first and collects data in order to test whether the proposed theory is correct or not. In this respect, the present study aims to verify or refute if there is a relationship between metalinguistic knowledge and speaking anxiety using a survey design which provides quantitative descriptions of attitudes or opinions of a sample population that is composed of ELT students.

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A. Participants

The participants of the study were composed exclusively of students studying at Aksaray University, English language teaching department. For the selection of the participants, convenient sampling was employed. The participants are selected from the students who are conveniently available to participate in the study without any predefined selection criteria. All subjects are invited to participate in the study and the research was conducted with the volunteering participants. The following table illustrates the distribution of participants.

Table 1. Distribution of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prep</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table clearly illustrates that the study was conducted with a total of 126 students. Out of 126 participants, 32 of them were preparatory class students who form roughly one fourth of the total participants. 26 first year students participated in the study with a percentage of 20.6. Only 15 sophomore students volunteered for the study and their group was the fewest in number with a percentage of 11.9. Junior class students group were the highest in number with 35 and 27.8 percentage. The last group, senior class students, were 18 in number. It can be observed from the table that more than two thirds of the participants are prep, freshman and junior students and there is not an equal distribution among the groups as the students participated in the research on a voluntary basis.

B. Instruments

In order to attain the objectives of the study, two instruments were administered to the participating students namely, metalinguistic awareness test and speaking anxiety scale.

a) Metalinguistic Awareness Test: The test used in the present study was developed by Tokunaga (2014). It included 40 items written in five sections namely parts of speech, parts of sentence, voices tenses moods, other and find the mistake sections. For the first two sections the students are supposed to find the correct terms for the underlined speech and sentence parts. In voices, tenses and moods part, the students needed to find out the correct tenses or moods for the given sentences. In the other section, the participants needed to identify plural, regular adjective, third person “s” etc. in the given sentences and choose the name of parts of speech for the underlined words. In the last find the mistake section, the students are expected to find the grammatically incorrect sentences and choose the most appropriate explanations for each sentence among the given options.

b) Speaking Anxiety Scale: The scale was originally created by Horwitz et al. (1986) in order to test foreign language anxiety level of learners with a five point Likert scale and included 18 items. The Cronbach alpha value of the scale for the present study was .886 suggesting that the items in the scale have high internal consistency statistically.

C. Data Analysis

In order to answer research questions descriptive statistics and bivariate analysis were applied using SPSS 20. For the first and second research questions, descriptive statistics
was used and frequency analysis was tested for the purpose of drawing conclusions from the mean value. For the third research question, correlation analysis was carried out as it was planned to investigate if two variables, metalinguistic knowledge and speaking anxiety of participating ELT students, are linearly or non-linearly related.

III. FINDINGS

The first research question intended to measure ELT students’ metalinguistic recognition from preparatory class to senior levels and tried to find out which metalinguistic features are easy and which are difficult from the students’ perspectives. The following table presents the results of the frequency test.

Table 2. Recognition of Metalinguistic Features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Total Points</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parts of the Sentences</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parts of Speech</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.81</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenses-Voices-Moods</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammaticality Judgement</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25.25</td>
<td>4.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from the table above, the participants did best in speech part patterns. The mean value of 126 participants is 9.81 out of 11. On the contrary, grammaticality judgement part in which the students find the grammatically incorrect sentences and choose the most appropriate explanations for each sentence among the given options is the most difficult part as the mean value of 126 students is 4.21 out of 9. In total, the mean score of correct answers for all participants is 25.25 out of 40 when all test and items are considered which corresponds to % 62.5 that is above the average level.

The second research item was questioning participants’ speaking anxiety level. The table below illustrates the results of speaking anxiety scale.

Table 3. Speaking Anxiety Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Anxiety</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>76.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table clearly presents that the majority of the students participating in the study have intermediate level of anxiety with a percentage of 76.2. The number of students with low level of anxiety is quite few in number when compared with the other groups. Only nine students participating in the study expressed that they have low level of anxiety. The number of students who have high level of anxiety is 21, which forms 16.7 percentage of all participating students.

