

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' PRACTICES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF
GRADE NINE LEARNERS' ORAL PROFICIENCY: A CASE STUDY OF
STUDENTS IN ASMARA, ERITREA**

By

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fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of
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DECLARATION

This thesis is the original work of the researcher and has not been submitted in any form to another university. Where use was made of the words of others, this has been duly acknowledged in the text and included in the bibliography.

Dawit Maekele Russom

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ABSTRACT

The main focus of this study is on the causes of the problems in English language proficiency of Grade Nine high-school learners in Asmara, Eritrea, with reference to their oral skills, particularly for academic purposes. This study examines the way Grade Nine English teachers in Eritrea do or do not promote the development of Grade Nine learners' oral proficiency. The researcher's focus is on how the teachers structure their teaching approach to English and the way students learn the language in the classroom. The researcher looked at the practices of English language teachers by conducting observations in English classes in two high schools in Eritrea for about a month.

The researcher obtained rich data via different methods of data collection with respect to the learners' oral development. The criteria that the researcher adopted for observation were those of the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching Observation Scheme (COLT) (Allan, Frohlich, and Spada: 1983). In addition to the classroom observation, the researcher also conducted interviews with the teachers. Questionnaires were distributed to learners, after which focus-group discussions with selected students were conducted.

The findings of this study are summarized as follows. Firstly, English teachers have teaching techniques which are ineffective in achieving the intended objective. They use the structural approach to language teaching, which is out-dated. Secondly, grammar is the main focus of lessons. Most of the students commented that more oral (speaking) classes should be included in the learning of language to achieve oral/aural proficiency. Teachers must therefore foster a supportive classroom environment and stress the importance of oral classes in language learning.

INDEX FOR TRANSCRIPTION

^ = Silence

(---) = Not audible

[L1:...] = Mother tongue (L1)

() = Researcher's comments

--- = Pauses

Italicized words = words which are emphasized more

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- EAL: English as an additional language**
L1: First language (mother tongue)
L2: Second language
NNS: Non-native speakers
NS: Native speakers
SLA: Second Language Acquisition
TESOL: Teaching of English as a Second Language
MOE: Ministry of Education
COLT: Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching
MOI: Medium of Instruction
MT: Mother Tongue
BICS: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
CALP: Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
LT: Language Teaching
ZDP: Zone of Proximal Development
EFL: English as a Foreign Language
CLT: Communicative Language Teaching
FLINT: Foreign Language Interaction Analysis System
FIAC: Flanders Interaction Analysis

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Nature and purpose of the study

The main focus of this study is on the problems of English language proficiency of Grade Nine high school learners in Asmara, Eritrea, with reference to their oral skills, particularly for academic purposes. The researcher chose Grade Nine since it is the second year of high school in Eritrea and the students at this Grade have already experienced two years of schooling through English as a medium of instruction (MOI). In Eritrea, the medium of instruction at the elementary grade levels (1-5) and junior levels (6-7) is the mother tongue, while at secondary levels (8-11) the medium of instruction is English. This study specifically examines the way in which Grade Nine English teachers in Eritrea do or do not promote the development of Grade Nine learners' oral proficiency. The researcher's focus is on how the teachers structure their teaching approach to English and the way students learn the language in the classroom. The researcher looked at the practices of English language teachers by conducting observations in English classes in two high schools in Eritrea for roughly a month. The researcher obtained rich data via different methods of collection with respect to the learners' oral development. The criteria that the researcher adopted for observation were those of the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) observation scheme (Appendix 8), (Allan, Frohlich, and Spada: 1983). Basically the aim of COLT is to examine the effects of second language instruction on the acquisition of the target language.

In addition to the classroom observations, the researcher conducted interviews with the teachers. Questionnaires were distributed to learners, after which focus-group discussions with selected students were conducted (see 3.3.6 for detailed discussion).

1.2 Rationale for the study

English is the language of communication *par excellence*. In international organizations and universities, English is used for contact purposes and as a medium of instruction.

Eritrean students need to improve their oral proficiency for many reasons, which include studying abroad, globalization, modernization and education. Firstly, it is well known that Eritrean students going to study in universities abroad experience difficulties in their oral/aural skills even though they passed the written scholarships. The reason for this, according to the students, is lack of exposure, as the students do not get an opportunity to practise the English language with a native speaker or others who speak English. For example, students who are studying in South Africa were obliged to take an English course to ensure that they were ready to undertake study in their degree programmes without difficulties. The main focus of this preliminary course was to improve the learners' academic writing skills and English for specific purposes, but it also attempted to improve the oral skills through seminars, debates and discussions. However, the learners suggested that they needed more oral/aural lessons in order to follow their lectures and improve their communication skills with their instructors and fellow students.

Secondly, Eritrean students need to engage with English as an international language. English has inarguably achieved global status all over the world. Whenever we turn on the news to find out what is happening in the world, local people are being interviewed and telling us about it in English. Eritrean students should improve their aural/oral skills in order to follow such news.

Thirdly, English is closely associated with modernization. Information is sent and received at increasing speed. The competitive demands for technological progress of governments, industries and corporations, both national and multinational, require an understanding of the language of technology – English. English is, thus, a compulsory linguistic medium in the new economic environment. It is the undisputed international language of business and communication, giving one access to knowledge and technology and the possibility of communication with many people. World technology is introduced in English. Profiting from the new technological advances requires an understanding of the language of their manufacturer.

Being able to read, write and understand English allows access to knowledge on the Web, since English is the medium for most of the information stored in the world's computers. Also, English has become the *lingua franca* of science. Books on any subject are either written in English or translated into it; almost all articles about science appear in English.

