

Investigating English Use within ESP Learners' Practices and Interactions through BE & EOP Classroom Observation

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Received: 18/04/2023,

Accepted: 02/06/2023,

Published: 10/06/2023

ABSTRACT: *Classroom observations are used in language teaching to provide teachers with constructive critical feedback aimed at improving classroom instructional techniques. This paper represents a comprehensive framework for class observation within business English learners at the Graduate School of Economy of Oran, Algeria, and English Occupational Trainees at the SONATRACH learning institution. This investigation aims to confer a practical and detailed insight into learners' use of mother-tongue and French language while performing their English learning tasks and so forth in interacting between them and with their teacher of English. To generate useful data, we have selected two methods: a "classroom observation system" and a classroom assessment scoring system. The findings show that the relative frequency of language used by the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learners was not regular or stable. Each time the use of English, the second foreign language (FL2) is low, the use of other languages, French as the first foreign language (FL1) and the Mother-tongue: Algerian Arabic dialect (MT) is high and vice versa. Accordingly, the informants fall into the category of unbalanced use of languages with a steady involvement in learning activities due to certain criteria that would be discussed and explicated in the paper in hands.*

KEYWORDS: Observation - BE/EOP learners - mother-tongue use – French use – English use- Learning practices – class interaction.

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1. Introduction

In the arena of EFL (English as a foreign language) /ESL(English as second language), language teachers are usually faced with the challenge of meeting the needs of ever-changing groups of learners in addition to exploring new strategies, especially in ESP(English for specific purposes) classes. This is why teachers are continuously selecting and trying useful methods and tools.

As known, Business English is the type of English used in business contexts; it aims at developing learners' communicative skills in both social and professional interactions. The interactions between language and the social environment (Haugen, 1972; Spolsky, 2004) may include decisions made by individuals to use a particular language in one setting but not another. However, teaching Business English is not only to improve learners' receptive and productive ability in this field but also to understand English by learning terminology and skills that can be applied to business; moreover, it entails expectations of clarity, particular vocabulary, and grammatical structures.

Yet, English for occupational purposes is a branch of ESP that covers situations in which learners are studying English for work related reasons. Indeed EOP (English for occupational purposes) is an indispensable language for career growth for it involves work-related needs plus training. Hence, it is quite important to mention that it focuses on the development of appropriate and relevant language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and language content that are directly applicable to a wide range of professional contexts. Besides this it aims to develop and promote learner's confidence in all four skills areas, "students work on all four skills from the beginning, i.e. a given activity might involve reading, speaking, listening and perhaps also writing" (Celce-Murcia1991).

Obviously, teaching is the act of encouraging learning activities, given that effective teaching/learning practices are evidence-based teaching strategies: (Strategies, activities, and programs that evaluation research has shown to be effective are based on evidence. They focus on creating safe and supportive learning environments) implemented and informed through data to produce positive and sustained results. It should be emphasized that stronger classroom participation (Benson, 2000; Dutcher, 1995); increased access to education and development of critical thinking skills. (Benson, 2004c; Smits, Huisman, & Kruijff, 2008 . cited by JN Cabansag · 2016). To be sure, there are many examples of classroom tasks that might be classified as active learning because practice helps learners to increase their ability to access information rapidly and frees their brains to process more challenging information and problems.

Along with these definitions, communication or the direct involvement at a learning situation is the process that involves reciprocal stimulation or responses. More precisely, the term *classroom interaction* alludes to the interaction between the teacher and learners, and amongst the learners themselves, Littlewood (1981:1) cites that, "In the teaching process student's communicative competence is based on their qualification to communicate with a teacher and other students" this what refers to **Learner-Learner** or **Learner-Instructor** Interaction.

Activities such as group/ pair work, class debates, discussions, or review games are examples of full-class interactions, "students regularly work in groups or pairs to transfer (and if necessary to negotiate) meaning in situations where one person has information that others lack (Celce - Murcia 1991). Consequently, communication skills' importance takes shape in developing learners' self-esteem, understanding conflicts and improving their conflict-resolution skills, increasing their problem-solving capacity skills plus their intrapersonal skills.

