



**The University of the West Indies
St. Augustine Campus
Faculty of Humanities and Education
Caribbean Studies Project
HUMN 3099**

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Title of Thesis:

**Investigating the emergence of linguistic form over linguistic function in the L2
classroom as a hindrance to fluency: A case study among Year 2 Spanish
undergraduate students at the UWI.**

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Acknowledgements

The researcher would like to take this opportunity to thank the HUMN 3099 Caribbean Studies Project administrators as well as the supervisor of this research project for having given a tremendous amount of guidance that facilitated the successful completion of this research. The researcher also acknowledges the valued participation of the sample population that has formed the basis of this study.

Abstract

Fluency is seen as an effective gauge that allows one to determine their achieved level of proficiency and linguistic competence by language learners. The physical and psychological setting of the L2 classroom brings to the forefront the tenets of linguistic form and linguistic function, which play a pivotal role in the pursuit of fluency once applied to language learning in a well-balanced manner. This research was designed to investigate the emergence of linguistic form over linguistic function in the L2 classroom by means of analysing its potential as a hindrance in the pursuit of fluency among twelve (females=9, males=3) Year 2 Spanish Undergraduate students at the University of the West Indies St. Augustine Campus. Qualitative interviews requiring the usage of English and Spanish were conducted as the basis of retrieving primary research in addition to the supplementary consultation of secondary sources. The findings of the study indicated that the emergence and focus on linguistic form over linguistic function in the L2 classroom does in fact pose a general hindrance towards the effective pursuit of fluency. The general hindrance to fluency has also been evident through the four main areas of verbal and conceptual fluency, the alignment of interactional competence to the L2 classroom context, segmentation and input processing and lastly, the absence of SLA theory uses in the classroom context. This is mainly since each area presented evidence which indicated an emphasis on linguistic form over linguistic function, empirically linked to the low levels of fluency among the sample population. In the long term, hypothesized drawback to L2 fluency can be resolved given that a more conscious and concerted effort is taken towards the pursuit of foreign languages both on the ends of teachers and students.

Keywords: linguistic form, linguistic function, verbal fluency, conceptual fluency, interactional competence, segmentation, input processing, SLA theory.

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Introduction

Language can be described as the conduit that allows humans to verbally communicate thoughts and ideas. In light of this, it is also deemed a naturally occurring human phenomenon held up by several systematic intricacies such as phonology, syntax, etc. which are subconsciously learnt through continued immersion and exposure to the natural speech environment. Thus, the ability to speak a particular language as a mother tongue can be achieved, simply by exposure to the speech environment from as early as birth. In light of this, one can express that fluency is the execution of language, adapted through a natural and well-balanced awareness and employment of the systematic linguistic intricacies, as key components of the target language.

However, fluency existing a naturally-occurring linguistic phenomenon in the mother-tongue (L1) setting, manifests itself differently in the context of pursuing a second language (L2) by means of formal education. That is, since the L2 classroom acts as an artificial speech setting that facilitates the occurrence of the target language. Analysis of the variant speech atmosphere of the L2 classroom then bears the ability to shed light on the way fluency is perceived and attained. The setting of formal education generally relies on the proposition of acquiring grades that are satisfactory; a dynamic that acts as a conventional means of measuring one's proficiency in their target area of study. Mapping this grade-oriented attribute to the context of the L2 classroom, one can observe that the existing dynamic of formal education has the power to impact the culture that develops among students and teachers.

Albeit languages occur naturally as means of verbal communication in their host speech environment, the artificial grade-oriented setting and culture of the L2 classroom tends to favour a more 'correct' usage of language, otherwise known as usage favouring linguistic form which ascribes to grammatical and systematic ideals. That is, rather than paying similar

attention to linguistic function as a facet of language which constitutes communicating ideas simply by employing comprehensive structures that carry meaning precisely behind the thought or idea to be communicated. On the basis of satisfying the cultural norms of the conventional grade-oriented L2 classroom setting, the dichotomous relationship between linguistic form and linguistic function which contributes to overall effective spoken fluency can be derailed.

This study has been modelled to probe the prevalence of linguistic form over linguistic function in the setting of the L2 classroom as a bump in the journey to achieving fluency among Year 2 Spanish undergraduate students at UWI St. Augustine.

Rationale

The rationale for this study is rooted in the interpersonal communication between the researcher and the target undergraduate year group which occurred outside of the classroom over a prolonged period of time. Thoughtful observation has led the researcher to hypothesize that the fluency of the sample population is highly limited to context. In this regard, the students usually perform well in class and are able to attain high scores on their Spanish exams due to their capability to have discussions in class over the related topics. This is since material and topics for classes are usually provided way in advance to classes via student-teacher online portals, so students usually have a reasonable time frame to prepare their points of view and prepare their discussions. Thus, discussions held in class and even in exams usually have a polished and fluent appearance, typically reaching profound depths and complexities due to the fact that students can plan their responses.

Contrastively, general interaction in the L2 outside the classroom context on random topics usually appeared fragmented and incoherent; a clear indication that their collective

fluency is limited to context. Such an imbalance in contextual experience can be explanatory since the likeliness of exposure to Spanish through informal contexts in Trinidad and Tobago is almost non-existent, given that the L1 of the nation is English. In this way, Spanish language learners at the University may only receive experience in the informal context of their L2. That is, logically either by making the extra effort to communicate in Spanish out of the classroom among classmates, or by means of occasional encounters with native speakers of Spanish where the learners are brave enough to communicate.

Aims

In light of the rationale, this study aims to investigate and analyse the limitedness of fluency by means of using the sociolinguistic environment of the L2 classroom as its main correlate. Constant reference to linguistic perspectives and working definitions of fluency in the context of L2 acquisition will be employed, which will aid the researcher to generate a more accurate and specific thematic analysis of the data gathered from the sample population.

Objectives

- To identify the nature of various cases where hindrances in fluency are detected among the sample population.
- To describe the nature of various cases where hindrances in fluency are detected among the sample population.
- To give insight into possible causes of these general hindrances to fluency.
- To propose potential solutions for the hindrance of fluency that originates from the classroom context.