Furthermore, English plays a significant role in education in many countries. For example, Eritrea has adopted English as the medium of instruction (MOI) at secondary and tertiary education levels. Success or failure in English at school is decisive for educational and career prospects. Instruction at the university level is also in English, meaning that it is a precondition for higher educational qualifications. Students must pass an examination in English in order to enter a university.

Finally, English is the international *lingua franca* for communication in the media and among non-English speaking peoples. This means any literate, educated people from different countries can use English to communicate with each other.

Although it is clear that English has become a powerful and dominant international language, and that it is in the rest of the world's interest to learn it, there is also a negative aspect to this power which needs to be taken into account, for example loss of cultural roots and identity (self and national). This aspect will be explained more fully in the next chapter (see 2.6).

Students in Eritrea are weak in their English aural/oral skills. The Standard National Examinations given at the end of formal basic education have been very instrumental in not only assessing the learning achievement of students but also in consolidating students' study and work. The National Examination has been changed in quality and organization, so that it serves the purpose of improving the quality of formal basic education in the country. One of the main concerns was to standardize the examinations based on the Curriculum Framework for National Examinations. This guideline gives a clear description of the English language competence levels required by the end of the formal basic education level. However, the overall performance is still very low in terms of the national attainment targets and requires improvement (www2.unesco.org).

In the next section, the conceptual framework of the receptive and productive skills that Eritrean learners need to engage with will be explained. In this section, the possible exposure to English that Eritrean learners could receive from listening and observation in the various domains: school (educational setting), mass media (TV and radio) and technology (computers) in their day-to-day activities will be explained. The main importance of the conceptual framework is to know the quality and quantity of L2 (English) that the learners get in these domains in order to develop their aural/oral proficiency.

Two frameworks for conceptualizing the nature of language proficiency are particularly influential in the design of the present study. The first is the communicative competence framework developed by Canale and Swain (1980). It comprises grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. The framework was later refined by Canale (1983) to include grammatical, discourse, sociocultural and strategic competence. In order to develop Eritrean learners L2 oral proficiency, the following criteria for the components should be included in the teaching of L2 (Harley *et al.* 1992: 30):

Grammatical Competence: in order to develop learners' grammatical competence, teachers need to focus on phonology (sound system), morphology (word formation) and semantics (meaning system) and syntax.

Discourse Competence: learners need to be taught rhetorical control with accurate and appropriate use of cohesive devices, organization of argument, narrative and description.

Sociolinguistic Competence: teachers need to focus on the appropriate choice of lexis and sentence structure. They could use role-play of speech acts, requests, offers, complaints and turn-taking activities.

In order to develop learners' oral proficiency, learners need to be given tasks that include elements of all the above competencies in an integrated manner, i.e. communicative tasks.

Concerning sociolinguistic competence, learners need to be taught how to produce and recognize socially appropriate language in context such as requesting, offering, or complaining. This would help the learners to shift register, using frame markers of politeness in formal and informal situations. Discourse (written) tasks should be included, such as letter writing for formal and informal requests and informal notes (directives).

The framework for conceptualizing verbal interaction in the classroom is related to the classroom context. It includes such aspects as genuine communication, predictable/unpredictable information, length of speech and control of topics. In the classroom, learners need the following criteria to develop their aural/oral proficiency skills.

Firstly, the classroom communication needs to be genuine. Learners need to discuss real issues such as world economy, politics and social activities in the classroom. Teachers need to conduct a class discussion of an article from a newspaper and ask questions about it and elicit comments from the class. Secondly, learners need to discuss topics which enhance communication. Learners need to be given supplementary tasks besides those from their textbooks. Moreover, they need to use sustained speech in the classroom. They need to engage in an extended discourse without restricting their utterances to a minimal length of one sentence, clause or word. Teachers need to create a conducive atmosphere to attain this goal. For example, they could ask learners open-ended rather than closed or yes/no types of questions. Concerning discourse initiation, students need to initiate talk in the classroom rather than responding to what the teachers say. This would create a good atmosphere within which to construct their own sentences and express themselves in the L2, rather than listening to the teachers' expression and answering by repeating words and expressions. This could be achieved using pair work, group work and individual work, rather than the traditional teacher-led class. As a result, the amount of student participation in the class would increase. This also increases the opportunity for individual students to practise and use new features of the target language. In a classroom, teachers need to use the L2 for classroom procedures, routines and classroom management, besides teaching the content of learning.

Learners also need exposure to mass media such as TV and radio in the L2. This would help them to observe the way the L2 is constructed such as asking politely, requesting information and asking directions. In brief, learners need the above-mentioned criteria in order to develop their oral proficiency.

The study will be beneficial to the Ministry of Education in Eritrea for identifying the causes of learners' weaknesses in their English oral proficiency. This research may have helpful implications and applications for in-service teacher education and possibly for the design of instructional materials, syllabuses and timetabling. It will also be a source of information for further study.

1.3 Overview of Eritrea's education system and the language education policy

According to the Ministry of Education (MOE), primary school is for grades 1-5, middle school education for grades 6-7 and secondary education for grades 8-11. Earlier education publications by MOE refer to "elementary education" (grades 1-5). This term has now been abandoned by MOE. Primary and middle school together are now labeled "basic education". Pre-school is a two-year programme offered for children 5-6 years of age. It is not considered part of basic education. For grade levels 1-7, the medium of instruction is in the mother tongue, although English is taken as a subject starting from grade five. However, from grades 8-11, the MOI is English.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) in Eritrea drafted a language policy for Eritrean education in September 1999. It has been summarized below (www2.unesco.org).