This paper seeks to study the exchange that takes place amongst learners to perform instructional duties and practices. Light is meant to be shed on the language and strategies employed by BE (business English) and EOP learners in achieving learning tasks and in interacting between them. The focus has been set to answer the following inquiries; first of all, what language is used during the English sessions? Secondly, what strategies are adopted to effectuate the learning practices?

For this purpose, we have opted for a classroom observation as a major method.

2. Methodology

Class observation is employed in this study to perform a quantitative research. It is believed to be the most appropriate method to meet the objectives set for this research. A bunch of scholars (Johnson and Christensen, 2004, p. 186; Richards, 2005; Philip and Stawarski, 2008) posit that classroom observation is an efficient technique to collect information about behaviours and phenomena in their genuine context; it also represents a useful means in needs analysis. Furthermore, effective observation can strongly detect the learning gap and collaborates very concretely in discovering certain attitudes and reactions that cannot appear within other tools of investigation such as questionnaires or interviews.

It is noteworthy to state that the predominant advantage of observation is to allow the investigation of particular observable events and facts at a close distance within various contextual variables. This latter may also lead to the researcher's subjectivity because sometimes closeness introduces a kind of bias. Furthermore, the process of observation may transmute the behaviour of the subjects observed as well as the job of the observer.

2.1 Procedures

As known, the challenge of loading events and notes taking of natural conversations may affect the learners' behaviour and attitudes. This is why the researcher acted as an internal observer, performing the roles of an instructor and an observer alike. Our presence with the EOP learners/ trainees as a contracted trainer in SONATRACH besides a teacher of English with the BE students of the Graduate School of Economics (GSE) encouraged the researcher to collect and record all the needed data without missing any subtle information that might have great worth and significance in supporting the research through correct as well as fair results basically in understanding the phenomena of using other languages during English sessions.

As a matter of fact, observation needs to elaborate a schedule so as to gather the target data during class time. So, performing the job of teaching and investigating at the same time is intricately complicated. Henceforth, we were motivated to effectuate this methodological strategy by opting to instate **structured observation**. Allwright (1987) rightly describes the nature of structure observation stating that

*The researcher observes what takes place in the classroom with the aid of an instrument that standardizes both the observer's data collection procedures and the focus of the observation. This instrument defines **priori** the focus of the observation. A large number of such instruments have been developed over the years by different researchers for a variety of aspects of classroom research.*

(Allwright, 1987: 118)

2.1.1. Structured observation

Before all else, **structured observation** is a methodology in which an event or series of events are observed in their natural setting and recorded attentively. Purposefully, it is mainly employed in studies starting with relatively specific formulation, it is known for elucidating a high degree of explicitness, and exactitude as well as valuable findings. Since our notable and conspicuous goal is to require the highest accuracy possible, we have determined previously what to observe in a specific context (languages use within ESP learning).

Additionally, we have attempted to designate the relative appliance that precisely defines the behaviour under investigation, what to focus on, and the sort of data to gather by using some instructional instruments, such as checklists, audio recordings, and written transcriptions. Therefore the anecdotal records were set down in several ways; hereafter, they were carried around sticky notes. Lastly, they were transferred and written down in the last stage of this process.

At this step angle, the researcher opted for designing a checklist tool and selected the circumstances for establishing the standardized process of observation. As previously mentioned, one assumed the role of a participant-observer which enabled the researcher to implement, pilot and fine-tune an observation schedule that would be appropriately utilised for the study at hand.

2.1.2. The Observed Population Description

The sample consists of a group of twenty (20) first-year business English students (BE), plus sixteen (16) occupational English trainees (EOP) who were observed and regularly recorded. As the participants' group is formed by probability sampling, one approached learners in both groups with high and low competence in the same way. It is noteworthy to emphasise that the EOP learners were in the pre-intermediate level and the BE students were studying in first-year classes which is equivalent to the elementary level.