Methodology

The methodological framework for the research and data collection of this study has been crafted to suit the nature of fluency as the topic being investigated. The primary research frame consisted of anonymous voice-recorded interviews, where part one was conducted in English and part two in Spanish (see appendix 1). Available research in the area of L2 fluency commonly focused on relevant linguistic theory without taking into consideration the existing knowledge and awareness of the terminologies among the sample population. For this reason, the first part of the interviews was designed using open-ended questions to allow the researcher to gauge the stance of the sample population, regarding second language acquisition (SLA) theory in relation to their individual language learning experiences as Spanish Undergraduate Year 2 students at the University of the West Indies. In cases where students were unaware of the meaning of any terminology, standardized explanations and definitions were provided, which still allowed the students to be able to establish the linkage between the relevant SLA theory and their individual experience as language students. In this way, the interviews would allow the sample population to perceive and concretize their experience studying Spanish at the University level, as it related to their journey to achieving fluency and the level of fluency that they would have presently achieved.

The second part of the interview conducted in the Spanish has also been inspired by the expanse of secondary research consulted. Available secondary data which tested L2 fluency commonly involved a research frame which required L2 use among the population in some form or fashion to effectively test respective SLA hypotheses. For this reason, part two of the interviews were introduced and conducted completely in Spanish, to allow the researcher to actively investigate the level of L2 fluency attained by the sample population. This section consisted of five open-ended questions that pertained to abstractly selected daily-life concepts. It is noteworthy to mention that the topics of discussion typically chosen for classes are more

complex and in-depth in nature such as immigration, violence, education, etc. Thus, the contrary selection of abstract questions that relate to the simplicities of daily-living would have played the role of testing whether the fluency and expression of the sample population was limited to the complexities of the classroom context through the ability of the interviewee to coherently answer simple questions as opposed to the typical complex ones.

Upon being granted verbal consent by the participants of the sample population, interviews were conducted during the academic year 2019-2020 in a confidential manner which safeguarded the identity of the interviewees. In the interview setting, the researcher, as the interviewer would have made clear to all interviewees that the interviews would be conducted without the use of time constraints, to allow and encourage freer flow of discussion and encourage data that is highly qualitative.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

The art of fluently speaking a language lies beneath a plethora of intangible linguistic factors. Gradually probing the individual subconscious steps of this process can then facilitate a more accurate and rational analysis of the potential drawbacks of fluency which stem from the classroom setting.

The working definition of fluency.

Fluency in the second language context can stand as a theory that is well-layered. Therefore, abiding by a single framework and definition of fluency can lead to limitedness in the scope of analysis. At the surface level of fluency, lies the primary concept of verbal fluency. Verbal fluency refers to the cognitive function of the level at which one can access their vocabulary or mental lexicon in the process of forming utterances for their individual purposes, or simply the ability of one to mentally retrieve and produce words. This view of fluency encompasses both oral and written contexts in the production of language due to their innate communicative ability to house grammar (Nassaji, Hossein and Fotos, 11) while also being a common focal point of traditional L2 classrooms.

Probing deeper into the theoretical considerations for fluency lies conceptual fluency. Conceptual fluency as proposed by Danesi (38) deals with the “knowledge about how the target language reflects or encodes its concepts on the basis of metaphorical structure and other cognitive mechanisms.” As a subset of the linguistic field of pragmatics, this type of fluency underlines a L2 production that entails the ability of an interlocutor to think in the conceptual structure and systematic framework of the target language. Cook (109) also adds the emergence of multicompetence as a consequential attribute to having developed a conceptual L2 fluency,

referring to a state of thinking that naturally comprises two or more grammars in the context of L2 learners.

Although both theoretical approaches of conceptual and verbal fluency are valid steps in the general pursuit of fluency, they still connote differing attributes. For instance, one can be verbally fluent in their language output by employing correct grammatical structures, concordance, etc. but at the same time fail to exhibit corresponding pragmatic skills (Kecskes, 147) that ensure meaning is effectively communicated. This stands as an attribute of conceptual fluency that varies from verbal fluency, since verbal fluency entails a translation-oriented thought process in language output, instead of the speaker thinking actively in their target language. A dynamic which is mainly definitive through one producing L2 output by firstly conceptualizing the situational topics of discussion in their L1, then directly translating the formulated opinions to generate spoken responses.

L2 Interactional competence (IC) and its alignment with the classroom context.

Interactional competence is another linguistic facet of the language-learning process that is considered a factor in determining one's achieved level of fluency. A competent interactional command of a second language can be characterized by the ability to maintain among interlocutors, an exchange of topical perspective in an effective manner that facilitates a fluid stream of communication. Kramsch as the academic pioneer to the basis of IC, has explained the theory distinctly through the knowledge of the social and cultural relevance of the topics of discussion among interlocutors (361). Kramsch has contended that IC stands as the functional relationship between context and the concomitant linguistic and interactional traits that are utilized by interlocutors. Forming the basis to contemporary analysis, IC has been subsequently dissected, analyzed and expanded by posterior linguists. Mehan (237) otherwise remarks upon IC as an indicator to fluency, whereby he considers discursive competence in the

context of interpersonal verbal interaction, a necessary ingredient for effective and coherent communication and conversation. Therefore, in modern theory one can consider IC as an indicator of fluency, as a joint-construction dependent on the competence of every interlocutor involved in any scenario of an effective co-contributory communication.

Communicative competence is yet another relevant subset of interactional competence that has undergone modifications in theory. Canale (37) has initially coined communicative competence as bearing the components of being grammatically, strategically, socioculturally and discursively competent in response to the Chomskian adaptation of being solely knowledgeable of the systematic subsets (morphology, syntax, phonology, etc.) of language. Often aligned to the classroom context as it relates to content, communicative competence has also been considered as an educational goal/objective (Celce-Murcia, Zoltan and Thurrell, 13). Thus, the active thematizing of communicative competence in the curriculum has led to a selective development of spoken proficiency that is limited to the content to be assessed.

Input Processing (IP) and Segmentation as correlates to Fluency.

