Countering Spiral of Silence through Motivation in Improving Speaking Skills of English for Academic and Social Purposes: A Participatory Study

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with the possible reasons which make some students experience spiral of silence and that may be due to some unseen fear of social, academic, religious and economic inconvenience which could be encountered by motivation through participation. For this purpose 110 students were observed. The researchers used Oxford's Taxonomy of Learning Strategies and kept motivating the focused group throughout the semester of 16 weeks by maintaining their personal data diary, as a tool, for the collection of data as well as to monitor their progress. At the end of the semester the findings of the study show that minority students started speaking fluent English and used it for academic and social purposes without considering the opinion, attitude, or snubs of the majority students and proved vocal and confident students The results indicated that 22 students were found to have spiral of silence syndrome which proved a stumbling block for them to interact in English language outside the classrooms as the majority of students was engaged in using either Urdu or Punjabi language for academic and social purposes leaving the minority frustrated and consequently left them practiced what was done by the majority. Hence, the study suggests that 'Spiral of Silence' could be avoided through extrinsic motivation to get the reluctant, shy, under confident students of master level, with major in English, improve their speaking skills of English.
Keywords: Spiral of Silence, motivation, intrinsic, extrinsic, speaking skills.

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Introduction

Spiral of Silence is a term in sociology that refers to a situation where opinions are divided between two sides with one side becoming increasingly vocal, overwhelming the other side into silence (Kanoh, 2000). And it happened to most of our students studying at master level with major in English who suffered from 'Spiral of Silence' and gradually started losing hope to improve speaking skills of English because of the cold attitude of majority students. This paper throws light on the possible reasons which make some students experience spiral of silence and that may be due to some unseen fear of social, academic, religious and economic inconvenience which could be encountered by motivation through participation. Twenty two out of 110 students were found to have spiral of silence syndrome which hampered their interaction in English language outside the classrooms as the majority students were engaged in using either Urdu or Punjabi language for academic and social purposes.

The Oxford's Taxonomy of Learning Strategies helped researcher throughout the semester and the collected data, students' progress diary, reflect that minority students started speaking fluent English that they used for academic and social purposes without considering the opinion, attitude, or snubs of the majority students and proved vocal and confident students. Hence, the study suggests that 'Spiral of Silence' could be avoided through extrinsic motivation to get the reluctant, shy, under confident students of master level, with major in English, improve their speaking skills of English. "The Spiral of Silence" was primarily shown in the paper published on *Journal of Communication Research* by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, German sociologist, in 1974. She generalized this theory comprehensively in the book "The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion-Our Social Skin" published in 1980 (Neumann, 2000).

Spiral of Silence is a term in sociology that refers to a situation where opinions are divided between two sides with one side becoming increasingly vocal, overwhelming the other side into silence. The theory says that once the vocal side has the upper hand, the other side is caught in a "spiral of silence", finding it increasingly difficult to dispute whatever the other side says, thus hampering the fair representation of the two sides (Kanoh, 2000).

Pakistan, being an underdeveloped country, still needs reforms in the medium of instruction to impart education to students from grade 1 to graduation which is apparently English for the teaching of English at all levels but the actual state of affairs is vice versa. Consequently, the students are taught in at least two languages, i.e., English and Urdu, which affects their communication skills. Our personal

experience is that a majority of students (Master Level) speaks first language (Urdu or Punjabi) outside the classroom and English in the classroom because of the controlled conditions. While using first language instead of the target language, which is their primary objective to learn so that they could communicate, such students get the minority students suffered from 'Spiral of Silence', who ultimately follows the majority which, consequently, harms the learning objectives of the foreign language.

It is also very important to consider such measures that could counter 'Spiral of Silence' in English language learning particularly 'Spoken English' through which minority students may avoid 'Spiral of Silence' and learn English language to use in academic and social life.

Keeping in view the above, this participatory study was designed to pave way to the graduates of Public Sector University to improve their speaking skills on one hand and to get them free from spiral of silence on the other through motivation. This idea is reflected in the definition given by Williams and Burden (1997: 120) who see motivation as "a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, a state which leads to a conscious decision to act and gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort". The same idea is conveyed in different words by R.C. Gardner who seems to explain the term with the precision of mathematical demonstration: motivation is a combination of effort plus desire to achieve a goal plus favourable attitudes towards the goal to be accomplished (Gardner, 1985:11).