2.1.3. The Observation Time and Context

For this type of observation, the researchers chose the time for observing and recording the participants in a pre-determined period. (Focusing on learners' TALKS and English use) the observation procedures lasted fourteen (14) sessions the equivalent of thirty (30) minutes a session. However, during this instantaneous sampling, the moments of observation were decided beforehand and recorded at that moment.

The observational data include the informants' speech and the languages they use (FL1- FL2 -MT) while doing their tasks and interacting with one another. In this regard, it is quite important to mention that the study does not deal with any specific speech act or language form. The main focus was put on improving learning skills, in addition to testing the acquired knowledge (vocabulary & grammar). We (researchers) have monitored and observed the participants' conversations during pair and group work in the language learning practice. Hence, our essential purpose was to boost the learners to communicate freely and constantly. Moreover, it motivates the learners to integrate into the learning process through their answers or by asking questions in discussing tasks and assignments. (As already mentioned the researcher was supported by a checklist)

2.1.4. Settings

It is substantially important to know that the observation process was carried out in two different settings under variant conditions. The first one was at SONATRACH Pedagogic Centre, exactly in the foreign languages department. The classrooms are arranged in a U-shape, which allows the learners to see and hear one another, moreover; it facilitates the teacher's observation and control. They were also able to follow the flow of the interaction, and the lesson progression and to communicate with the teacher as well. This seating arrangement makes the learning atmosphere suitable to be used as a language learning classroom.

The second setting deals with the first-year students in the Graduate School of Economics during English sessions in a normal classroom arrangement (learners were sitting one behind the other) which is not the case in the previous one for both the teacher and the students.

2.1.5. Observation Tools

2.1.5.1. Checklist

To obtain structured and analytical data, we have coded the learners' responses /actions on an agreed scale by using a behaviour schedule. The coding includes numbers, letters and many ranges to measure behaviour

intensity and describes its characteristics. The observational data could have been done by filling in the checklists, and we added tables (1. 2. 3) and figures/ diagrams to create a kind of concreteness of the finding results capable of being perceived.

This investigation means contains ordered records of a series of items arranged according to the system of the observed behaviour: Check whether or not the learners do the following:

<i>Learners 'observed behaviour</i>	<i>Number of times language is used 1.....50</i>
1. Use of MT in conversation with their colleagues	▪
2. Use of MT in conversation with their teacher	▪
3. Use of FL1 in conversation with their colleagues	▪
4. Use of FL1 in conversation with their teacher	▪
5. Use of FL2 in conversation with their colleagues	▪
6. Use of FL2 in conversation with their teacher	▪

2.1.5.2. Device Description

In the current research project, we used a camcorder of a GALAXY phone. The quality of the videos and recorded material were good enough to review them later, re-observe and analyse the outputs. The unnecessary recordings are separated and then eliminated. The main aim of the study drove the observer to concentrate on collecting data and recording them, testing and modifying the checklist, moreover; piloting the tailor-made observation schedule.

2.1.6. The Sampling Instructions

At the inception of the observation process, one instructed the participants to apply and go for the following linguistic directives:

- ✓ a slower rate of speech
- ✓ taking turns in speaking
- ✓ use of simple and correct sentences
- ✓ gradual complexity of input
- ✓ More basic/ relevant vocabulary and keep away from the meta-communicative means.
- ✓ Avoiding situations of silence
- ✓ Avoiding word-for-word translations.
- ✓ Stick to word order and grammatical patterns.

With definite interest, one communicated to the target learners to monitor their oral errors; in addition to eluding using mother-tongue or French language in accomplishing their learning tasks and even when interacting with one another. One admitted that there is no oral test on learning professional materials but we discussed the scores and explained the finding: achievements and difficulties that come out from their speech and language use as well.

