



## Awareness of Speaking Abilities in English over Four Years of Undergraduate Study

### Dört Yıllık Lisans Eğitimi Süresince İngilizce Konuşma Becerisi Farkındalığı

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper describes and discusses changes in language awareness during undergraduate study for a group of language and literature students. The paper uses qualitative, descriptive methods to analyse reports about the students' speaking elicited at five points during their studies. The paper identifies cognitive, affective and social aspects of how the students described their language knowledge, abilities, learning targets and strategies. The descriptions evolve from brief, general views of language and learning into more detailed and focused viewpoints. The students notice more about their language use and learning targets are described more fully and more clearly. Their learning strategies move from inside to outside the classroom, activities change from solitary and individual to social activities, and the students are better able to describe their speaking through engagement with CEFR criteria. Anxiety, experience, discourse for describing language and social learning strategies are features of the changing awareness displayed by the students.

**Keywords:** language awareness, engagement with language, speaking skills.

**ÖZ:** Bu makalenin konusu İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı (İDE) öğrencilerinden oluşan bir grubun, lisans eğitimi süresince dil farkındalığındaki değişikliklerdir. Makalede öğrencilerin eğitimi boyunca beş farklı noktada konuşma becerileri ile ilgili öğrencilerden alınan raporları incelemektedir. Raporda öğrencilerin dil bilgileri, becerileri, öğrenme hedefleri ve stratejilerini bilişsel, duygusal ve sosyal açıdan ele alınmıştır. Öğrencilerin dille ve öğrenme ile ilgili açıklamaları ilk başta kısa ve genel iken daha sonra detaylı ve odaklı hale gelmiştir. Öğrenciler zaman geçtikçe kullandıkları dil ve öğrenme hedefleri hakkında daha çok farkındalık elde etmiş, bu konularda daha bütünlüklü ve açık betimlemelerde bulunmuşlardır. Öğrenme stratejileri sınıftan dış dünyaya taşınmış, yaptıkları aktiviteler yalnız yapılanlardan sosyal aktivitelere evrilmiş ve öğrenciler CEFR kriterlerini kullanarak konuşma becerilerini açıklamak konusunda gelişme göstermiştir. Öğrencilerde görülen farkındalık değişimi, endişe, deneyim, dili betimleme söylemleri ve sosyal öğrenme stratejileri başlıkları altında toplanmıştır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** dil farkındalığı, dil ilişkisi, bilişsel, duygusal, sosyal etkileşim, konuşma becerisi.

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## Introduction

Language learning is a process that occurs through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1962). In this process there is an ‘organic interdependence between language learning and social interaction’ that implies awareness should be promoted ‘in all aspects of language development... to their fullest and richest extent’ (Lier, 1998, pp. 129-130). In view of this strong relationship, language and learning awareness and interaction are encouraged in language teaching pedagogy. The aim of this paper is to look at how language awareness developed for a group of English Language and Literature (ELL) students over four years of study taking a qualitative, descriptive approach. In this paper the author attempts to understand the processes that took place during the four years of study and aims to inform practitioners and researchers of how language awareness developed for this group of students. The author first looks at some of the ways in which awareness of language and language learning has been researched: as metacognition (Wenden, 1987), as learner autonomy (Holec & Huttunen, 1997; Little, 2008) or as Engagement With Language (Svalberg, 2018). These approaches all aim to understand the relationship between awareness, language use and learning and to promote success. The author goes on to describe the methods, data, analysis and participants in the study, using an analytical framework based on Engagement with Language (EWL), before presenting results of the analysis in the categories of cognitive, affective and social aspects of students’ engagement with language.

Metacognition, understood as thinking about thinking, or knowing about knowing, involves a number of processes and strategies. These processes consist of preparing and planning, selecting, monitoring, combining and evaluating strategies and the use of these strategies (Anderson, 2002). Metacognition has been researched quantitatively and qualitatively in order to describe and analyse what learners know about their own learning (person knowledge), what they need to do in English (task knowledge), and how to learn (strategic knowledge) (Wenden, 1998). Many studies of strategy use involved large scale surveys such as the SILL (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995) which elicited responses on a Likert scale and produced insights into learners’ opinions of strategies and the relationship between strategy use and learning. More recently issues such as affect (Ma & Oxford, 2014) and context (Griffiths, et al., 2014; Harish, 2014), have been investigated using qualitative methods by looking at metaphors (Oxford, Griffiths, et al., 2014), music (Kao & Oxford, 2014) and narratives (Oxford, Rubin, et al., 2014). Studies such as these have produced more nuanced views of learners and learning in specific locations and learning situations, showing that the definitions and theoretical underpinnings of learning strategies and language awareness are still developing (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014).