The language policy in education promotes the use of the mother tongue (MT) as a medium of instruction at the "basic" education level. Firstly, the process of learning to read is easier if the materials reflect the language of the children and are therefore meaningful to them. Learning to read a public language such as English means that children express very little of their internal, emotional life and experience. Secondly, learning literacy skills in the familiar language strengthens those very skills in the second language (L2), when they come to be transferred to L2 later on. Hawes (Macdonald 1990:52) maintains that the learning in mother

tongue for the initial years of formal education is good, since he holds that the oral mastery of the language (English) is important in order to be able to learn to read that language. The Eritrean government is aware of the fact that its citizens should learn in their vernacular language in order to provide equal opportunities for all ethnic groups. Thus, as a way of promoting equal opportunity and equal development of all languages, the corpus development of a writing system based on transliteration has been a major task successfully undertaken. Major problems still exist in relation to the standardization of the various languages and the lack of literary work. However, one of the important achievements of the Eritrean education system has been the expansion and consolidation of mother tongue education in the last three years. The impact of this on English is that more emphasis is given to the vernacular languages rather than promoting the L2 (English) at this stage.

The Ministry of Education used major strategies in the promotion of the use of mother tongue and second language as a medium of instruction in Asmara. A major strategy was the establishment of popular committees from the communities with religious leaders, community elders, teachers and local administrators playing key roles. The campaign was very productive in assuring the promotion of "basic education" schooling in the Mother tongue. In some areas, teaching through the MT was consolidated and expanded and more than 60% of the schools using L2 medium of instruction transferred to MT teaching and will get their full status in the next 3-5 years. In 1998/99, 16 new schools were opened in 6 languages while about 54 were transferred from L2 as MOI to MT as MOI.

Difficulties arise where the learning shifts from mother tongue instruction to second language medium of instruction (English). MacDonald (1990) conducted research on the difficulties that arise for South African learners as a result of switching their learning from mother tongue to English in schooling (Fincham in Inglis *et al.*, 2000: 141). This was termed the '*Threshold Project*'. She investigated the language and learning difficulties that grade five pupils experience when they change from their mother tongue to English as the language of learning. She found that the main causes for such problems are as follows. Firstly, for learners to process and understand their textbooks, they need more vocabulary in the target language. She concluded that it would be better to incorporate both mother tongue and English from an earlier level (bilingual education), instead of starting English later.

Similarly, Eritrean learners are underprepared for learning through English as MOI. English should be introduced earlier (transitional model) as a subject and more than this it could also be used as MOI for a couple of subjects.

Cummins (1984) (cited in Inglis 2000:142) has developed a theory which consists of several interrelated principles. The first of these is the *conversational/academic language proficiency principle*, in which he distinguishes between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP).

BICS are needed to conduct informal face-to-face conversations in everyday contexts, while CALP are the skills required to succeed with more complex academic and cognitive tasks. According to Cummins' research, conducted in Europe and North America, individual learners tend to develop BICS within about two years, whereas CALP takes up to five years to acquire. It is CALP, rather than BICS, which is important to the learners' academic success. Understanding the difference between BICS and CALP is crucial for Eritrean teachers in order to make accurate assessments of the learners' linguistic proficiency. In brief, communicative competence includes both BICS and CALP. Eritrean teachers should concentrate on both BICS and CALP, so that learners may improve their aural/oral skills.

The second of Cummins' principles is the *Linguistic Interdependence Principle* (Ibid: 144). According to this principle, learners first have to be competent in terms of BICS and CALP in their L1 before they acquire CALP in the L2. Moreover, he argues that the acquisition of CALP in L2 is dependent on the acquisition of L1 CALP. This means that if the learner does not fully develop L1 CALP, the learner is likely to experience difficulty in doing tasks related to L2 CALP. Eritrean learners should thus develop their language proficiency in both their L1 and L2 in a parallel fashion. They should develop their ability to express themselves at the level of (CALP) well enough in L1 before learning to express themselves in L2. Hence, Eritrean Mother tongue policy at elementary and secondary level should be "additive", which means L2 should be valued parallel with L1 in the school.

Cummins' third principle is based on the argument that any *bilingual education* needs to be additive in nature (Ibid: 145), that is the mother tongue should continue to be valued

alongside the new language instead of being replaced by it too early. In other words, second language learning should never be at the expense of the first language (mother tongue) when it is introduced.

In brief, Cummins' principles are very helpful for Eritrean English language teachers who wish to understand Eritrean learners' academic difficulties and possible causes for their weaknesses. For example, in order for learners to process and understand their textbooks, they need more vocabulary in the target language. However, if the learners learn in their mother tongue up to certain grade levels and then change to English, they encounter problems. Some of the reasons for these problems are the following. Firstly, teachers do not speak English with confidence or fluency, use outmoded materials and have relatively little time to learn English formally. Secondly, learners have almost no contact with English speakers.

Thirdly, learners are inadequately prepared for the sudden transition to learning subjects through the medium of English in secondary level. Fourthly, there is inadequate support from the family in terms of pre-literacy experience, such as books in the home, public libraries and the practice of reading for pleasure. The "straight for the target language" policy worked better in Canada, where English-speaking children have been taught through the medium of French from the beginning of school by fully bilingual, professional, trained teachers. This is called the "immersion" model (Cummins and Swain, 1986) (cited in Macdonald 1990: 50). However, there are problems in Eritrea's education system pertaining to lack of resources, lack of professional expertise in subject discipline areas and lack of professional qualifications in language teaching (LT) pedagogy. The problems in the educational system in Eritrea are described as follows (www.worldbank.org).

The present curriculum is narrow. For example, there is no place for creative, aesthetic and technological subjects, or for health education. Primary and middle schools have approximately 1 formal subject textbook for pupils (about 5 subject textbooks per grade are needed from grade 3 onward). Secondly, teacher support materials are almost non-existent. School libraries, found in some schools only, contain mostly outdated books and the Eritrean educators expressed an urgent need for modern books and updated content and technology.

English teachers are poorly qualified compared to science and Mathematics teachers who have Masters degrees and even doctorates (www.worldbank.org).