As one progresses in their pursuit of fluency, so would the corresponding traits of Input Processing (IP) and segmentation. IP refers to the ability of one to establish “form-meaning connections during the act of comprehension” (Van Patten, 113). Taking this into consideration, one can theoretically determine that a significant extent of SLA is based on and/or limited to, the proficiency of the L2 user in knowledge and comprehension of the thematic area. Segmentation refers to the morpho-syntactic ability to detect and/or utilize units or segments of meaningful speech in continuous joint units of speech (Hagiwara, 38) or the ability to decipher and/or use boundaries that segment related and supporting ideas. Segmentation initially allows the separation of sentences into clauses either by pauses indicating punctuation or through the use of conjunctions. In this way, from a simple sentence

containing a single independent clause, segmentation can create compound sentences (two clauses), complex sentences (three clauses) and even compound-complex sentences (four or more clauses). Gabrys (113) affirms L2 segmenting abilities in adults as an indicator of fluency in the regard that it shows the developing gradual capability of one to use and interpret language from a simple level to a complex level, in both personal expression and speech comprehension. Taking this into consideration, L2 speakers that possess the capacity to maintain and manage more complex forms of expression can be said to have achieved a higher level of fluency as compared to users that are limited to simple or independent clause expressions. In theoretical overview, one can then determine both IP and segmentation in the verbal exchange of the L2 speech environment as rational indicators in determining a low, intermediate or high level of fluency.

Chapter 2

Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the data collected that furnishes the hypothesis of an emphasis on linguistic form over linguistic function causing a hindrance to L2 fluency among Year 2 Spanish Undergraduate students. Although the data collected is mostly qualitative in nature, the researcher has opted to present the findings employing both qualitative and quantitative presentation conventions, to facilitate a better interaction and interpretation of the data to readers. Bearing in mind that the second half of the findings were conducted using Spanish as the target L2, the researcher has provided relevant translations in the presentation of the data.

Findings of part one of the interview process (conducted in English).

Questions 1-3: Perceptions of fluency

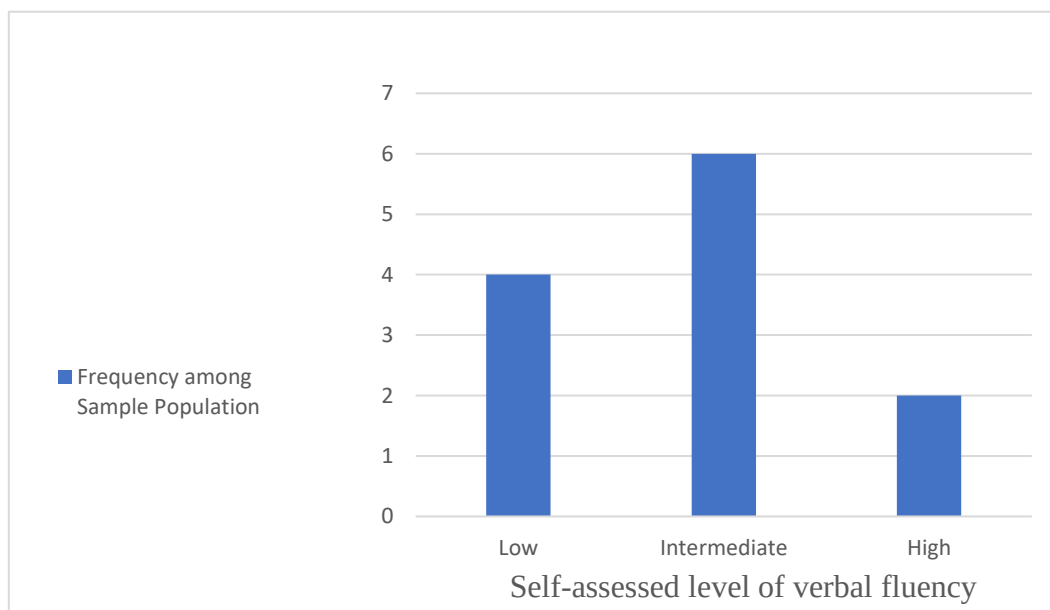


Figure 1. Chart showing the self-assessed level of fluency among the sample population.

Figure 1 shows the dispersal of the self-assessed level of fluency among the sample population of twelve participants. Based on the above data, one can observe that only two students (16.66% of the sample population) have self-assessed their fluency to be of a high level based on their personal perception of what fluency entails. Contrastively, six students (50% of the sample population) are of the opinion that they have an intermediate level of fluency and a remainder of four students (33.33% of the sample population) believe that they have a low level of fluency.