The participatory study is focused on getting the minority students of master level, with major in English, free from spiral of silence so far as their habit of speaking first language/dialect outside the classroom is concerned because of the majority of the students who are engaged in using first language outside the classroom where conditions are not controlled creating difficulties for those who seem to be interested to improve speaking skills of English language through practice outside the classroom for academic and social purposes.

This is a participatory study which was focused on students of master level, with major in English, who were unable to learn and enhance speaking skills for academic and social purposes because of the majority students who preferred to speak Urdu or Punjabi language outside the classroom as medium of communication leaving minority suffered from spiral of silence. For this purpose the researcher, after announcing in the classes, observed many students outside the classroom in academic and social settings to know that how many students were engaged in using English as medium of communication and vice versa. The subjects were also informed that students' data diary, as a tool, will be maintained to know the progress of the

subjects. It was observed that a majority used Urdu or Punjabi language except some who were sometimes snubbed or faced hard remarks of those engaged in using language/s other than English.

The researchers had a separate discussion with the minority and it was found that students: 1) had conscious about their general reputation so far as the use of English was concerned as they started generating consciousness of belonging to economically weak section of the society about whom the majority students had low opinion, 2) had unseen fear of those who preferred to speak other language/s outside the classroom than English because the majority laughed at them whenever they tried to communicate in English language, 3) had feelings that English language speaking is required in the classroom and with the passage of time they would be proficient in speaking English as the majority students made them think so, 4) became highly de-motivated because of shyness and existing non-English speaking environment outside the classroom and, 5) were found discussing even the subject matter of different courses in either Urdu or Punjabi language because of the social pressure of the majority students.

The above problems appear to be related to *extrinsic/instrumental* motivation and Gardner, 1985; Lightbown&Spada, 1993; Wright, 1987; Spolsky, 1989, all have come to draw a distinction between two types of motivation: when the only reason for learning a foreign language is to gain something outside the activity itself, such as passing an exam, obtaining financial rewards, getting a job or pleasing another person(s), the motivation is likely to be *extrinsic/instrumental*.

As the terms themselves indicate, it is caused by a combination of external factors and used as a means or instrument to obtain something. When its purpose is to enable one to communicate with the members of a specific language community, then motivation is considered to be *intrinsic* or *integrative*.

Hence, in order to offer a clear image of the intrinsic-extrinsic dichotomy, Spolsky (1989:124) borrows Harter's model (1982) and represents it in the following way:

Intrinsic		**Extrinsic**
Preference for challenge	vs	Preference for easy work
Curiosity/interest	vs	Pleasing a teacher/getting grades
Independent mastery	vs	Dependence on teacher in figuring out problems
Independent judgement	vs	Reliance on teacher's judgment about what to do
Internal criteria for success	vs	External criteria for success

Consequently the researchers made the above stated five problems of the students as research questions and used extrinsic motivation to enable students overcome spiral of silence to enhance their speaking skills by communicating in English language outside the classroom for academic and social purposes. For this purpose Oxford's Taxonomy of Learning Strategies were used as indicator for the collection and maintenance of daily data of the subjects.

Review of Related Literature

Language learning motivation, mean the motivation to learn (and acquire) a second language. This type of motivation is considered in the socio-educational model of second language acquisition (Gardner, 1985), the social context model (Clément, 1980), the Selfdetermination model (Noels, & Clément, 1996), the Willingness to Communicate model (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels,1998), and the extended motivational framework (Dörnyei, 1994) to name a few. It is a general form of motivation relevant in any second language-learning context. It is not a trait, as some individuals contend, but it is a general characteristic of the individual that applies to any opportunity to learn the language. It is relatively stable, because of its presumed antecedents, but it is amenable to change under certain conditions. The various models referred to above all agree that it as an attribute with significant implications for the individual; they differ in terms of its antecedents and/or correlates, as well as in how it might be assessed.