The other major problem is related to the quality of the teachers. According to the Ministry of Education in Eritrea (MOE), about 70 percent of primary and secondary teachers are professionally qualified, but only 32 percent of the middle school teachers are (World Bank 2000:10). Lacking sufficient training in pedagogy, many teachers are unable to engage students in active learning. At all levels, teaching practice is strongly influenced by the approaches set out in the textbooks. There is a strong emphasis on content and knowledge and insufficient focus on the development of understanding, evaluation and critical thinking skills. Furthermore, there are no mechanisms for regular and formal teacher evaluations on aspects of pedagogy at the school level (World Bank 2000:11).

There are also serious problems concerning school class sizes, which are large, averaging 50 students per class. This is not a favourable environment for developing oral proficiency in a second language. Moreover, other subject teachers, beside English teachers, code-switch from English to mother tongue in explaining the subject matter of the lesson, for example in science, geography and history. The use of L1 and L2 by both teachers and learners in English and other subjects will be critiqued in Chapter Four.

The Eritrean context is similar to the South African context, in that both governments promote the use of the mother tongue in their education policy. Eritrea can benefit from the South African experience. Above all, they would benefit if English is introduced earlier, since it is the window to the whole world in technology, science and mass media.

1.4 Limitations of the study

This study was undertaken on a small scale because of time and resource constraints. The study lacks the use of video and the observations of lessons was carried out in English language classes only due to time limits. Moreover, the researcher confined his observation to two schools, interviewed only four teachers and had focus-group discussions with only twelve students.

This had an effect on data collection and analysis. Firstly, video recordings provide more comprehensive data, including non-verbal clues and gestures such as facial expression and movement of the hands. It would be helpful for the researcher, in transcribing the collected data, if video recordings supplemented it. This is because it is easier to transcribe data by both listening and watching instead of merely listening to taped material (see Chapter Three).

In this research, the teachers were influenced at first by the presence of the researcher, although he was a non-participant throughout the observation period. Generally, teachers' or students' behaviour is more likely to change due to the presence of a visitor (observer) in class. For example, students were unusually well-behaved during the lesson with an observer in the classroom. They also became inhibited from participating actively in the classroom interaction. However, the researcher resolved this problem by changing his location to the back of the classroom.

Moreover, the teachers might try hard to show that they are skilled enough to teach the English language in the presence of an observer. They might understand that the purpose of the visit is to evaluate the teachers' performance. However, the observer tried to minimize the effect his presence would have on the teachers' performance by telling them the purpose of his visit. This is because, at first, the researcher told the teachers that the aim of his visit was not to evaluate them but to collect data for research purposes. The researcher obtained permission from the teachers to tape-record the lessons and take field notes during classroom interaction. During the first three lessons, the researcher (observer) sat at the front, recording the lesson and taking field notes.

Lastly, there was a problem concerning the instrument for recording the classroom interaction. The researcher used a small tape recorder, with poor quality recording capabilities. This compromised the analysis of the data. The researcher experienced difficulties with transcribing the recorded data, since it was not very audible. However, the researcher kept detailed field notes, which helped him to compensate for this.

This chapter has briefly introduced the main focus, nature and purpose of the study and also its rationale. Moreover, it gives an overview of Eritrea's educational system and language education policy. The limitations that the researcher faced while undertaking the research are mentioned.

The next chapter deals extensively with literature related to oral proficiency, in particular with the theoretical aspects of 'communicative competence', as defined from different perspectives. It also discusses the main features of the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching observation scheme (COLT). Chapter Two focuses on the factors that affect the acquisition of oral proficiency, the nature of assessment and approaches to and methods of language teaching, all of which contribute to our understanding of the nature of oral proficiency and what facilitates it. The final section examines the phenomenon of linguistic imperialism and resistance to the dominance of English as an international language, which, in turn, should inform the kind of oral proficiency to be acquired by Eritrean learners.

Chapter Three describes the research design and methodology, including the methods by which the researcher collected data for the research. Chapter Four is a detailed analysis and discussion of the transcripts of the lessons observed, interviews, focus-group discussions and the questionnaire. The last chapter is a concluding chapter, which reports on the findings. The researcher also gives recommendations emanating from this study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Chapter Two contains the following sections. First, the theoretical aspects of 'communicative competence' will be defined from different perspectives. Then there will be a discussion of the factors that affect the acquisition of oral proficiency, the nature of assessment and approaches and methods to language teaching, all of which contribute to our understanding of the nature of oral proficiency and what facilitates it. The final section looks at the phenomenon of linguistic imperialism and resistance to the dominance of English as an international language.

2.1 Communicative competence

It is very important to know the basic categories of communicative competence in order to help Eritrean learners develop their oral proficiency in English. This is because Eritrean learners should be taught not only the structure of the target language but also how to speak appropriately in that language.

Communication is a crucial element in the daily lives of human beings. Whether the person is speaking in mother tongue or other languages, the important aspect is how to convey an effective and meaningful message for a given purpose. However, the meaning they are communicating is negotiated between the persons involved. For example, Savignon (1983:8) defines 'communication' as follows:

"Communication, then, is a continuous process of expression, of interpretation and negotiation."

- The meaning we intend is sometimes different from the meaning we convey. This is because the meaning we convey depends on others who share an understanding of the systems of signs and symbols such as smiling, nodding, sound of voice, the way we stand and gesture.

Learners need to know not only the forms of language but also the different signs and symbols in language interaction that help the learners to communicate.

Noam Chomsky coined the term 'competence', to refer to the innate and idealized knowledge of a language that a native speaker has. He held that linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an

"Ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogenous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance" (1963:3).

For Chomsky, the focus of linguistic theory was to characterize the abstract ability speakers possess that enables them to produce grammatically correct sentences in a language.