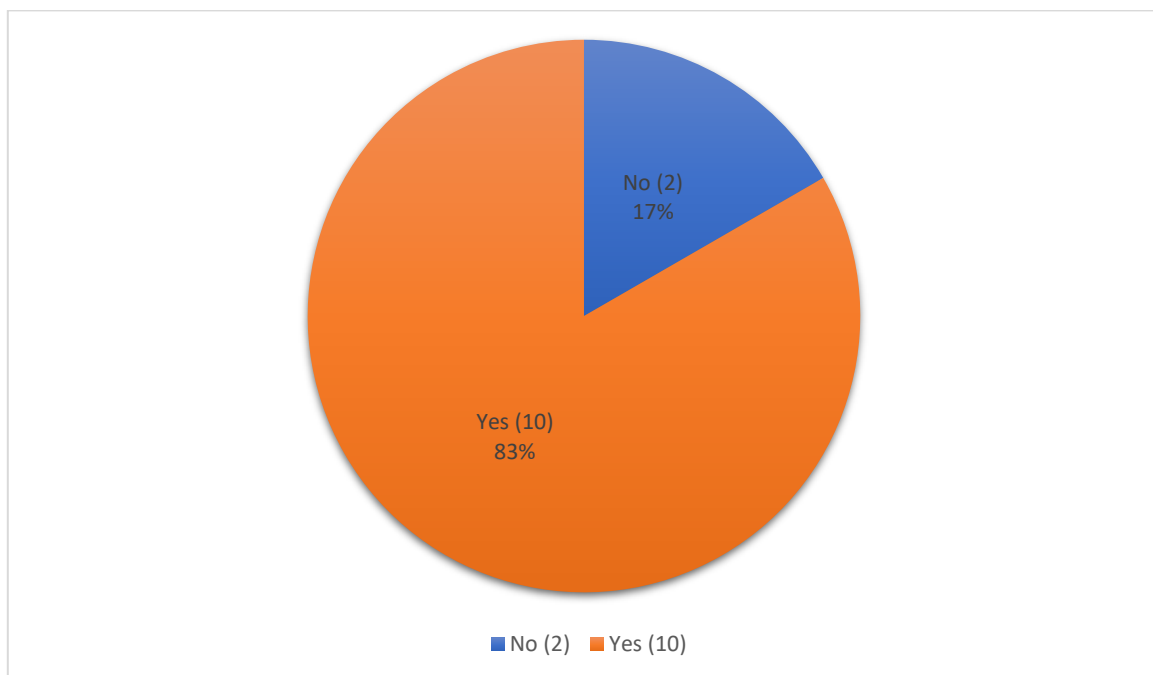


Figure 2. Pie Chart showing the frequency among the sample population that has assessed their fluency as being limited to classroom context.

Figure 2 addresses the issue of fluency being limited to the classroom context where a total of ten participants (83% of the sample population) perceive their range and command of Spanish is limited solely to the context of classroom discussions. This is in comparison to the lower figure of two participants (17% of the sample population) that responded negatively,

meaning that they rarely experience difficulty/difficulties in using their L2 outside of the classroom context.

Table 1. Reasons for negative self-assessment of fluency and their corresponding frequencies among the sample population.

Reasons for negative self-assessment of fluency	Frequency out of 12 participants
1. A low exposure to their L2 outside of the classroom context.	10
2. Effort is only made in the classroom context for good grades.	8
3. Personal acknowledgement of lack of effort taken, and/or laziness.	5
4. Participant feels anxious about communicating with native speakers.	9
5. The speaking speed of native speakers is incomprehensible.	11
6. Low motivation levels.	3
7. Vocabulary level is too low to facilitate a flowing conversation.	7
8. Participant does not know where to begin fixing their fluency issue.	1

The data presented above has been compiled into a table (see table 1), allowing one to easily gauge the reasons for negative auto-assessment of fluency indicated by the sample population. Additionally, the frequencies that correspond to each of the reasons listed in the table allows one to easily visualize the relatibility and dispersal of each of the issues noted among the sample population.

Question 4: Metacognition.

Table 2. Knowledge and applicability in the theory of metacognition of the sample population.

Personal standing as it relates to the theory of metacognition.	Yes	No
1. Participants that are familiar with the term metacognition.	4	8
2. Participants that believe they have a healthy metacognition.	5	7

Table 2 facilitates a comparative analysis of the sample population using the awareness of metacognition as a correlate to analyse the fluency that results from the classroom context. Upon being asked familiarity with the term metacognition as it relates to the context of language teaching and learning, eight participants (66.66% of the sample population) were unaware of its theory while four participants (33.33% of the sample population) were aware. Taking into consideration the possibility of negative responses for question 1 (see table 1), each uncertain participant then received a standardized explanation of the term for clarification, abiding by the research means of the scientific method.

Upon receiving clarification and/or information, every member of the sample population was then capable of giving an accurate response as to how metacognition applies to their journey as language learners. A total of five participants (41.66% of the sample population) indicated that their metacognition was healthy and conducive to learning, whereas seven participants (58.33% of the sample population) expressed otherwise.

Question 5: Testing systems and methodology.

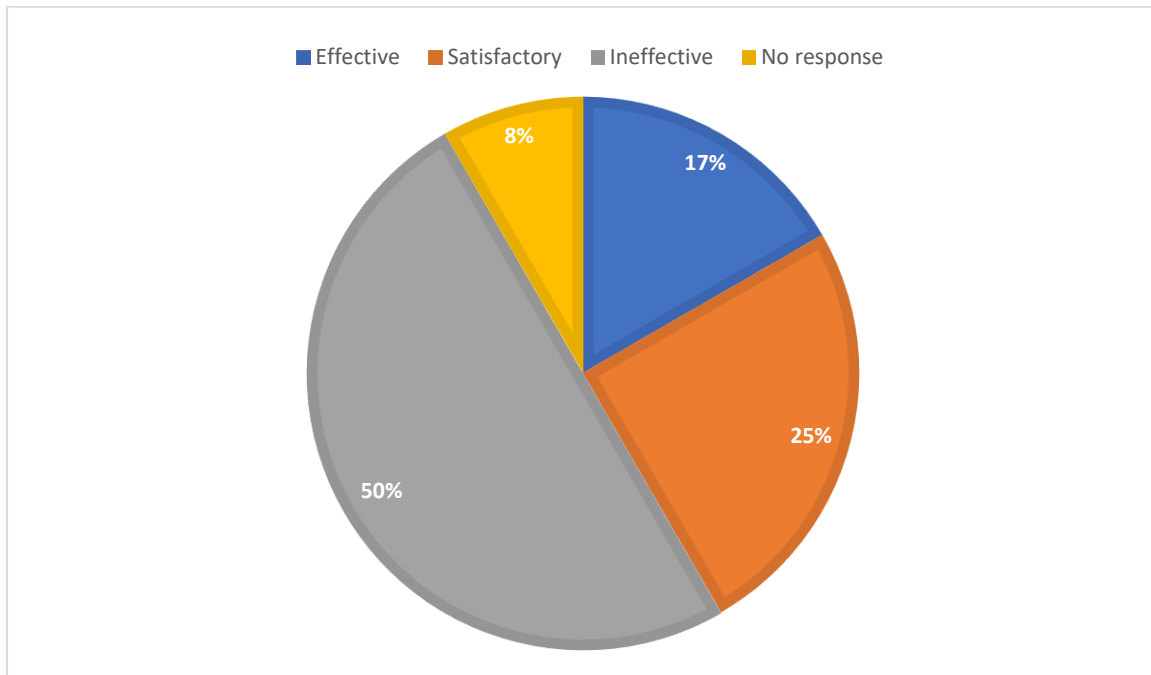


Figure 3. Pie chart showing the stances of the sample population in relation to the testing methods of Spanish Undergraduate students.