Given (Gardner, 2006) that there are various stages of language development one can well ask what we mean by language learning. Learning vocabulary is language learning. Learning structure, pronunciation, etc., is language learning. Learning to communicate in the language is language learning. Ellis (1994), in an overview of research on motivation, simply asserted that motivation affects the extent to which language learners persevere in learning, what kinds of behavior they exert, and their actual achievement. Wlodwoski explained motivation as "the processes that can (a) arouse and instigate behavior, (b) give direction or purpose to behavior, (c) continue to allow behavior to persist, and (d) lead to choosing or preferring a particular behavior" (1985, p. 2).

Gardner was one of the pioneering researchers in second language acquisition (SLA) to focus on motivation. He chose to define motivation by specifying four aspects of motivation:

1. a goal
2. effortful behavior to reach the goal
3. a desire to attain the goal
4. positive attitudes toward the goal (Gardner, 1985, p. 50).

But the most important which helped the researchers was Oxford's Taxonomy of Learning Strategies (Oxford, 1990) in which various direct and indirect strategies, during the entire semester of sixteen weeks, got the researcher's efforts fruitful. And for this purpose the researcher maintained students' data diary to determine the progress they made after the application of the following strategies. Hence, the main tool for data collection was personal diary of twenty students out of the total one hundred and six students, even though there has been debate on the usefulness of diary studies in second language acquisition SLA (Root, 1999). Some concerns focus around the small number of subjects, the subjective nature of data collection, and a lack of generalizable conclusions (Bailey, 1991; Bailey & Oschner, 1983; Brown, 1985; Long, 1980; Schmidt & Frota, 1986).

Oxford's Taxonomy of Learning Strategies

Direct Strategies

i. *Memory* Strategies
      A. Creating mental linkages
      B. Applying images and sound
      C. Reviewing well
      D. Employing action
ii. *Cognitive* Strategies
      A. Practicing
      B. Receiving and sending messages
      C. Analyzing and reasoning
      D. Creating structure of input and output
iii. *Compensation* Strategies
      A. Guessing intelligently
      B. Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing

Indirect Strategies

i. *Metacognitive* Strategies
      A. Centering your learning
      B. Arranging and planning your learning
      C. Evaluating your learning
ii. *Affective* Strategies
      A. Lowering your anxiety
      B. Encouraging yourself
      C. Taking your emotional temperature
iii. *Social* Strategies
      A. Asking questions
      B. Cooperating with others
      C. Empathizing with others

Mac Intyre et al. defined motivation as "an attribute of the individual describing the psychological qualities underlying behavior with respect to a particular task" (2001, p. 463). This goal-directed behavior shows itself through distinct actions of the motivated individual. Dörnyei described this explicitly when he wrote the following: "The motivated individual expends effort, is persistent and attentive to the task at hand, has goals, desires and aspirations, enjoys the activity, experiences reinforcement from success and disappointment from failure, makes attributions concerning success and or failure, is aroused, and makes use of strategies to aid in achieving goals" (2003, p. 173).

Further, Dörnyei (2001) wrote, "A great deal of empirical research during this period [the 1980's] was directed at measuring the association between various aspects of motivation and L2 language achievement. The emerging body of research studies established motivation as a principal determinant of second language acquisition…" (p. 43). Masgoret et al. stated that "learning a second language requires the adoption of word sounds, pronunciations, word orders, and other behavioral and cognitive features that are part of another culture. Individuals who want to identify with the other language group will be more motivated to learn the language than individuals who do not" (2003, p. 172).

Gardner and Lambert (1972) wrote: The acquisition of a new language involves much more than mere acquisition of a new set of verbal habits. The language student must be willing to adopt appropriate features of behavior, which characterize members of another linguistic community. The words, grammatical patterns, mode of pronunciation, and the sounds themselves should have significance for the learner that goes beyond simple translations or equivalences given by a teacher, grammar book, or dictionary (p. 14). That's why we see various research studies have supported these views. For example, Archibald and Libben (1995) reported, "Gardner and Lambert (1972) studied English speakers learning French in Quebec and argued that integrative motivation led to greater success in second language learning" (p. 318). Bialystok and Hakuta (1994) attributed the success of these English speakers to their interest in the French language and culture and the "desire to become part of the community" (p. 137). Gardner and Lambert's early research on English speaking students learning French in 1960 Connecticut determined "the strong motivation to learn French seems to stem from the students integrative orientations towards the study of the language" (1972, p. 36).