Language awareness can also involve learner autonomy which is based on learners’ thinking about language use and learning, combining learners’ cognition, interaction and affect. Language learning is seen as a succession of acts within different learning experiences: self-assessment, target-setting, strategy selection and determining the conditions for success (Holec, 1990). Self-assessment offers learners ‘more control of their language learning, by enhancing their self-awareness and their awareness of the language

learning process, and by giving them a realistic idea of their own abilities' (Alderson, 2005, p. 209). Furthermore learner autonomy involves interaction as 'the product of an interactive process' (Little, 2007, p. 26). The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) also attends to affective factors as it supports learner autonomy by describing learner competences and characteristics in terms of skills and interaction (Europe, 2001a) by means of positive descriptions of language use that are intended to motivate and encourage learners.

The CEFR provides a number of tools for supporting teaching and learning by identifying levels of achievement and describing those levels in words that can be understood and used by students. These tools include tables such as a global scale, a self-assessment grid (SAG) and qualitative aspects of spoken language use (SLU) containing descriptors (Europe, 2001a, pp. 24-29) that are used by administrators, examiners, teachers and students to evaluate language produced at different levels of competence. These tables promote language awareness and learner autonomy, for example through the European Language portfolio (ELP) which provides learners with opportunities to describe and develop their language experiences and language competence (Europe, 2001b), or through DIALANG, which is an online assessment system that aims to enable learners to identify their level, to self-assess and to select strategies for future learning (Alderson, 2005). CEFR level descriptors have been used to raise university students' awareness of their speaking skills by providing language that can be used by students to describe their language skills (Glover, 2011). The global scale, SAG and SLU facilitate this process. The SLU table identifies five criteria for speaking: range, accuracy, fluency, interaction and coherence, all of which can be described and improved by learners. For example, improving awareness and accuracy in speaking is observed by Dormer (2013) who identifies six stages of awareness related to motivation and language input. These stages break down the process of developing awareness into becoming aware of deficiencies and the consequences of these deficiencies for comprehensibility, awareness that change is possible and that structure is connected to meaning for an individual and in detail. Another criterion, fluency, has been investigated by Larson-Hall (Larson-Hall, 2016), who reports that oral fluency for a group of students improved during a speaking skills course that included extensive practice and repeated activities. Task repetition is also supported by Lynch and Maclean (Lynch & Maclean, 2000) who note benefits for lexico-grammatical accuracy and pronunciation.

Language awareness is revealed in two ways, both in the way that the students use the language and in what they say about the language. Svalberg (2016) calls learners' active connections with language and learning Engagement With Language (EWL). EWL has cognitive, social and affective characteristics. Cognitive engagement relates to how in tune the learners are with the language, the extent to which they notice features of their language and interaction, how focused they are on language as an object or medium, and how reflective, critical or analytical they are about their language and learning. Affective engagement concerns willingness to engage, whether learners are withdrawn or eager, whether they have a sense of purpose in their learning and how autonomous they are. Social engagement is about how interactive learners are, whether they use interaction for

learning, how they support their learning with language as scaffolding and whether in learning they are reactive or initiating (Svalberg, 2009). The combination of cognitive, affective and social factors enables researchers to pay attention to a complex combination of issues such as mindsets and attitudes as well as collaborative dialogue, different task engagement, purposefulness, willingness to engage and meaningfulness (Svalberg, 2018, p. 30). Studies of motivation also support attention to such matters as atmosphere, classroom relationships, self-confidence, interest, culture and goal-orientedness (Dörnyei & Csizer, 1998, p. 215).

Learners' thinking about their language and learning has been investigated using a variety of methods and approaches in different contexts. An EWL framework was used to analyse students' spoken use of grammatical and lexical items to look at the learners' engagement with language forms in an Australian context (Storch, 2008). Feedback questionnaire responses were used to investigate the effects of a grammar awareness course for language teachers that used 'cognitive conflict' to encourage dialogue between participants and resulted in feelings of anxiety for some participants (Svalberg, 2012). Studies have also looked at how awareness and autonomy advanced through ACTFL statements (Kissling & O'Donnell, 2015).

Awareness of speaking involves cognitive, affective and social factors, and speaking abilities can be described using CEFR criteria. Changes may occur in language skills and awareness and these changes are thought to contribute to the development of language skills. These issues are addressed in the study that is reported on in this paper.

### Materials and Methods

In this study EWL categories were used to analyse data from 27 learners in order to investigate awareness of their speaking. The study compared how undergraduate students described their speaking, learning and strategies over four years of study. The learners were asked to write reports about three aspects of their speaking skills: describing their speaking, setting targets for learning and stating strategies for improvement. The instructions that the students received from their teacher were as follows:

- *Write an email message to me about your speaking in English.*
- *First tell me about your speaking, tell me what you can say and how you speak.*
- *Then tell me what you want to do better in speaking this year.*
- *Finally tell me how you can achieve your aims. Write about 350 words.*

The study used an EWL framework (Svalberg, 2009) to answer the following questions:

1. How alert, focused and reflective are the learners at each point in their learning? (cognitive engagement)
2. How willing to engage, purposeful and autonomous are the learners? (affective engagement)
3. How interactive, supportive or reactive are the learners to their learning experiences? (social engagement)

Participants provided five reports in total, at the beginning and end of the first year of study, at the end of the second year and at the start and end of the final (fourth) year of study. Each report was elicited at the beginning or end of a course that had worked on developing speaking skills. All 27 participants contributed at least three reports including the reports in the first year and in the final years of study. Informed consent for the analysis of these reports was obtained at the beginning and end of the periods of study, and one student declined to be included. The mean length of the reports grew from 224 words at the start of the first year to 408 at the start of the final year (see Table 1). In total 42,763 words were analysed from 128 reports.