Sociolinguists and others have acknowledged the limitations in the Chomskyan formulation of competence and have stressed the need to include knowledge of communicatively appropriate performance (Schmidt and Richards 1985:100). They are careful to distinguish this referential meaning of language from the social meaning language also carries. In the words of Gumperz (1971:285) (1963) (cited in Paulston: 38):

"Effective communication requires that speakers and audiences agree both on the meaning of words and on the social import or values attached to choices of expression ... We will use the term social significance or social meaning to refer to the social values implied when an utterance is used in a certain context."

Gumperz (1971:285) suggests that linguistic competence should not be defined in terms of rules that speakers must use. Instead, he argues that it is about creating conditions that make possible *shared interpretation*.

According to Hymes, this competence consists of the interaction between:

- What is possible (in terms of linguistic structure)
- What is feasible (in terms of psycholinguistic processing)
- What is appropriate (in a sociological context)
- What is performed (actually done in the speech community)

We have to account for the fact that a child acquires knowledge of language that is not only grammatical but also appropriate. The term Hymes has suggested for knowledge of the rules of understanding and producing both the referential and the social meaning of language is 'communicative competence.'

Canale and Swain (1980) defined 'communicative competence' in a more developed way. This involved a synthesis of knowledge of basic grammatical principles (grammatical competence) and knowledge of the rules of language use (sociolinguistic competence), discourse and strategic competence. Sociolinguistic competence is defined as a field of inquiry having to do with the social rules of language use (Savignon 1983:37). In other words, it requires an understanding of the social context in which the language is used, such as the roles of the participants, the information they share and the function of the interaction. Sociolinguistic competence is divided into sociocultural rules of use, which includes knowledge of how language is used in social situations to perform communicative functions, and specific ways in which utterances are produced and understood appropriately, including factors such as topic, role, participants and setting.

Discourse competence, which consists of knowledge of how utterances and communicative functions can be combined according to the principles of discourse, involves the notions of cohesion and coherence. Discourse competence is concerned not with the interpretation of isolated sentences but with the connection of a series of sentences or utterances to form a meaningful whole (Savignon 1983:39).

The fourth element of communicative competence is strategic competence. Strategic competence refers to the strategies second language speakers employ in order to handle breakdowns in communication. This includes knowledge of how to cope in an authentic, communicative situation and how to keep the channels open. There are some strategies which one uses to compensate for imperfect knowledge of rules, or limiting factors in their application, such as fatigue, distraction and inattention (Savignon 1983:40). Some of the strategies are paraphrasing, circumlocution, repetition, hesitation, avoidance and guessing, as well as shifts in register and style.

Both L1 and L2 speakers use the above strategies for coping with limitations in their knowledge or restrictions in the use of that knowledge in a particular setting (Savignon 1983:43). In sum, the effective use of coping strategies is important for communicative competence in all contexts and distinguishes highly competent communicators from those who are less so (Savignon 1983:43).

The fifth element of communicative competence is the critical dimension (Candlin and Mecer 2001). This is related to the students' needs and motivation to learn an additional language. It also refers to the question of how the teaching and learning of English is implicated in the reproduction of social inequalities in different contexts in the world. As regards the global influence of English, Pennycook (1994) points out both the global dominant position of English and the socioeconomic, cultural and political embeddedness of English in the world. In other words, it views learners' attitudes towards the learning of an additional language with regards to social identity and relations of power (Martyn-Jones and Heller 1996) (cited in Candlin 2001:271). Clement's social context model (1980) (cited in Harley *et al.*, 1990: 141) discusses the issue of motivation. It is defined as the net result of two opposing forces, integrativeness and fear of assimilation. Integrativeness refers to the desire to become an accepted member of the out-group culture; fear of assimilation refers to the fear that belonging to the 'other' culture might result in the loss of the first language and culture. When the difference between these two forces is positive, learners will have a high motivation to learn the out-group language, but if the difference is negative the motivation to learn a new language will be very low. Aptitude, motivation, and self-confidence thus have

an impact on learners' development of communicative competence or bilingual proficiency. The 'critical' component of communicative competence consists of the learners' ability to reflect on his/her learning of English as a powerful world language in a critical way so as to be able to challenge this power by refusing to be positioned negatively by it. The learners challenge its dominance at the same time as they are learning the language.

Putting all the above-mentioned points together, Savignon (1983:8-9) suggests the following characteristics of competence in communication:

1. Communicative competence is a dynamic factor rather than a static concept. It depends on the negotiation of meaning between two or more persons who share to some degree the same symbolic system. In this sense, then, communicative competence can be said to be an inter-personal, rather than intra-personal, trait. Communicative competence applies to both written and spoken language, as well as to other symbolic systems like gesture and facial expression.
2. Communicative competence is context specific. Communication takes place in an infinite variety of situations and success in a particular role depends on one's understanding of the context and on prior experience of a similar kind. It requires making appropriate choices of register and style in terms of the situation and the other participants.
3. There is a theoretical difference between competence and performance. Competence is defined as a presumed underlying ability; performance as the overt manifestation of that ability. Competence is what one knows. Performance is what one does. Only performance is observable, however, and it is only through performance that competence can be developed, maintained and evaluated. Eritrean learners need to have communicative competence in order to communicate and express themselves in their L2 in various places for various functions.
4. Communicative competence is relative, not absolute, and depends on the co-operation of all the participants involved. It makes sense, then, to speak of degrees of communicative competence. This refers to the skills that are needed to get one's meaning across and to do things in a second language. The criteria Savignon adopts for evaluating the communicative performance of her students include efforts to communicate, amount of

communication, comprehensibility and suitability, naturalness and poise in keeping a verbal interaction in hand and accuracy (semantics) of information (Paulson 1992: 7).