Without forgetting to highlight that observation is a method associated with certain ethical issues that need the consent of the population under study, we preferred to exploit sampling methods to assort plus codify the loaded records. Lastly, the previous operation succeeded in the classification of the selected information appropriately.

3. Results

3.1 Common behaviours

The data were pooled for the two groups while observing the learners performing their instructional tasks/ activities and communicating between them. We noted the following actions/ behaviours:

- Asked for the translation (to FL1 or MT) of the unknown words
- Referred to dictionaries for unknown and new words
- Used FL1 (French) in conversation with the teacher
- Used MT (Arabic dialect) in conversation with the teacher
- Used FL1/ MT (Arabic – French) in conversation with colleagues
- Used FL1/ MT (Arabic – French) in conversation with the teacher

A set of behaviours have been noticed in both classroom observations and also after consulting the totality of the loaded records that have systematically captured information during the English sessions. These could be summarised in the following statements:

- Involvement of some of the group members.
- Few of the informants start speaking in English.
- Use language dictionaries and ask about the words they ignored.
- Anxiety, shyness and reluctance of some learners to participate or enter into communication.
- Repetition and the inordinate reaction of certain participants to their colleagues' responses
- Speaking up (of a small group) sometimes entailed to noisy class.
- Silence blocks learners' interaction when indulging in certain situations such as failing to find suitable words and structure patterns to express their ideas.
- Frequent use of FL1 and MT languages
- A translation that leads to poor language competence in English and poor topic-related competence in certain situations
- Decline/ decrease use of MT and FL1 languages as compared to the first stages.
- Remarkable increase and improvement in FL2 (English) use (as compared to the beginning of the observation).

3.2. Mother tongue Use

In the very first stage, the results reflected the number of tasks and the times the MT is spoken by the participants while doing these tasks. We favoured activities that lead to more speaking and discussion.

As the expectations, even though the participants were warned not to use other languages except English, the results show frequent use of MT. The table below displays the data concerning the use of MT (Arabic dialect/ language).

<i>LearningTasks</i>	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6	Task 7	Task 8	Total
<i>Participants</i>									
B E Group	6	4	4	5	3	2	0	1	25
Percentages	24%	16%	16%	20%	12%	8%	0%	4%	100%
EOP Group	4	3	4	3	1	2	0	0	17
Percentages	23%	18%	23%	18%	6%	12%	0%	0%	100%

Table 1: Use of Mother-tongue

It seemed that the learners failed to communicate using English only, although the teacher insisted on the same instruction and tried to collaborate and cover the one-sided speech, the participants continued unconsciously to communicate with the other languages.

Concerning this point, table 1 revealed that the participants' interaction during classroom activities includes (MT), though, we noticed a gradual decrease in the use of (MT) from task 1 to the last task which means the eighth one. The scores demonstrated that the BE learners' total use of MT, in performing all the tasks has reached 25 times and which represents 60%, whereas, seventy (17) times is equivalent to 40% for EOP learners.

3.3. French Language Use

For the second step, the whole population under investigation consciously attempted to speak in English, i.e. FL2 use, but they failed again. Hence, in addition to the existence of the MT in learners' speech, excessive use of FL1 (French) has been marked, with a proceeding in small stages in using English as remarked from the task (1) to task (8). All these results are clearly illustrated in the next table lists.

	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6	Task 7	Task 8	Total scores
BE Group	9	5	6	7	5	4	2	1	39
Percentages	23%	13%	15%	18%	13%	10%	5%	3%	100%
EOP Group	8	9	11	6	4	4	2	1	45
Percentages	18%	20%	24%	13%	9%	9%	5%	2%	100%

Table 2: Use of French

The obtained outputs dealing with the language use proportions revealed that the FL1 is widely employed. The EOP informants reached forty-five (45) temptations with a percentage of 46%. It is noteworthy to state

that the total use of FL1 by the EOP informants is higher than the BE group who marked thirty-nine (39) temptations representing 54%.