Meara & Skehan also wrote, "An integrative orientation is associated with an elaborative simplification strategy, i.e. hypothesis formation about the target language and a willingness to restructure the linguistic system. Gardner and Lambert (1972)

supported this when they wrote: We find that an integrative and friendly outlook toward the other group whose language is being learned can differentially synthesize the learner to the audio-lingual features of the language, making him more perceptive to form of pronunciation and accent (p. 134). Meara and Skehan (1989) further wrote, "Corder's phrase, 'Given motivation, anyone can learn a language' brings out the importance of motivation and the way it can overcome unfavourable circumstances" (p. 49).

We also see (Noels 2001, p. 44) offered that in addition to the major players of integrative and instrumental motivation in language acquisition, people may wish to learn an L2 for many number of reasons, including intellectual stimulation, showing off to friends, a need for achievement and stimulation, interest, curiosity, a desire for assimilation, travel, friendship, knowledge, prestige, career, school, media, national security or any combination of these. Moreover, Krashen (2002) contends that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety are well equipped for success in second language acquisition.
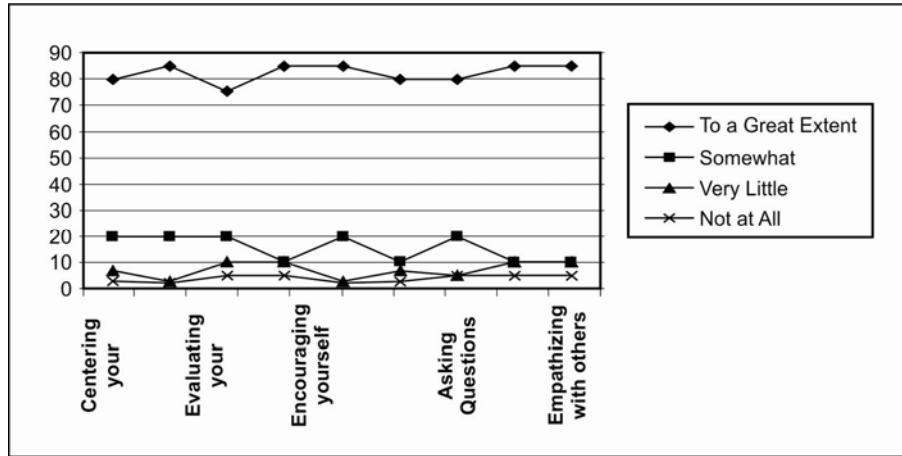
Results

Graphic display of data in the light of students' (22 students) progress through personal diaries from 1 to 100% is presented below.

Direct Strategies: Memory, Cognitive and Compensation Strategies' Progress in the light of students' diary
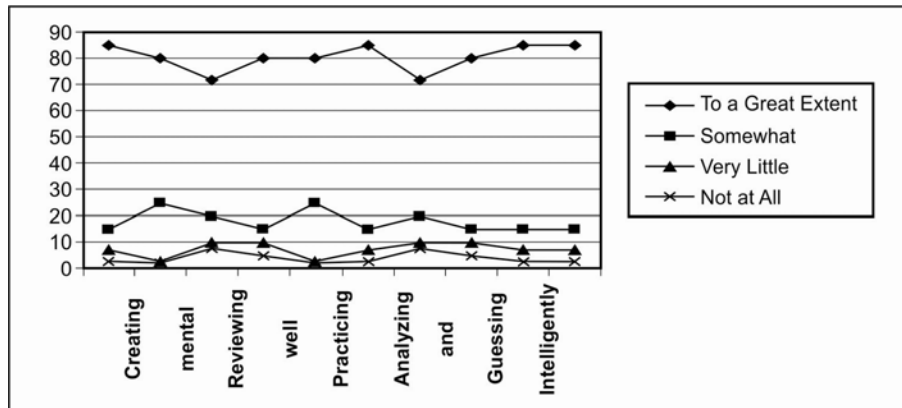
Indirect Strategies: Metacognitive, Affective and. Social Strategies' Progress in the light of students' diary