**Table 1.** Reports, Total Words and Means

Reports	Number	Total Words	Mean
R1	27	6062	225
R2	23	6359	289
R3	25	9729	389
R4	27	11012	408
R5	26	9511	396
All	128	42673	333

The main reason for eliciting the reports was to support planning and delivery of the courses being taught by the researcher. They were an opportunity for communication between the learners and their teacher (the researcher) that were also suitable data for this study. The learners described their speaking skills, learning targets and learning strategies at different stages of their studies and provided the teacher with information that informed pedagogical practice. The reports can be read as representations of the learners' views at different points in time, and as snapshots of the students' thinking about their speaking skills.

The reports were coded by the researcher according to their content, and 36 codes were created such as 'general description of ability positive', 'general description of ability negative', 'feelings showing positive emotions' and 'feelings showing negative emotions about mistakes'. Intrarater reliability was checked by recoding a sample of the texts and then rechecked by a second rater for the same sample. The codes were brought together into six themes: descriptions of speaking ability, learning targets, feelings about speaking, experience of English language use, learning strategies and interaction with language.

The characteristics of cognitive engagement, affective engagement and social engagement and the related criteria for identifying engagement with language were then matched with the six themes (see Table 2 for a summary). The cognitive engagement characteristics, level of 'alertness', 'focused attention', 'reflection and problem-solving' were related to the descriptions of spoken language ability and learning targets. Affective characteristics of engagement, 'positive orientation' and 'willingness to interact with the language and users of the language' were related to feelings about speaking English and use of criteria to describe speaking. Social engagement characteristics, 'behavioural readiness to interact', 'initiating and maintaining interaction' and 'supportive use of language' were related to previous language experiences and learning strategies and use of language to support learning (Svalberg 2009, pp. 246-7).

**Table 2.** Types of Engagement, Criteria and Themes (Svalberg 2009 pp. 246-7)

Engagement	Criteria for Identifying Engagement	Themes
Cognitive	Alertness, noticing language and interaction features Focused attention, language as object or medium Critical, analytical reflection	Descriptions of speaking ability Learning targets
Affective	Willingness to engage with language and users How purposeful How autonomous	Feelings about speaking Experience of language use
Social	How interactive How supportive, with use of negotiation and scaffolding Reactive or initiating	Learning strategies Interaction with language

### Analysis and Findings

The quotations from the reports were grouped according to the six themes and analysed using the related criteria. For example, the researcher took the quotations that were descriptions of speaking ability and identified awareness of or noticing of language forms and skills, focused attention on language forms or skills, and analysis of speaking. The grouping process was repeated for affective engagement looking at feelings about speaking and experience. Finally social engagement was considered by identifying learning strategies and use of language to support learning. Findings were then checked by rereading each whole report to ensure that impressions from individual quotations were reflected in the report as a whole. Analysis thus consisted of a careful process of reading, grouping, rereading and regrouping. Quotations from the students' reports are presented below followed by a reference number to show the report and student, for example R1S1 refers to the first report written by student number 1. The students are numbered randomly to ensure anonymity.

#### Cognitive Engagement

The learners' descriptions of their speaking and their learning targets indicate how alert to and focused on language and language skills the students were and how reflective or analytical they were. Over the course of the four years the learners became more alert, noticed language forms and skills more, focused on language both as an object and as a medium more often and became more analytical. The descriptions of speaking changed from brief evaluations of general language use to longer descriptions of language forms, skills and reflections on language use.

#### Cognitive engagement in the first reports

The first set of reports show limited awareness. At this stage learners often describe knowledge of English in general and not their actual speaking. Students tend to give a brief, usually negative evaluation of their speaking, followed by a simple explanation for

their level of skill or an improvement strategy: 'I can't easily express myself fluently. Because, I am very excited' (R1S1), and 'I can't speak very well. Generally, I am afraid of wrong speaking. So I don't want to speak in front of class' (R1S2). A few students show the beginnings of awareness: 'I speak with a person and then I say to myself why I said that there was another way of saying it. I don't know what to do about it' (R1S3) and 'I can't find the true word at the moment that I speak. So I speak slowly because of the fact that I think grammar' (R1S4). Descriptions of what the students can do when speaking English are rudimentary. The students had been given and had used in class CEFR self-assessment grid (SAG) and Spoken Language Use (SLU) tables but only two used phrases from the tables in their reports.