To know the rate of use of the English language, we have intended to analyse this focal point through the next table that depicts the proportions related to the frequent use of each language (MT- FL1- FL2), by the BE as well as EOP informants according to each learning task, and from which we might concentrate on the speaking of the FL2.

Languages Use per Task

Languages	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6	Task 7	Task 8
French	41%	33%	39%	31%	22%	19%	07%	04%
Mother-tongue	47%	34%	39%	38%	18%	20%	0%	04%
English	12%	33%	22%	31%	60%	61%	93%	92%

Table 3: Relative frequency in Languages use by BE/EOP Learners

Therefore, the analysis reveals a remarkable decline of the MT and FL1 use, in moving from task 1 to task 8, whereas, we could notice a real amelioration in terms of English-speaking temptations i.e., logically, the betterment that could be seen in FL2 use causes a decrease in MT and FL1 use by the participants. The following chart breaks down the exact proportions of each language according to their relative use within each group under study.

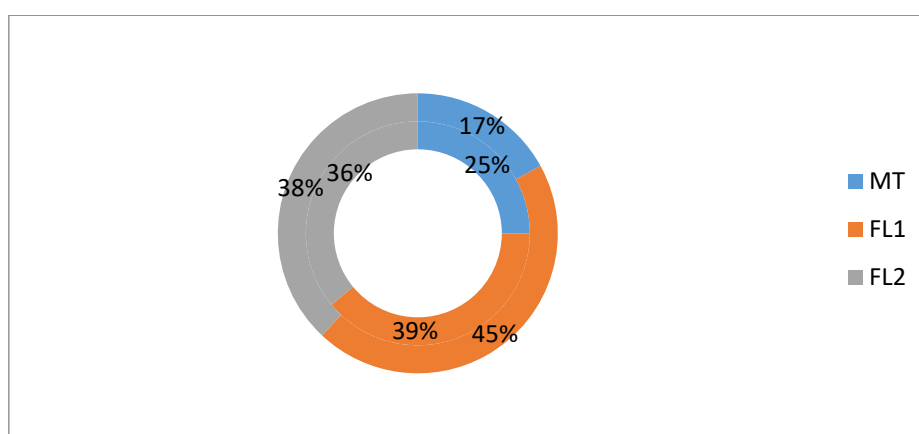


Chart 1: English Use as Compared to Mother tongue and French

3.4. The total use of MT/FL1/FL2

If we conceive the whole usage of the three languages we can directly deduce, though the results revealed a noticeable betterment in English use, the MT and FL1 total use is still higher. This conclusion could be clearly regarded in the table below.

<i>languages</i> / <i>informants</i>	MT	FL1	FL2
BE	25	39	36
EOP	17	45	38

Table 4: The total use of each language by BE and EOP informants

Most importantly, the scores within the FL2 have shown thirty-six (36) for BE learners and thirty-eight (38) for EOP ones, whereas, MT scored twenty-five (25) by the BE and seventy (17) by EOP participants. On the other hand, FL1 reached thirty-nine (39) with the BE and forty-five (45) with the EOP informants.

All in all the use of FL1 and FL2 by the EOP is higher, as opposed to MT which is less than the BE learners. What is really important is that FL2 speaking is nearly the same for the two groups.

4. Discussion of the Findings

The findings clearly indicate that the MT is more used by the BE learners, as opposed to the FL1 use which is higher within the EOP informants' talks. This is due to certain reasons as the dominance of the French language since it is considered the first/ main tool of communication in the company of SONATRACH.

The relative frequency in language usage indicates an unbalancing output, as previously shown in the above tableau, when the participants were doing their tasks, i.e., the rate of language usage was not regular or stable. Each time the use of the English language is low, the use of other languages (French and Mother-tongue) is high and vice versa.