From Savignon's list we can say that in order to improve Eritrean students' communicative competence, classroom language teaching should stress speaking skills (aural/oral) and comprehensible input and focus on verbal interaction.

In brief, we can conclude that the exclusive focus on grammatical competence in classrooms is not a sufficient condition for the development of communicative competence. However, it would be inappropriate to say that the development of grammatical competence is irrelevant for the development of communicative competence. In other words, learners should know not only the grammatical rules of language but also the sociolinguistic aspects and communication strategies in order to acquire both linguistic and communicative competence.

Eritrean learners need to be taught the social rules of the target language. Emphasis should be given to teaching them the culture of the target language. However, the teaching of the target language culture should not be at the expense of the mother tongue. Learners should maintain their culture whilst learning the target culture in a comparative way. This might help them to understand the appropriate ways of speaking in the target language. Learners should also be able to understand L2 or other English speakers for communication. Learners should also get genuine exposure to the language (interaction) such as native speaker teachers (if possible), or teaching them in a language laboratory using audio and video recordings of native speakers, and different communicative techniques (see 2.6).

In the next section the main factors that impede or facilitate additional language learning will be explained. This is crucial, because teachers should know the factors that impede Eritrean learners in their development of oral proficiency in English.

2.2 Factors affecting the acquisition of oral proficiency

There are factors that greatly contribute to the overall success achieved in language learning. They can be categorized into learner-external factors and learner-internal factors (Ellis 1994: 22).

2.2.1 Learner-external factors

External factors relate to the environment in which learning takes place, namely social factors and the setting. The main factors under this category are type of classroom, input, output, instruction (fluency compared with accuracy), amount of practice and culture.

Educational setting (classroom)

The classroom is the main factor which has an impact on learners' second language acquisition (SLA). Classroom settings vary according to whether they are submersion or immersion. '*Submersion*' is where L2 learners are taught in classes where L1 speakers are dominant, whereas '*immersion*' is where learners with high-status L1 are taught through the medium of L2 in classes containing only such learners or *foreign language classrooms*, for example English language classrooms in Japan. The Eritrean context is in between the immersion and foreign language classroom, since the learners are non-native speakers of the TL and there are no native speaker learners in the classroom in classroom. If learners are submerged in a classroom where there are more native speakers of the target language and receive the right level of input, it is likely that their oral proficiency will develop through interaction, in contrast to settings where there are more L2 speakers or no L1 speakers of the target language, i.e. immersion. Generally, in the Eritrean context, the classroom does not include native speakers of the TL. This has a detrimental effect on the learners' SLA. For example, they do not have the opportunity to interact with the target speakers of the language.

Input

In order for learners to develop their oral skills, classroom interaction should be established on meaningful and authentic language contexts and use. Learners should get comprehensible

input such as sustained speech and authentic and genuine language inputs, rather than minimal and/or pseudo speech. Different researchers reflect their ideas on the role of input in the development of second language acquisition. Steven (1998:204) suggests that television programmes provide valuable and unique resources for language learners, illustrating cultural details and giving authentic examples of language spoken by many different people. His study supports the integration of such programmes into courses by presenting practical ideas for finding, evaluating and managing the use of programmes on video. This develops sociolinguistic competence.

Hawkins (1987) suggests that it is not only language behaviour that is involved, but also the non-native speakers' understanding of the ways in which language is used in the new culture, that helps the learner perform at a higher level than she/he could do without interactional support (Ellis 1997:225). However, watching TV in the L2 will only be useful if it is in some way comprehensible. Krashen, in his input hypothesis (Inglis 2000: 137), says:

“Language pedagogy needs to focus on ways to move a learner from his/her present stage ‘i’ to the next ‘i+1’”.

Krashen (1985a) gives supporting evidence in favour of the role of input. The more comprehensible the input, the greater the L2 proficiency. Results from research (Krashen, 1982,1989; Carrol, 1967; Eva, 1998:176) show that a large amount of exposure to the L2 leads to proficiency. Sheer exposure without comprehension is often useless to acquisition. Learners should get more language input in order to develop their oral proficiency. For example, learners should have the opportunity to listen to tape-recorded materials, watch movies or video-tapes, and other real-life communications.

While most researchers accept the need for learners to comprehend the input (for it to become intake and not just noise), few would agree that comprehensible input alone is sufficient. Learners who have the opportunity to use the L2 regularly or receive the most input will exhibit the greatest proficiency (Larsen-Freeman 1985: 320).

“ It is self-evident that L2 acquisition can only take place when the learner has access to input in the L2. This input may be in written or spoken form. In the case of spoken input, it may occur in the context of interaction (that is, the learners attempt to converse with a native speaker, a teacher or another learner), or in the context of non-reciprocal discourse (for example, listening to the radio or watching a film)” (Ellis 1994:26).

Output

The role of learner output is crucial in promoting learners' second language acquisition. Swain (1985), for instance, has put forward the “comprehensible output hypothesis,” which states that learners need opportunities for ‘pushed output’ (that is, speech or writing that makes demands on them for correct and appropriate use of L2), in order to develop certain grammatical features that do not appear to be acquired purely on the basis of comprehending input (Ellis 1994:27).

In general, learners need pushed output in order to develop their oral proficiency. They need to practise L2 (output) so that they may use correct and appropriate second language and modify or adjust their production accordingly.

Instruction (fluency compared with accuracy)

Another major factor that has an effect on the development of SLA is the type of instruction available, i.e. whether the emphasis of instruction is on accuracy (form-focused instruction) or fluency (meaning-focused instruction). Different researchers hold various views on the topic.

Pica and Doughty (1985a and 1986b) (cited in Ellis1994: 28) found that certain kinds of tasks appear to result in more modified interaction than others. For example, tasks that involve a two-way exchange of information – such as when learners each hold part of the information for which they need to solve a problem jointly have been shown to promote extensive meaning negotiation.