Learning targets are also briefly and simply stated or do not appear at all, commonly expressed as a general desire to improve English, speak better or understand more. The students are not alert, focused or analytical and show limited focus on language forms without providing details. Half do not identify a target at all, just expressing a general desire to improve. Some mention aspects of speaking that they want to improve such as 'vocabulary', 'confidence', 'fluency', 'pronunciation', 'grammar' or 'accuracy'. They do not state which vocabulary, grammar or fluency aspect they would like to improve. Evaluations of speaking are limited to saying that they are good or bad at speaking, in most cases the latter.

### **Cognitive engagement in the second reports**

The reports written at the end of the first year are slightly different from the first reports regarding cognitive engagement. Students describe speaking rather than English in general and most think their speaking improved. The second reports are on average 62 words longer than the first. Some descriptions of ability show alertness to how they speak and more of a focus on specific aspects of language forms and skills. There is still little evidence of a critical or analytical view of speaking.

For alertness, focus and analysis more students provide examples of what happens when they speak in the second set of reports, for example: 'My speaking is not bad, if I speak current events and familiar topics. But I can't join a conversation without preparing.' (R2S5). Some students refer to thinking in English, inviting others in to a conversation and asking questions. There is slightly more focus on language forms and skills, especially pronunciation, fluency, accent, correcting mistakes or connecting phrases. As for critical analysis, more students evaluate their speaking using CEFR levels or criteria such as range, fluency or interaction.

### **Cognitive engagement in the third reports**

For the third set of reports each student first listened to a recording of themselves giving a talk in class and then described their speaking, saying what was good about it, what needed to be improved and how. The CEFR self-assessment grid (SAG) and Spoken Language Use (SLU) tables had been given to the students and used in class, and most of the students used parts of the tables to write their reports. Written in the middle of the second year, the reports show more alertness, focus and analysis than in previous reports.

Students describe a variety of features of their speaking in the talk and refer to different aspects of their preparation and delivery. Comments on preparation include choice of topic, the role of notes or memorisation, planning and organisation. Comments on delivery describe how the student spoke, the use of circumlocution, timing, relevance of the topic and how it was received by the audience. Students identify improvement points and show a clearer focus on language both as object and as medium and a more analytical approach; 24 use criteria from the CEFR (range, accuracy, fluency, interaction and coherence) to provide examples of their use of grammar or vocabulary and its effect on speaking. Three students write about specific aspects of speaking and language forms and the relationship between range, comprehensibility and specific words: ‘Although I know lots of high level vocabulary, I cannot use them in my talks. I’m using more simple words instead. When I’m speaking I forget them somehow. They don’t come to my mind.’ (R3S7). Students describe their interaction with the audience by referring to body language and eye contact: ‘my interaction was nice. When I spoke, I looked everybody and had eye contact’ (R3S2). The learners focus both on language as object and for interaction and notice more about what happens when they speak, some referring to specific words and phrases that they used: ‘My coherence was good. Because my words related each other. I didn’t say a different subject... My speaking include 3 parts and they were similar... I used some connectors. For example but, like, and, because.’ (R3S8). Students have noticed more about how they speak, how they use specific forms and skills, and how they can analyse their speaking.

### **Cognitive engagement in the fourth reports**

Final year reports show higher levels of alertness, focus and reflection. They are more detailed and specific than in the first year. Most learners look back at changes in their speaking since the first year. There is evidence of greater awareness and reflection. Learners are alert to changes in their speaking and have noticed the effects of appropriacy, relevance and how different aspects interrelate. Students identify a need to focus on fluency and range with examples of how pauses and use of vocabulary affect speaking and comprehension: ‘I would like to improve my vocabulary and fluency in my speaking. These are actually connected to each other. I know that if I enlarge my vocabulary knowledge, my fluency will directly be better’ (R4S7). Another student is aware of how her use of language affects comprehensibility:

the most important thing for communication is to convey sentences in an order. If it is not logical, it is not important what you say. If you want to communicate with somebody, your speaking must be clear, fluent, and cohesive... using conjunctions and noticing intonation have importance if you don’t want to be misunderstood. (R4S9).

Students show that they have noticed more about how they speak with more evidence of analysis through self-evaluation at a specific level (B1, B2, C1) accompanied by detailed explanations or justifications:

Spoken interaction is B2. For example I can understand in detail... normal spoken language..., spoken production B2 I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options (R4S10).

Students have developed a more complex view of speaking based on awareness of what happens when they speak, how the use of forms and skills affects their speaking and how they can analyse their speaking. There is a more critical approach to speaking that recognises improvements whilst also noting that there is much to improve.

### **Cognitive engagement in the fifth reports**

In the final set of reports the main focus is on future language use. Levels of awareness, focus and analysis are higher than in the previous reports. Students are aware that their skills have improved since the first year ‘When I came to this university, I did not speak English. Now, I can express myself more easily’ (R5S9). Students are aware of the need for further improvement and their focus is on improving skills rather than forms, especially fluency and range. There are still few references to specific grammar or vocabulary points that the learners would like to improve. ‘So to speak better I need to learn more vocabulary. Because vocabulary is the most basic element of a language. Vocabulary knowledge helps me improve my fluency as well’ (R5S7).