The information above (see fig. 3) was based on the view of the sample population towards the feasibility of the testing methods of the Spanish Undergraduate programme. That is, concerning whether it is possible to obtain a general Grade A (a final percentage of 75% and over as per the standards of UWI St. Augustine) while not being verbally fluent in Spanish. A total of two participants (17% of the sample population) positively opted that it is not possible to be rewarded a Final Grade A and not be verbally fluent in Spanish. Negative and impartial sentiments occupy the remaining higher figures of the pie chart since three participants (25% of the sample population) view the system as being satisfactory, meaning that in some cases it can be understood that one can perform poorly but still achieve a high grade. Adversely, six participants (50% of the sample population) thought that ‘cheating the system’ by achieving high final grades in spite of poor L2 fluency is quite possible in any circumstance, with the

anomalous exception of one participant (8% of the sample population) preferring to not share sentiments regarding the matter.

Questions 6-9: Linguistic Form as compared to Linguistic Function

All twelve participants responded in total agreement regarding the matter of immersion into the natural speech environment as an effective means of developing fluency. The leading common rationale shared by 58.33% of the sample population for having chosen this alternative, advised that the language learner in the native Spanish-speaking environment will have a lesser probability of interventions from their mother tongue (English) which sometimes acts as a distraction or temptation to ‘resort to English’ in times where they are incapable of contributing to communication. Interestingly enough, participant #9 compared this question to the classroom context of Spanish in saying “...and sometimes honestly if I really not sure about a word in Spanish to finish my point, I could usually just ask my friend next to me in class for the word using English and when they tell me, I could continue expressing my idea.” In light of this, one can then say that the classroom environment is subconsciously acknowledged as an artificial means of creating an atmosphere where the L2 Spanish ‘naturally’ should occur.

Additionally, the following question sought to address the stance of the sample population in whether they usually focus on linguistic form instead of linguistic function while communicating with Spanish speaking individuals. It must be noted that also in adherence to the scientific method, in cases where students were unaware or needed clarification on the meaning of the terminologies, the same standardized explanation was repeated to each participant where necessary. A leading eleven participants (91.66% of the sample population) indicated that they focus on linguistic form instead of linguistic function when communicating with native Spanish-speakers, whereas only one participant (8% of the sample population)

confidently stated otherwise. Table 3 below further reiterates the high figures among the sample population that are preoccupied with the use of linguistic form over linguistic function as the highest frequencies concomitantly surrounded reason #3 and #5 as being tenets of linguistic form in language use.

Table 3. Frequency of leading challenges while communicating with native Spanish-speakers.

Leading challenges while communicating with native Spanish-speakers.	Frequency out of 12 participants
1. The speed of native speakers is incomprehensible.	5
2. Vocabulary level is too low to facilitate a flowing conversation.	7
3. Worrying about grammatical errors leading to large pauses.	10
4. Participant wonders whether their idea has at all been communicated and understood.	5
5. Large pauses taken after grammatical errors for conversational repair.	8
6. Temptation to ask whether the native speaker speaks English.	5
7. Different accents are hard to keep understand.	4
8. Participant has to translate their thoughts from English to Spanish which causes lengthy pauses.	7
9. Participant has a low confidence level.	6
10. Participant feels high levels of anxiety.	5

Moreover, the below information (see fig. 4) deals with the matter of whether students actively think in their L2 while actively it is in use. Only one participant (8% of the sample population) confidently expressed being fully able to think in Spanish. Four participants indicated that they sometimes think in Spanish while using the language, but it relied heavily on whether the vocabulary in the topic area was initially well known by them. On the negative end of the spectrum, seven participants (58.33% of the sample population) admitted to never thinking in Spanish while using the language. In this regard, they alternatively expressed that their ideas are first conceptualized and perceived naturally in English, before undergoing an active mental translation that enables their oral expression in Spanish.

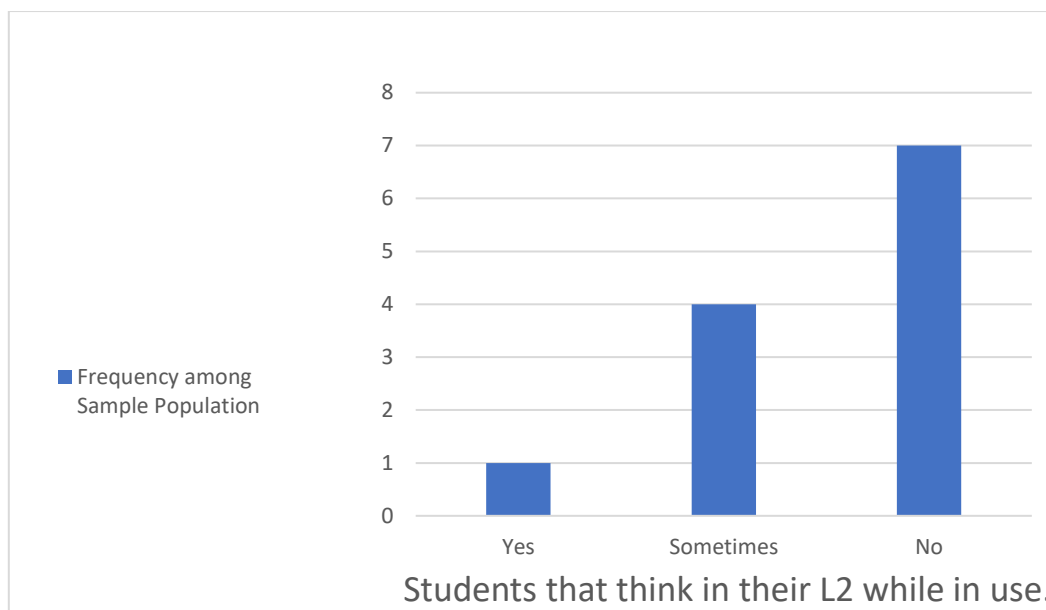


Figure 4. Chart showing the frequency of students that think in their L2 while in use of it.

Findings of part two of the interview process (conducted in Spanish).