Discussion and Conclusion

The first tapped problem of the minority students was their consciousness about their economic or social class which appeared to be hurdle in overcoming spiral of silence regarding their habit of speaking language/s other than English. The researcher found that by applying Oxford's Taxonomy of Learning Indirect Strategies like lowering anxiety, encouraging, and taking emotional temperature, the minority students started improving their attitude towards the habit of speaking English as the data diary reflects. The subjects started generating sense of confidence and began interacting in English by centering their learning, arranging and planning their learning and evaluating their own learning by communicating in English language.

It was noted that they were frequently found to empathize and cooperate other peers by asking questions and answering them in a composed way and conduct. This seems to have eliminated their fear of those students who snubbed them or laughed at them whenever they tried to speak English as their progress enabled the researcher to conclude that they improved their confidence and mostly took the adverse remarks of the majority students casually by responding in English language gently. It was also observed that not only outside the classroom but the minority students preferred to speak English language inside the classroom voluntarily instead of considering it a controlled condition. It is interesting to mention that the attitude of the majority students also got flexible and gradually their apparent attitude towards the minority students was not as harsh as it was at the start of the semester. The data enables us to write that most of the students, minority group, understood the true requirement of spoken English on which mastery comes only through practice because of the existing academic environment at our institutions.

The progress diary reflects that by using different 'Memory Strategies' the students became able to talk subject matter, of both language and literature intricacies, in English language and proved to be different students which the researcher found them at the start of the semester; Language Learners with Spiral of Silence Syndrome. They started writing their own daily diary, arrangement and creation of reflections on the courses, etc., in English language and utilized their free time at the cafeteria in social and academic discussions by communicating in English language. They appeared to be motivated, confident and found putting efforts to generate English speaking environment at the campus. The researcher observed that their use of vocabulary, structure of the language and pronunciation improved a lot because of consistent practice and motivation by the researcher. The focused group seemed to have shunned off its shyness and reluctance so far as the use of English language outside the classroom was concerned.

It is important to mention that the same students who were mostly seen using Urdu or Punjabi language instead of English outside the classroom because of spiral of silence stopped using Urdu or Punjabi and preferred English by commenting that: "*We are here to complete masters, with major in English, by proving that we have equal proficiency in all language skills required in academic and social life so that we may be able to prove ourselves as skilled and knowledgeable graduates who are ready to contribute to national development*".

It was also observed that partly some percentage of teachers, who are engaged in teaching English at higher education, is also responsible for this state of affairs as they offer less time to students to discuss academic and social matters outside the classroom where students have uncontrolled conditions. Out side class is such an environment where adults, at least in our educational institutions, may experience stress free conditions to communicate in a foreign language but it is the same condition where they need guidance and mentoring of language instructors which was found absent in most of the instances during the course of this study.

Hence, in the light of the findings of the study the researcher is in the position to say that there are many other students in our country who don't speak English, which is a living language of the present era, because of the spiral of silence syndrome as the sample of this study represents but that could be countered through extrinsic motivation by the language instructors.

Implications

The researcher would suggest, in light of the findings of the study, that:

1. Teachers teaching English at master level must ensure the habit of speaking English especially outside the classroom by interacting with the students so that they may come to know the possible needs of the students who face different problems while using English as medium of communication for academic and social purposes.

2. It is imperative for teachers to motivate students on daily basis to provide them chance to shun off their shyness and reluctance which the students feel while using English language in and outside the classroom.

3. It is important for institutions to ensure assistance and counseling of such students who suffer from spiral of silence so far as English speaking habits are concerned so that they may not take such inadequacies along with them in the practical life where they are expected to be confident and composed graduates.

4. Higher education institutions and teachers teaching English at master level must ensure English speaking forums at their respective departments to improve the speaking skills of the students required both in academic and social life.

5. Teachers, at higher education level, should reserve sometime on daily basis for discussion on various social and economic issues and must try to promote equality of all social, religious, economic and cultural classes so that students may not create sense of inferiority or superiority complex.

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