The five sets of reports show that cognitive engagement can develop over time. Starting from tentative, uncertain, superficial and brief views in the first reports, by the end of the second year students show more alertness and reflection, and in the final year these views have reached higher levels of understanding.

### **Affective engagement**

Consideration of affective engagement looks at the learners’ willingness to engage with the language and their experience of language use, specifically how purposeful and autonomous their language use and language learning are. A major factor in willingness to engage is the learners’ feelings about speaking. Although the students were never asked specifically to describe their feelings and emotions, they all have something to say about their feelings concerning speaking, and many write repeatedly. From the beginning the learners have a desire to learn English, but they have negative feelings caused by nervousness or anxiety. Over time these feelings of anxiety diminish or disappear or the anxiety gets under control. There is growing purposefulness in views of the reasons for learning English. Autonomy is limited at the beginning but more evident by the end.

### **Affective engagement in the first reports**

The learners show a desire to engage with the English language and express enthusiasm for learning, but their views of speaking are largely negative and show limited purposefulness or autonomy. Learners are positive about learning English, using words such as ‘like’, ‘love’ and ‘enjoy’, but speaking often stimulates negative emotions, ‘anxious’, ‘nervous’, ‘afraid’, ‘shy’ and ‘injured’. These feelings are not described in detail. Nervousness is used to explain lack of proficiency or is attributed to lack of speaking at high school, fear of making mistakes or shyness. Four students who have already had experience of speaking English through work or living abroad are positive about speaking. Students do not give reasons for learning English. Autonomy is extremely limited as most learners see learning English as an activity managed by teachers and taking place in the classroom: ‘I need to speak more in class’ (R1S9).

### **Affective engagement in the second reports**

The learners describe their emotions in more detail and continue to express a willingness to learn although they feel anxiety about speaking. Some feel that their speaking has improved and that they have become more confident. There is little evidence of purposefulness or autonomy.

As with the first reports many learners state that they enjoy or like English, but speaking makes them uncomfortable. Students refer to nervousness affecting their ability to remember words and speak fluently: 'I try to speak English but I can't speak because of my excitement and not remembering words' (R2S9). Some members of the group have started to overcome anxiety: 'When I prepare the topic, everything is OK. Even I (am) not ... nervous' (R2S12) and 'now I control my excitement. It is an important thing for me' (R2S10). Reasons for learning English are not given, and speaking English continues to be located in the classroom under the management of teachers: 'I didn't want to speak in front of the class' (R2S4). There are few examples of self-assessment and reports do not show signs of autonomy.

### **Affective engagement in the third reports**

Nervousness continues to be present in the learners' third reports of speaking in a presentation to the class. Many learners refer to positive as well as negative aspects of speaking. Some autonomy is evident as students self-assess their level for the criteria of range, accuracy, fluency, interaction and coherence.

Nearly all students include a reference to feelings. Many refer to their nervousness as a factor that prevents better speaking and causes problems with fluency or vocabulary, as in earlier reports. However, many students also have a feeling of achievement after delivering the presentation successfully and express pleasure that they felt when listening to the recording: 'I am glad to hear myself (R3S12) and I prepared the topic... I was trembling in front of audience... even my hands trembled' (R3S9). Some learners are purposeful as they see better presentations as an aim for future speaking. Most learners show greater autonomy by self-assessing: 'Firstly my range was enough to my talk about my quotation. I tried to use understandable words to everyone and I used different words that could have the same meanings' (R3S6). Being able to describe speaking better helps the learners focus on their speaking skills and then act to improve: 'as long as know what you did... that makes you realise what was wrong what was right and what could have been done... will help you reach your goal' (R3S3). The third reports represent something of a breakthrough for the learners in terms of their emotions, purposefulness and autonomy.

### **Affective engagement in the fourth reports**

There are fewer references to emotions, and some refer to having more positive feelings about speaking or having controlled anxiety. Willingness to engage is reflected in a desire to control anxiety and to speak better, and many now say that they like speaking: 'I feel happy when I can speak fluently and spontaneously' (R4S15). Students have a sense of achievement as a result of developing their speaking skills: 'Actually, I love speaking

English (especially with foreign people)' (R4S16), and 'while I am speaking in English I have more confidence' (R4S17). Others say that their fear of speaking has diminished: 'At the beginning of the first class of my department, I was very anxious about speaking... I beat my fears for English speaking' (R4S10). References to greater confidence are often accompanied by comments about how that developed: 'At the beginning of my university life, I didn't have confidence in my English skills at all, but now, after I did a lot of things and learned many things, I feel much better than before' (R4S1). Students' comments about improvements in speaking ability are often accompanied by references to speaking activities inside and outside the classroom, and to classroom experiences being enjoyable and to an appreciation of speaking with people who are kind, patient or encouraging.