This section of the interview allowed the researcher to outline correspondence between the theoretical data of part one and the fluency of Spanish among the sample population. Table 4 below shows the average response time calculated for each of the five (5) questions asked by the researcher that comprised Part 2 of the interview process.

Table 4. Average response times in seconds for Part 2 of the interview.

Question	$\left(\frac{\text{Total of response times (seconds)}}{\text{Number of respondents}}\right) =$	Average response time (each question)
1	$\frac{1 + 3 + 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 + 5 + 5 + 5 + 5 + 6}{12 \text{ Participants}}$	<u>4.16 seconds</u>
2	$\frac{2 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 4 + 4 + 4 + 5 + 5 + 5 + 6}{12 \text{ Participants}}$	<u>3.91 seconds</u>
3	$\frac{2 + 2 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 4 + 4 + 5 + 5 + 5 + 7}{12 \text{ Participants}}$	<u>3.83 seconds</u>
4	$\frac{1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 6 + 6 + 6 + 7 + 7}{12 \text{ Participants}}$	<u>4.75 seconds</u>
5	$\frac{1 + 2 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 4 + 5 + 5 + 6 + 6 + 6 + 7}{12 \text{ Participants}}$	<u>4.33 seconds</u>
Average response per question = $\frac{\text{Sum of averages}}{\text{Sum of questions}} = \frac{4.16+3.91+3.83+4.75+4.33}{5 \text{ Questions}} = \underline{\underline{4.196 \text{ secs}}}$		

As calculated, the responses to each question range between the lowest figure of 3.83 seconds to the highest figure being 4.75 seconds. Albeit the average response time to any question amounted to the total of 4.196 seconds, the researcher has noted the quick response times of participant #7, having a low personal average of 1.4 seconds $\left(\frac{1+1+1+2+2}{5 \text{ Questions}}\right)$ to all questions. A figure which one can deem anomalous, since the majority of recorded response times ranged between 2-7 seconds which still consisted of inarticulate and short responses.

The fluctuations of the tabulated data occurred through many reasons that the researcher has observed whilst conducting the interviews. Table 5 below qualitatively presents the problems that the participants encountered for each question in Spanish. The average response times have been selectively juxtaposed to correspond to the problems experienced, thereby allowing one to view not just the commonality between the issues in response, but the specific issues that potentially lead to the difficulties in answering and largest delays in response.

Table 5. Problems experienced by the sample population in responding to questions asked in Spanish.

Question	Average Response time	Problems experienced by the sample population.
1	4.16 seconds	i. Students were unaware of the conjugation of the expression “<i>cuéntame</i>” (“<i>tell me</i>”) from the verb “<i>contar</i>” (“<i>to tell</i>”) which caused pauses. Some participants asked for clarification on the meaning of the verb. This caused a delay in responses. ii. Struggle starting responses, in the choice between using the verbs “<i>ser</i>” and/or “<i>estar</i>” which both mean “<i>to be</i>” but have different accepted grammatical contexts. iii. Issues regarding grammatical concordance of gender in describing oneself, causing pauses in between ideas.
2	3.91 seconds	i. Uncertainty of narrowing an opinion, causing delays before the beginning of a response. ii. Struggle between the usage of the present and present continuous tense in attempt to express habitual and ongoing actions, causing pauses in between ideas that broke streams of thought.
3	3.83 seconds	i. The conjugation “<i>quisieras</i>” (“<i>you would like</i>”) in the question, from the verb “<i>querer</i>” (“<i>to want</i>”) conflicted participants in terms of choosing an appropriate tense to use in response, causing large pauses before and during responses. ii. Struggle in switching between tenses, causing intermittent pauses and breaks in streams of thought.
4	4.75 seconds	i. The majority of participants have never met the verb “<i>asustar</i>” (“<i>to scare</i>”) used in the question and this made most unaware of what the question was asking, causing a large delay before the start of responses.

		ii. Stemming from uncertainty, most respondents looked quizzically at the face of the researcher when conjugating the verb “<i>asustar</i>” for non-verbal correction or confirmation of their conjugation. iii. Issues regarding grammatical concordance of gender and number in expressions of opinions causing in-between pauses and breaks in streams of thought.
5	4.33 seconds	i. Struggle in starting a response between using the verb “<i>ser</i>” and/or “<i>estar</i>” which both mean “to be” but have different accepted grammatical contexts. ii. Issues regarding grammatical concordance of gender and number in expressions of opinions causing in-between pauses and breaks in streams of thought.

An interesting detail to note after a comprehensive look at the content in Table 5 is that the problems gravitated around linguistic form were also centred around smaller scale syntactic structures rather than larger scale usage. In light of this, the researcher noted that participants did not employ the use of complex and compound complex sentences in the verbal delivery of their responses. In the general responses of all participants, the sentence structures were limited to the use of simple sentences (using one clause) and seldomly compound sentences (joining two clauses using connectors such as “and” or pauses that indicate punctuation such as commas, colons and semicolons). Moreover, all participants despite their range of fluency kept the complexity of their responses to a minimum which generally made the management of expressing their ideas at a minimum.

The following section discusses the data presented in the findings of this study. That is, a discussion in further detail as it relates to the theoretical tenets of the research as being linguistic form and function and relevant surrounding influential aspects.

Chapter 3

Discussion

The findings of the study provided data that allows the researcher to add valuable insight on hypothesizing whether a focus on linguistic form as compared to linguistic function can lead to a hindrance in fluency levels. This chapter of the research aims to synthesize the data presented in the findings as they correlate to linguistic form and function and supplementary theories consulted in forming the basis of the research. In this regard, ample insight is provided towards the initial research objectives of identifying, describing and analyzing the areas where hindrances to fluency has been detected. Those areas in the long-term also formed a viable foundation towards the objective of proposing a more guided approach in enhancing the pursuit of L2 fluency in the classroom context.

Verbal Fluency and Conceptual Fluency.