Tom (1997:35) suggests that learners should be encouraged to use their own knowledge of the target language as a resource instead of relying on grammar books. He advocates the interrelationship between form and meaning. In other words, he maintains that learners should be taught grammar, but implicitly. Bialystok (1982,1984) (cited in Ellis 1985:238) distinguishes two continua involving an analyzed factor and a control factor. The *analyzed factor* refers to “the extent to which the learner is able to represent the structure of knowledge along with its content” (Bialystok cited in Ellis 1985:238). The *control factor* refers to “the relative ease of access that the learner has to different items of linguistic knowledge” (Ibid: 238). She makes two basic points from this model. Firstly, different tasks require different types of knowledge. Secondly, different kinds of learners can be identified according to which kind of knowledge they possess. She maintained that formal L2 learners will be characterized by type D knowledge in the initial stages and type C in later stages (see Figure 1).

-analyzed +automatic A	-analyzed -automatic B
+analyzed +automatic C	+analyzed -automatic D

Figure 1. Knowledge in a variable L2 system (Bialystok 1982)

Johannes (2001:34-35) states that some kind of focus on form is useful in the learning process; the question arises as to what is to be understood by “focus on form” and how it can be related to concepts such as “focus on meaning”. In his article he stresses that language-

related learner questions and text (re) production group tasks are a suitable pedagogical means of encouraging metalinguistic knowledge and communicative skills.

Ellis (1997:233) cautions that grammar teaching does aid L2 acquisition, although not necessarily in the way in which teachers often think it does. He mentions two principles involved in the teaching of grammar to learners: consciousness-raising and practice.

Consciousness-raising involves an attempt to equip the learner with an understanding of a specific grammatical feature in order to develop “declarative” rather than “procedural” knowledge. Its main purpose is to develop explicit knowledge of grammar. The aim of this kind of grammar teaching is not only to enable learners to perform a structure correctly, but also simply to help them know the rules.

In relation to *practice*, Ellis (1992:106) mentions three different positions regarding its role in language learning. Firstly, practice is necessary to ensure that learners develop correct language habits. Secondly, practice is not necessary for language learning but is desirable either as a precursor to communicative language use or as a means of dealing with problems that arise in communicative language use. Ellis also mentions a number of different types of practice activities such as *mechanical practice*, which consists of various types of rigidly controlled activities such as substitution exercises; *conceptualized practice*, which is controlled, but involves an attempt to encourage learners to relate form to meaning by showing how structures are used in real-life situations and *communicative practice*, entailing various kinds of information ‘gap’ activities which require the learners to engage in authentic communication while, at the same time, stressing the structures.

In brief, learners may develop their oral proficiency if they get more opportunity to practise the target language repeatedly. The more learners practise the language for communication, the more they know how express themselves in the target language.

Culture

Culture also has an effect on the development of oral proficiency of the learners. Jeremy (2000: 20), in his study of cultural factors affecting students' participation in an academic group discussion in Australia, asks why so many students from non-native English-speaking backgrounds, especially those from Asian cultures, have difficulty in participating actively in academic group discussions at English-speaking institutions of higher education. Similarly, Eritrean learners do not participate actively in group discussions or public speech, mainly because of shyness which is an individual trait. Learners do not participate freely because if they make any silly mistakes, they might think that their friends laugh at them. Eritrean teachers should recognize the reasons for the students' inhibitions that lie behind silence or reticence and should encourage a shift in behaviour toward talkativeness. Teachers would need to organize group and pair work tasks, instead of individual activities, to encourage learners to speak more confidently.

Teachers should instill an awareness of the value of the culture of the target language in enhancing the learners' oral proficiency. However, this is easier for L1 teachers. If the learners are taught how to speak, behave and act appropriately in the target language, they might not be inhibited to participate actively in oral communicative activities and would feel free to communicate with native speakers of the target language in real-life communication. Learners should have the opportunity to observe native speakers of the language, either in TV or movies, so that they can understand how to initiate talk and avoid shyness.

2.2.2 Learner-internal Factors

These factors are not directly observable but inferred by studying learner output and learners' reports of how they learn. Among these factors are the issues of language transfer, learners' styles and strategies and attitudes and motivation.

Language Transfer

Corder (1983) (cited in Ellis1994: 28) refers to both translation and borrowing used by learners to deal with communication problems as examples of communication transfer. This results in code-mixing (the use of both L1 and L2 in the communication of the same

sentence) and code-switching (the alternative use of L1 and L2 within a discourse). Eritrean teachers use both code-mixing and code-switching in teaching language to learners (see Chapter Four on the teachers' use of L1 and L2). In cases where the target language differs from L1 this could result in interference or negative transfer. The use of code-mixing and code-switching can be important in improving learners' oral proficiency. It may help the learners to understand some difficult expressions or terminology which are difficult to explain in L2. However, it does not mean that all expressions should be interpreted into the L1, since it does not encourage the learners to use the L2. However, in the present data, teachers were observed code-mixing (resorting to the L1) repeatedly, which has an effect on the learners' aural/oral proficiency since it limits exposure to the L2.

Learners' language learning strategies

Ellis mentions three types of strategies that are particularly relevant to language learning: learning strategies, production strategies and communication strategies (Ibid: 411).

Learning strategies are the ways in which language learners process language input and develop linguistic knowledge. These processes may be conscious or unconscious. Some of the examples of these processes are overgeneralization of rules and memorization of formulaic speech. *Production strategies* are employed by L2 learners when attempting to use their learned linguistic knowledge in communication. *Communication strategies* are used when L2 learners lack the appropriate linguistic knowledge to say what they want to say. These include paraphrasing, substitution and borrowing. These help learners to keep their conversation going. It would be better to develop Eritrean learners' use of L2 strategies during communication. Learners need to use L2 strategies appropriately in the case of communication breakdown.