There is greater purposefulness as most students refer to using English for social or professional purposes. Students feel positive about their future use of English, for example as English teachers: 'But the most important thing for me is loving my job. If I like my job, already it is not job for me... I will be teacher... And I will speak English' (R4S18). There is a stronger sense of autonomy, as students state that after graduation they will be responsible for managing their future learning and especially for improving their speaking. There is recognition of the need to engage with speaking, often with a strong sense of purpose coming from a desire to use English as a teacher or in other forms of employment: 'I should improve my speaking throughout all of my life' (R4S8) and: 'I started to speak English... in this department. I was nervous about my speaking because I could use only grammar in the lessons...' and there are references to teaching that is 'very kind and patient... (and) encourages us when we are afraid... I learned to make presentation... I started to read books... more and to improve my speaking by using right words' (R4S2).

### **Affective engagement in the fifth reports**

There are few direct references to emotions, and the learners show willingness to engage, purposefulness and autonomy. Learners are focused on graduating and using English in the future for employment and enjoyment. Most students state the need for autonomous learning in the future, and most state that they plan to use self-assessment for their own and their students' learning. Students also look back to their earlier speaking experiences with the assistance of recordings made during examinations.

Many students show how their willingness to learn English has developed with their speaking competence: 'After listening (to) the recording of this... examination, I noticed my speaking has really improved... For example, I was shy in the first year; I was afraid of making mistakes' (R5S4). There is greater purposefulness and students talk about English helping them to fulfill their dreams: 'my most productive years passed in my university years. I practiced English... and in the future I'm going to use it as a work tool as well... I will not stop to improve my English and in every chance I will use it and continue to practice it' (R5S19) and: 'The reason why I will continue my study is that I want to learn more about English. But learning English not only for my future career, it also makes me more intelligent... English opens the doors to an interesting life with interesting work' (R5S1). Speaking English has become a positive reality rather than a source of anxiety.

As for autonomy, most students state that they will use self-assessment to support their future learning and teaching: ‘Thanks to CEFR tables I comprehend... not only my speaking level but also my listening, reading, writing levels. Whenever I spoke... I checked my ability on my speaking; what I could do well or what I could not do’ (R5S6). Many of the students have become comfortable with self-assessment and self-management of future learning, and are aware of what is involved. Learners have moved beyond a condition where anxiety restricts their willingness to speak. Some have overcome anxiety, and most express feelings of satisfaction and pride at their achievements. Many state that they intend to continue developing their speaking skills in the future, and that they will be autonomous in their use of self-assessment.

### Social Engagement

Social engagement involves interaction with other speakers and interaction with language itself. Social engagement can be found in the students’ learning strategies and in their interaction with other people and with language. Learning strategies identified by the students change over time. At the beginning they are predominantly individual, solitary activities, but over time the strategies combine individual study and social language use and learning. Interaction in English is mainly inside the classroom in the earlier reports and outside the classroom later. By the end of the study most students show a desire to initiate future interaction outside the classroom, but some are less resolved.

In the course of their studies the students acquire language and awareness that enables them to describe their spoken language use and feelings about speaking in greater detail. Interaction with language can be seen in the learners’ use of language from the CEFR to describe their speaking (see Table 3). The words selected include not only the words that actually appear in the CEFR SLU, for example accuracy, but also accurate and accurately, shown as *accura\** in the table.

**Table 3:** Student use of CEFR Speaking Criteria Words

Criterion	Report 1	Report 2	Report 3	Report 4	Report 5
Range	0	5	23	13	12
Accura*	0	5	21	12	14
Fluen*	5	14	24	25	22
Interac*	2	5	18	12	7
Coheren*	0	1	21	12	9
Total	7	30	107	74	64

Two types of change occur in the use of language to support awareness and learning. First students use new words that enable them to describe aspects of speaking that they did not write about before. Second the language that is used by students changes in order to describe certain experiences differently and the descriptions become more detailed. Words that begin to be used are ‘range’, ‘accuracy’, ‘interaction’ and ‘coherence’. None of these words are used in the first reports but all the students use at least one of these words in the later reports. ‘Fluency’ is used by a few students in the first reports, half in the second and nearly all in the subsequent reports. In the first reports students refer to

pronunciation or accent, and these concerns are replaced by a great interest in fluency, which is accompanied by greater use of words related to fluency such as pauses. 'Range', 'accuracy', 'interaction' and 'coherence' follow a similar pattern of greater use.

### **Social engagement in the first reports**

In the first reports learning strategies identified by the students are predominantly individual and solitary. Learning with other people occurs inside the classroom. The most frequently cited strategies are watching films or TV in English, listening to songs, reading and private study. Practice is seen as an activity that occurs inside the classroom.

The learning strategies that most students identify are individual, passive activities involving listening or reading: 'I want to speak better in this year. So I will watch plenty of foreign films. And I will read a book, newspaper etc. So, I can improve speaking.' (R1S8). Some combine passive strategies with a general reference to 'practice', without stating who with, when or how: 'to fix these problems I think this year I'm going to do some speaking practice and read some books etc. with loud voice' (R1S19). Interaction with the English language through speaking is almost exclusively in the classroom and many students note their lack of opportunities to use English even in class before starting at university: 'This year is a start of me because I think high school and preparation are not enough to improve these skills' (R1S9). When students refer to interaction, it is not initiated by them, but is provided by schools or teachers and few students refer to practice outside the classroom.