The fundamental aspects of verbal fluency and conceptual fluency surface valuable data regarding the hypothesis of the study. Verbal fluency is mainly characterized through the level at which one is able to access their mental lexicon for verbal exchange or simply the level at which one can retrieve and produce words for meaningful utterances using the structures of the given language. In favouring correspondence to verbal fluency, eleven participants indicated that they focus on linguistic form instead of linguistic function with only one participant signalling otherwise. Here, the vast majority of the sample population exhibits a focus on the structural and grammatical conventions of their L2. Therefore, the leading challenges that participants encounter when communicating with native speakers showed higher frequencies among structural and grammatical concerns (see Table 3). This is opposed to a minority of only five participants that admit to sharing pragmatic concerns of whether meaning is communicated (see table 3), characteristic of linguistic function.

On the other hand, a high level of conceptual fluency was not apparent among the sample population. Although only two participants were of the opinion that they had a high level of verbal fluency and the remaining ten were split among intermediate and low levels (see fig. 1), only one participant admitted to thinking in Spanish while using the language (see fig. 4). Otherwise, only four participants indicated that they sometimes think their L2 while in use, depending on their topic area strength whereas seven individuals admitted that they completely do not think in Spanish whenever they are using the L2 (see fig. 4). These values undoubtedly confirm that a minority of the sample population has reached a level of conceptual fluency since they are mostly incapable of thinking in the conceptual framework and structure of their L2 (Danesi, 38).

Additionally, the data collected aligns to the dynamic established by Kecskes (147) whereby the majority of participants possess a verbal fluency seen by their awareness of the structural concepts of the language, but at the same time fail to exhibit the linguistic function of pragmatic awareness which guarantees that meaning has been communicated. Concomitantly, the level of multicompetence as an active indicator to conceptual fluency is also only limited to one member of the sample population (see fig. 4) where the individual as outlined by Cook (109) has developed a state of subconscious thinking that naturally comprises the grammatical system of their L1 and L2. As a result, more than half of the sample population would be limited to a lengthier communication process that first involves translation of thoughts which then enables oral expression, due to having not yet developed a functional multicompetence.

The alignment of L2 Interactional competence (IC) to the classroom context.

Both the theoretical area of L2 IC and its alignment to the classroom context have provided worthwhile data towards the hypothesis of the study. IC as a feasible indicator to L2 fluency can be considered as the ability to maintain a well-balanced topical exchange between interlocutors that facilitates a flowing conversation. Having a low L2 exposure outside of the classroom is not only common among the majority of the sample population (see fig. 2), but it also consistently arises as one of the leading reasons for the negative self-assessment of verbal fluency (see table 1). Corresponding low levels of discursive communicative competence skills as a subset of IC have also been recorded where most participants believe that the natural pace of Spanish-speakers is incomprehensible (see table 1) aside from being of the opinion that the different accents are also difficult to comprehend (see table 3). Taking into consideration the factors of social and cultural experience (Kramsch, 361) and the discursive structural conventions (Canale, 37) as key IC attributes that are absent among the sample population, one can postulate that the verbal fluency level of the sample population would be low in the native L2 environment.

A low level of IC that affects verbal fluency is also explanatory through the alignment of IC to the classroom context. Among the sample population, a total of eight individuals make effort using their L2 only in the classroom context to secure good grades (see table 1) whereas half of the sample population believe that it is completely possible to get a Grade A at the Spanish Undergraduate level and not be verbally fluent (see fig. 3). By nature, Cots, Josep and Amparo (53) posit that the L2 classroom context is already an artificial speech setting whereby the target language unnaturally occurs. Therefore, the limiting exposure to the aforementioned context would bear implications that cause lowered IC and fluency, which would become evident in scenarios where L2 students are put into a speech setting where their L2 naturally occurs. In this way, students may exhibit low L2 fluency in the actual speech environment since

it is not guided by the ‘predetermined’ nature thematic discussion and is more impromptu and informal in nature.

Moreover, the high frequency of individuals that believe ‘cheating the system’ in spite of low levels of spoken fluency (see fig. 3) in addition to students that only make effort in class to safeguard good grades (see table 1) follow the model where a fluency selective to context has evolved into an academic goal (Celce-Murcia, Zoltan and Thurrell, 13). Students are capable of utilizing the manipulability of thematized assessment methods for spoken fluency to their advantage of obtaining good grades, while expanses of alternative ‘untouched’ topic areas remain unassessed. In this way, spontaneity as an assessment attribute of fluency from Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 24) that the Spanish Undergraduate programme utilizes in speaking exams can be contradictorily premeditated and planned due to the thematized nature of speaking exams. The result of which creates and fosters a system of contrived and selectively thematized commands of fluency.

Input Processing (IP) and Segmentation indicative of Fluency.

IP and segmentation qualitatively supported the hypothesis of the study being prevalent in part two of the interview process. Based on the fluency range of the participants, limited levels of IP have been recorded among the sample population where students were unaware of the meaning of verbs and their respective conjugations, leading difficulties that caused corresponding delays in average response times (see table 4 and Table 5). The failure to establish “form-meaning” connections through discursive comprehension definitive of IP (Van Patten, 113) further exemplifies the collective preoccupation towards linguistic form as opposed to linguistic function. This can be seen where the main concerns causative of delays were towards grammatical concerns, instead of linguistic function and the pragmatic concern of effectively conveying meaning. In the long term, such extensive intermediate pauses and

delayed responses as a consequence of the lowered ‘grammatically oriented’ IP can be considered a fluency drawback, with the potential to damage the natural turn-taking dynamic of conversation in the hypothetical natural L2 speech environment.

Similarly, the segmentation used by the sample population indicated a low level of fluency, being entirely limited to simple sentences containing one independent clause. Considering that segmentation abilities are proportionate to fluency through the ability to manage complexities in expression (Gabryś, 113), the limitation of the sample population to managing mostly simple sentences and seldomly compound sentences further outlines the low level of verbal fluency among the sample population. That is, due to the general inability to naturally manage expressions of higher complexities.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory in relation to the L2 classroom context

The findings of the study inspired a thought-provoking analysis and consideration of the data, regarding the presence of SLA theory in the L2 Spanish Undergraduate classroom. The study and interview questions were modelled around common SLA theory such as fluency, metacognition, linguistic form and linguistic function, whereby standardized explanations for each of the SLA terminologies were provided for unaware participants, to safeguard the accuracy of responses (see appendix 1). However, the vast majority of the sample population were unaware of the significance of most of the SLA theory consulted. Therefore, in most cases the researcher had to utilize these explanations since SLA theory is not overtly taught and/or inculcated into the curriculum of Undergraduate Spanish. Regarding the improvement of L2 teaching and learning, Pienemann (3) contends that the incorporation of SLA theory in the L2 classroom bears the potential to improve the effectiveness of language teaching and learning. This is since the introduction of such essential theory not only facilitates a conscious awareness among teachers and students regarding the respective levels of students in the pursuit of their

L2 fluency (Pienemann, 4), but it also provides learners with a perceivable goal to work towards (Pienemann, 5).