The third research question explored the correlation between metalinguistic knowledge and speaking anxiety of the participants. The following table shows the results of Pearson Correlation Analysis.
As the table displays, a statistically significant relationship was not observed between speaking anxiety and metalinguistic knowledge in general. However, a negative moderate degree of relationship was observed in one sub dimension when each part was subjected to the analysis. Speaking anxiety and grammaticality judgement test is negatively correlated and the degree of correlation is moderate as $R$-value stands between $0.30$ and $0.49$ interval.

### IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This study emerged as a result of the concern about the reason behind speaking anxiety of ELT students at Aksaray University which is at a critical level most of the time and cause communication failure. As a result, it was thought that there could be a relationship between metacognitive knowledge of students and their speaking anxiety level as they were struggling hard to provide accurate discourse and error free utterances during their speech in English. Besides it was also planned to investigate metacognitive awareness and speaking anxiety level of the participating students.

First of all, although the students were expected to have high level of metalinguistic awareness and knowledge as they received explicit grammar instruction during their preparatory and freshmen years because it was thought that linguistic competence is the core component of communicative competence and prospective English teachers should serve as an ideal model with his/her competencies in all areas of English, it was seen that majority of the students have average level of metalinguistic knowledge which could be regarded as a valuable incentive to review the program and course content for certain changes for the purpose of training English teachers with rich metalinguistic knowledge. This is because language teachers should have a reasonable understanding of the perplexities and different parts of the system, including the ability to correct, improve, and explain ungrammatical structures (Arndt, Harvey & Nuttall, 2000; Borg, 2011; Hadjioannou & Hutchinson, 2010). In this respect, the study provides parallel findings with the study conducted by Munallim and Raymundo (2014) who also observed low performance of English teachers in Metalinguistic tests and offered review of the grammar treatment in teacher training programs.

The descriptive analysis on recognized metalinguistic features by ELT student teachers shows that they are more successful in the parts that require basic metalinguage awareness entailing more analytic investigation than holistic analysis. This result could be attributed to language assessment policy in Turkey that shapes prospective English teachers attitudes towards language and language learning which compels students to pay attention to form and ignore meaning and function as mentioned by Hatipoğlu (2016).

The majority of the participants have intermediate level of speaking anxiety which was an expected outcome before setting out for the present study as speaking anxiety is a
common phenomenon among English learners in Turkey. In this respect, the study presents similar findings offered by Tüm & Kunt (2013), Subasi (2010) who also studied with EFL student teachers and obtained high speaking anxiety level among prospective English teachers.

A statistically significant correlation was not observed between metalinguistic knowledge and overall speaking anxiety scores of the participants. In this sense, the finding is consistent with those claimed by Alderson et al. (1997), Elder et al. (1999). However, a negative moderate relationship was obtained in grammaticality judgement test and speaking anxiety. This finding was interpreted as grammaticality judgement test requires higher order thinking skills as it entails finding out incorrect sentences among a group of sentences and offering correct answer for each when compared with other parts. In this respect, when the success rate increases in this section, the speaking anxiety level decreases. Thus, grammar courses offered in teacher training courses should include meaning oriented activities that promote and support higher order thinking skills instead of providing students with meaningless form based mechanical drills.

### V. CONCLUSION

Overall, although the literature presents controversial findings with respect to the role of metalinguistic knowledge and awareness in bringing any benefits in language learning and performance, its contribution to the linguistic competence of the language learners in terms of awareness of language patterns and functions is nonignorable for the prospective teachers of English language teaching as linguistic competence is one of the prerequisites for a language teacher in order to ensure successful language learning. In this sense, metalinguistic awareness test administered to the participants in the present study provides valuable findings by inducing incentives for revising and reorganizing grammar teaching syllabus and programme at Aksaray University English language teaching department.

Even though the study arose out of the curiosity that there could be a correlation between metalinguistic knowledge and speaking anxiety and oral language performance of the participants, in other words, high level of metalinguistic knowledge would result in low level of speaking anxiety and in turn better speaking performance, the obtained findings indicated that metalinguistic knowledge and speaking anxiety are two separate constructs which are independent from each other. This does not mean that there is no relationship between metalinguistic knowledge and language proficiency which was investigated in the previous studies and found a certain degree of correlation as language proficiency is a comprehensive and versatile entity that is context specific.

### REFERENCES


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