The language that the learners use enables them to express limited awareness of their own abilities. Descriptions of abilities use 'can' or 'can't' and are often followed by general verbs relating to production or reception of language such as 'interact', 'make conversations', 'speak', 'say', 'express', 'ask' and 'understand'. Few students go beyond a simple evaluation of their skills as good or bad, or use general words and expressions like 'pronounce', 'make sentences', 'recognise words and phrases', 'find the right word' and 'remember a word'. 'Can' is used to describe current abilities or inabilities, to describe aspirations and to refer to possible learning strategies. In the first reports only 'fluency' from the CEFR SLU criteria is used, and one student uses 'can' in phrases taken from the SAG and SLU. 'Range' is not used, but some learners refer to vocabulary and 'different' ways of speaking which may be intended to mean range. 'Accuracy' is not used, although there are references to 'mistakes' or 'wrong words'. There are no references to interaction or coherence.

### **Social engagement in the second reports**

There are fewer references to learning strategies and more references to interaction in English, mostly in class, and more CEFR SLU criterion words are used. Most strategies cited are individual (watching films or TV, listening to songs and reading) but the balance between individual and interactive practice has shifted slightly towards practice. More, but not most learners identify speaking practice as a learning strategy and some refer to practice, they initiate such as 'speaking to foreign friends' or to classmates. CEFR SLU

criterion words are used to a limited extent, 'fluency' is used by around half the students, and the rest of the criterion words by very few students.

Learning strategies include more details reflecting on how individual learning strategies can contribute to speaking, such as watching films with subtitles, or initiating practice with others:

I watch film and listen the English music. These are benefit for me... thanks to English music, I hear new word and when I continually listen, I am accustomed it... I must practice very much and also communicate foreign students... In conclusion, my English is improving day by day. (R2S22).

As for the use of criterion words, there are more 'can-do' than 'can't-do' statements in these reports, and a few students have begun to use 'can' in phrases from the SAG and SLU. 'Fluency' is used by half the students, and a much smaller number use 'range', 'accuracy' or 'interaction' and 'coherence' is used once. All but one of the uses of fluency are when a student identifies an absence of fluency or a desire to improve fluency.

### **Social engagement in the third reports**

Students spend more time describing their speaking and less time describing strategies. Compared with the first year reports there are more references to speaking practice than to other learning strategies. Interaction with language referred to is predominantly inside the classroom as before. CEFR criteria words and phrases are used by nearly all students.

The balance of strategies that the students refer to has moved away from individual learning towards practice: 'When we do face to face conversation at the class, I should start conversations and should talk more details' R3S21. Most of the practice strategies are located in the future as a kind of 'wish-list', often using modal words such as 'should' or 'must': 'we should practise with our friends' R3S13, 'If I did some more practice, I could speak more correctly' R3S4. Some have definite plans for practice: 'So I have a plan for my summer holiday... Work and Travel... I'm going to the USA in July' R3S25.

The task set for the report was to describe a specific piece of speaking using the criteria if the students felt that those criteria would be useful. Previous and later reports also use the criteria, but the third reports show most use. The task may have enabled the students to focus more clearly on how they actually spoke.

### **Social engagement in the fourth reports**

There is a higher level of social engagement than in the previous reports. The reports provide more detailed descriptions and explanations of a variety of strategies and experiences inside and outside the classroom. CEFR language supports more detailed and varied explanations. Students are more likely to refer to learning strategies that involve social use of language, especially practice and travel. Interaction is with a wider variety of people than previously.

For some students strategies involving social interaction with classmates outside the classroom have become a reality, but for others they remain possible rather than real: 'I have two friends with whom I occasionally speak to in English. Since they are my friends,

I speak with them without any hesitation or nervousness' R4S23. Some students have interacted with international students: 'I was hanging out with foreign friends (Polish Erasmus pupils). Thanks to them, I have been improving my speaking... Generally I raised two levels...' R4S10. Using English outside the university classroom for many involves becoming a teacher: '... at my practice school... I am practicing... with my students...' R4S9. For others using English outside the classroom remains more of an aspiration: 'I would like to speak with foreign people and native speakers' R4S22.

Descriptions and explanations of strategies go into more detail:

In my opinion my language is enough to express myself clearly and directly without restricting myself to particular sentences which I heard from somewhere. I mean I am able to construct sentences which I do not know by heart and as a matter of course, sometimes I make grammatical errors but I would say that it is never to a certain extent that my interlocutor is not able to understand the sense of what I am saying. Although I would call it a "difficulty" because sometimes it leads to hesitation while I am thinking of the right grammar but even if I make mistakes I am able to correct them as an after-thought. R4S20.