To put in a nutshell, the phenomenon of speaking/ the use of other languages during English sessions will directly lead to the decline of English language use. Furthermore, it might have a lot of drawbacks, for instance, the communication becomes far less effective and the speech would lose shades of meaning as well. Most crucially the disposition to speak different languages, while studying the English language will not support fostering language skills and development. In the end, much more exposure to FL2 would surely have a positive impact on the expressive and receptive abilities of the learners.

The informants fall into the category of unbalanced use of languages, although various cases of balanced bilingual or trilingual have been confirmed by the researcher. However, we have conceived that through time each learner has voluntarily developed a kind of auto control by himself while starting to speak out in the English language. This strategy will decrease language errors, keep the learners away from confusion and prevent them from using other languages rather than the target language.

The analysis of this issue has revealed the extent to which ESP learners had succeeded to speak in English by exerting a self-control attitude. It also shows the significant correlation between self-control with self-confidence while conversing or speaking in English. In this situation, the participants develop a variety of strategies like using a slow and steady rate of speaking, correct grammar patterns, selecting

appropriate vocabulary, and avoiding linguistic errors: implementing structures from MT/ FL1 languages such as word order, grammatical errors, etc.

An important betterment is progressively marked in English use due to individual self-control, learners' mutual correction, and the recurrent intervention of the teacher. Most importantly, the learners were able to follow the teacher's instructions only when they interact and select the target language (FL2) consciously. The elaborate talks made me gain in-depth knowledge because I had the opportunity to converse freely with the respondents and inquire about their improvement in communicating in English. Moreover, they collaborate with me to find the causes of many of their behaviour and reactions. (Achievement or weaknesses).

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research and some areas for improvement, we think of suggesting some recommendations that can help remedy.

The English-only rule should be applied and adopted under the circumstances like communication with partners and when working as a team to compile certain tasks or jobs.

English usage for non- official and official communications, English should not be limited to only the official functions at work, but it is needed to enhance English communication and fluency with co-workers and trainers during English language training courses. In addition to all this, EOP learners must have tests / interviews to confirm which level of English proficiency they will need to meet.

From another angle, assessment should meet the score requirements for the overall and all individual component parts (speaking, listening, reading, and writing). Finally, the EOP participants must also be awarded an academic qualification at the end of the enrolment period

Business learners have a goal in mind which is basically related to business and academics, so what really motivates them is succeeding in their studies and getting a job by developing the skills they need in English. Therefore; making the module of English a compulsory subject and the language of teaching would have a positive step in providing the opportunity to succeed in studies, research and job acquiring. Additionally, English syllabi content has to promote students' engagement in multiple types of oral communication, using student independence and instilling a positive classroom climate that needs to be conducive to instruction.

6. Conclusion

Longstanding debates have been raised about using L1 (Algerian Arabic) or FL1 (the case of Algeria) during EFL courses and which has taken a larger space as compared to English use. The paper ensures specific tools and statistical significance for specifying and generating the correct and exact outcomes of these issues.

The final results reveal an unbalancing use of languages that are characterised by the use of (French and Mother-tongue) more than the English language. It is noteworthy to highlight that after a long process of observation, the researchers noticed that ESP learners (BE/EOP) had succeeded to speak in English by exerting a self-control attitude.

Additionally, the motivation phenomenon is the most significant behaviour in the learning process and by which the purposes of language acquisition could be achieved. It represents the key to success in learning a foreign language. Hence, the teacher's verbal reward encourages the learners to be more involved. This appears in their English use without spelling out words in MT or FL1. Therefore; the cases in which students speak fluently and correctly had a positive effect on their behaviour as well as achievement.

In conclusion, encouraging ESP learners to use English in interaction with each other and in class involves creating a supportive and non-judgmental environment, providing opportunities for communication, implementing an English-only policy, incorporating games and fun activities, encouraging self-expression, providing regular feedback, offering rewards, and integrating technology. Through these recommendations, teachers and language instructors can easily motivate learners to use English, build their confidence and fluency and support their language development.

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