Conclusion

This study sought to investigate the emergence of linguistic form over linguistic function in the L2 classroom as a hindrance to fluency among Year 2 Spanish undergraduate students at UWI St. Augustine. The findings of the study being mainly qualitative in nature, substantiated the underlying hypothesis in validating that the emergence and emphasis on linguistic form as opposed to linguistic function in the L2 classroom does in fact pose a major hindrance in the pursuit of L2 fluency.

Additionally, it was discovered that the general hindrance to L2 fluency stemmed from four main areas. Verbal and conceptual fluency and IC aligned to the classroom context are the first two areas explored that encouraged a preference towards linguistic form instead of linguistic function. This was rationalized through situations where a good academic performance was achievable by means of having temporary grammatical knowledge aside from being able to ‘cheat the system’ where assessments ironically attributed spontaneity to fluency based on discussion topics planned in advance by students. Segmentation and input processing acted as the third agent allowing the researcher to identify and analyze fluency drawbacks in favour of linguistic form among the sample population in the actual usage of their L2. Lastly, the absence of incorporating SLA theory to the L2 classroom acted as the final aspect causative of a lesser-guided approach towards pursuing L2 fluency. However, all four aspects function simultaneously and unanimously in posing a general hindrance to L2 fluency among the Year 2 Spanish undergraduate students.

Limitations

The study conducted was presented with two main limitations regarding the research process. Primarily, gender demographics could not have been used as a feasible correlate towards the interpretation and analysis of data since the quantity of female Spanish undergraduate students greatly outnumbers the number of enrolled males. The last and most difficult limitation of the study evidently stood as finding individuals that were willing to participate as primary research subjects. The main reason for this was that the second portion of the interview process designated to be conducted in Spanish acted as a definite deterrent, whereby many students out of nervousness and anxiety of their L2 fluency declined the offer to take part.

Recommendations

The general recommendation of the researcher towards improving L2 fluency is dichotomous in nature, requiring effort from both students and teachers. Regarding students, a greater effort can be made in the pursuit of their desired L2 outside of the classroom setting. One must remember that the dynamic of language as a means of human communication is a naturally occurring phenomenon. Therefore, a more immersive and inclusive approach in L2 usage that transcends the artificial barriers of the classroom can be beneficial in the pursuit of fluency and development of multicompetence. However, on the end of teachers, a greater effort can be made towards the incorporation of SLA theory into the classroom content as an element that can inform and guide students towards the best practices in achieving L2 fluency. In the long term, this bears the potential power of breaking the archaic and lesser-informed student tendency of focusing on linguistic form instead of linguistic function, as a model which has resulted from the conventions of the classroom setting.

Lastly, future research can be conducted among subsequent generations if the demographic between enrolled males and females are more balanced. This would allow researchers to shed light on whether gender can also act as a potential element that contributes to the hindrance in L2 fluency.

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Appendix 1

INTERVIEW

Good day, my name is Jervan Rampersad and I am a final year student in pursuit of my thesis (HUMN 3099). I would like to seek your consent to participate in my primary research which will act as the premise of my study. Please note that this will consist of an audio recorded two-part interview; whereby the first part will be conducted in English and the second, in Spanish. In cases where linguistic terms are unfamiliar, clarification would be provided. Please answer all questions as honestly and thoroughly as you can, as they relate to your experience as a Year 2 Spanish student. Thank you for your time.

PART ONE

1. What is your perception of the term “fluency” and do you consider yourself to have a low, intermediate or high fluency level?
2. If your answer to the previous question is not to a high level, why do you not consider yourself fluent?
3. Is your fluency limited to the classroom context and/or do you have opportunities to use Spanish out of the classroom?
4. Are you familiar with the term metacognition? If so, would you consider yourself to have a healthy metacognition?

Explanation for unaware participants: Metacognition refers to the self-awareness that one has regarding their planning and execution in the classroom context or simply how one feels about how they learn and think.

5. What is your opinion on the testing methods of the Spanish Undergraduate programme?

This is a question in terms of its efficiency, in that, is it possible to get Grade A's and not be fluent?

6. Do you believe that immersion is an effective way to improve one's fluency or communicative competence?
7. Do you focus on form instead of function when communicating with native speakers?

Explanations for unaware participants:

Linguistic form - this is a linguistic term that encompasses the structural and grammatical conventions of languages.

Linguistic function - this is a linguistic term that encompasses the pragmatic attribute of language or simply put, the transmission of meaning through the context of expression.

8. What are your biggest challenges in the natural speech environment with native speakers?
9. Do you think in Spanish while using it?

PART TWO

Ahora, vamos a continuar con la segunda parte de la entrevista en la cual tiene cinco preguntas abiertas. ¿Estás listo?

- A. ¿Cómo eres? Cuéntame de ti.
- B. ¿Cuál es la característica/tendencia que odias de tu generación?
- C. ¿Qué cosa quisieras hacer antes de morir?
- D. ¿Qué te asusta más sobre el futuro?

E. ¿Eres feliz con tu vida por lo momento? ¿Por qué/por qué no?

Translation:

Now we are going to continue with the second part of the interview which has five open-ended questions. Are you ready?

- A. What are you like? Tell me about yourself.
- B. What is a trait/tendency that you hate about your generation?
- C. What thing would you like to do before dying?
- D. What scares you the most about the future?
- E. Are you happy with your life momentarily? Why/why not?

This brings us to the end of the entire interview. Thank you for your valued participation and do have a good day!