Speaking practice inside the classroom using English as the medium of instruction and a patient approach by teachers are valued. Students refer positively to activities such as speaking in pairs with different partners or brainstorming.

CEFR criterion words are used less than in the second-year reports, but all students use at least one. Students use different strategies with the CEFR. Some take whole phrases from the tables to describe their speaking, whereas others use single words or short phrases in paraphrases. Fluency remains the greatest concern for most students.

### **Social engagement in the fifth reports**

The reports at the end of the final year summarise learning experiences over the four years and look forward to future use of English. This future use of English is predominantly social and for real-life purposes such as teaching or travel. There are more detailed descriptions and explanations of a variety of strategies and experiences inside and outside the classroom. The language that the students use supports more detailed and varied explanations.

Reading, listening and writing are still seen as valuable ways of maintaining and improving English language skills and knowledge, but actual use of English for speaking has become the most important. Uses include speaking with classmates, foreign friends, for travel, but most of all for teaching. Many see their future as an English teacher and recognise teaching both as a means of maintaining and improving speaking skills. References to future practice use 'will' rather than 'should' or 'must'.

Speaking practice has become a real, not just a possible experience:

I have been trying some different techniques for the past four years in order to improve my speaking. I watched TV series and movies, I read a great number of books and articles and I made speaking practice with my instructors and friends. All of them have helped me to improve my speaking in different sides. Yet, the most rewarding one was practicing since practice makes perfect. For that reason, I am going to practice with native speakers either by living abroad for a while or becoming friends with them. Thus, I will learn some idiomatic expressions more accurately. R5S23

For some plans for future speaking practice involve the use of social media or travel:

I am planning to attend a CELTA course in England and I think that not only the course in itself but the time I will spend there will improve my speaking because there are only people who speak English so there is no other option for me. Furthermore, I will travel from place to place there and get the chance to meet new people who could 'teach' me indirectly. R5S20

Students write about how they see their future use of the CEFR to support their learning. Most views are positive and some add constructive criticisms.

The cefr tables were benefit for determine my speaking level and see my development through the years. I will use them in the future for see my development after graduation. R5S11

If I start teaching one day, I will definitely use the CEFR tables. It is one of the most helpful tools... provided us and for me it encourages me to understand what I am capable of and what I can become. To be honest it did not draw my attention at first... R5S3

In my opinion the CEFR tables are very beneficial as a guideline because I can check my language... the tables are made briefly and concisely so that I do not have to spend much time on it... The table would be more helpful with some examples of sentences or some more detail, for example, I do not know what 'rare errors' mean and what the limit is from 'rare' to 'often'. R5S20

There are also some critical comments regarding the CEFR: one student states 'I do not think that I will use the cefr tables, because I do not want to limit myself. I want to speak freely without any limit.' R5S24, for another 'CEFR tables are hard to apply in real life' R5S19 and another states 'sometimes I can't decide what my level is.' R5S14

CEFR criterion words are used with similar frequency to the fourth reports. Fluency remains the main topic of interest, followed by range and accuracy. Interaction and coherence are referred to slightly less.

In four years of study the students have moved from viewing speaking in English as an activity that happens in the classroom and organised by a teacher to thinking of speaking as an activity for the real world with real people. This change occurs after the students start to speak in the classroom and reflect on their performance using self-assessment. After gaining confidence the students become ready to speak and manage their own speaking.

### Conclusion

These reports tell the stories of English language experiences over four years of study for 27 students. The reports begin with trepidation and end with hope and enthusiasm. In the course of the four years the speaking experiences for most students move from the classroom into their social or professional world. These experiences indicate the value and importance of paying attention to the affective side of language learning, to students' actual experience of speaking, to the language that the students use to describe their learning and to the role of social and individual strategies in learning.

The EWL perspective used in this study provides a useful way to look at the development of language awareness in this group of students. The EWL framework and categories bring out the importance of the learners' emotions and their interaction with the language and other users of the language.

The role of affect in language learning deserves a great deal of attention. The study illustrates the extent to which anxiety about speaking English has a negative effect on speaking and on willingness to speak. Experience of speaking is another important factor in developing awareness and abilities. At the beginning most students say they have had little experience of speaking. The amount of speaking performed by the students increases over the four years of the course. As a result the learners overcome or control their anxiety after taking part in classroom practice and after taking varied opportunities for speaking outside the class that are offered by travel abroad or by visitors to Turkey.

A number of changes also occur in the social and individual strategies that the students say they use. At the beginning of the study strategies are described largely as aspirations and in a very general way. By graduation the speaking strategies that the students referred to are described in more detail and are more likely to involve communication with real people. Language used changes from being limited and simple to becoming a vehicle for showing a higher level of awareness. Using CEFR criteria and tables make a contribution to these changes.

The importance of affect and interaction for learners should not be underestimated. Students benefit from developing awareness of how they speak, how they feel about speaking, how often they speak and how they employ various social and individual learning strategies. Reflecting on these aspects of speaking and finding ways to describe these speaking experiences are likely to contribute to more successful learning.

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