Affective variables

Another factor that has an impact on SLA are affective variables, i.e. motivation and attitude (Ibid: 413). Motivation is described as the need or desire the learner feels to learn the additional language. It can be categorized as 'integrative' or 'instrumental' motivation. Integrative motivation is the desire to achieve proficiency in the target language to participate

in the life of the community. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, is the desire to achieve L2 proficiency for functional reasons, such as getting a job (Ibid: 413).

Eritrean learners need to have both integrative and instrumental motivation to improve their English language proficiency and understand better the target speakers of the language and mass media. Learners should be aware of the aim of learning English and the benefits which they would get from learning it.

Motivation can also be intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is derived from the personal interests and inner needs of the learners, while extrinsic motivation is derived from external sources such as material reward and increasing success in using the L2. In general, motivation affects Eritrean learners to the extent in which they persevere in learning the L2 and the kinds of learning behaviours they employ, for example their level of participation in practicing English in the classroom.

The second variable that affects SLA is attitude. Attitudes are reflections of beliefs and opinions about L2 culture, as well as own culture. It means the extent to which learners prefer their own language to the one they are learning (Ibid: 413). However, these factors do not affect Eritrean learners, since they have a positive attitude towards the learning of the English language (see Appendix 4).

To sum up, Eritrean learners need to get more opportunity to practise the language in and out of the classrooms, both with their teachers and fellow classmates, to improve their oral proficiency. Moreover, they should be motivated both internally and externally (see Chapter Four). Teachers need to encourage learners to be motivated, as learning English is beneficial for further education, especially overseas, and to follow programmes that are transmitted in English, for example CNN and the BBC.

In a classroom situation, there should be effective ways of assessing the learners' oral proficiency of the language. This is because teachers should know the weaknesses and strengths of their learners' oral skills in order to find possible solutions and improve their

oral proficiency. The next section will discuss various ways of assessing the spoken language in second language classrooms.

2.3 Nature of assessment

Testing learners' oral proficiency is necessary for language learning. This is because an integral part and extension of the teaching provides students and teachers with useful information that can serve as a basis for improvement. Moreover, it is necessary to monitor how well the learners can put into practice the language they have been learning. Concerning oral/aural skills, learners need to have regular proficiency tests. In other words, great care should be taken in designing and constructing tests to measure learners' communicative proficiency. This is because the nature of the test should match the goal of the test and of the language instruction as a whole.

Two approaches to language testing are significant here: the atomistic and the integrative. In the atomistic approach to language testing, discrete items are constructed, each of which ideally reveals the candidates' ability to handle one level of the language at a time in terms of one of the four skills (Brumfit and Johnson 1979: 144). The assumption underlying this approach rests on the idea that knowledge of the elements of the language is equivalent to knowledge of the language.

“Even if one adopts, for the moment, a purely grammatical view of what it is to know a language (Chomsky's definition in terms of the ability to formulate all and only the grammatical sentence in a language), it seems fairly clear that a vital stage is missing from an atomistic analysis, viz. the ability to synthesize. On the other hand, integrative type of tests are devoted not only to what the learner knows about the second language structure but also to what extent the learner is able to actually demonstrate the knowledge in a meaningful communicative situation” (Canale and Swain 1980:34).

Canale and Swain (1980:35) (cited in Rivers 1987: 126) believe that variety of activity and pace are crucial for keeping students alert and interested. This means a variety of testing

formats will provide students with broader opportunities for demonstrating both their competence and their ability to perform in the language.

An alternative view of language learning would hold, however, that answers to tests should make the learners produce samples of their own 'interlanguage', based on their own norms of language production. For example, instead of testing learners' oral proficiency by giving them listening comprehension based on multiple-choice exercises, it is better to let them express their ideas in answering the questions orally (Weyer 1999:112). In relation to this point, Eritrean learners should be tested in such a way that they can express their ideas freely rather than asking them to select from given alternatives or choices.

De Almeida (2001:198) reports that language assessment should be adapted to meet more 'real-life' learning situations. His study involved two pairs of EFL learners working on a co-operative picture-story task, based on Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZDP), involving scaffolding, private speech and task activity. In order to develop Eritrean learners' oral proficiency, tasks such as individual talk (where each student gives a speech on a certain topic) should be included in the English class lessons.

To sum up, teachers need to include not only knowledge of grammatical aspects of a language but also the ability to synthesize this knowledge in performance when testing learners. Moreover, they should design tests in such a way as to meet real-life or genuine situations. Learners should also be given an opportunity to produce the language instead of only recognizing appropriate forms, as in the case of multiple-choice tests. In other words, learners should be tested on what they have learned. Above all, class size should be considered in designing an oral test.

If there is a desire to have an oral proficiency test for language learners, teachers should know the most effective ways of testing oral proficiency. The next section will discuss this issue.

2.4 Ways of assessing learners' oral proficiency

Here are some of the integrated types of testing that help teachers to assess their learners' oral proficiency. It can be done both in *summative* as well as in *formative* assessment. Summative assessment is testing at the end of the programme, while formative assessment is testing or assessing learners continuously during the course. Some of the ways are information transfer, oral presentation, following instructions and interaction tasks. The use of a laboratory in language classrooms is helpful for the learners because they can imitate the L1 speakers' way of speaking.

It might be appropriate in the Eritrean situation for the teachers to design an oral test involving *information transfer*, in which the candidate sees a picture depicting a chronologically ordered sequence of events and be required to tell the story in the past tense, or where the examiner asks the candidate a number of questions about the content of a picture which he has had time to study; it could also take the form of *oral presentation*, in which the candidate is expected to give a short talk on a topic that he has either been asked to prepare beforehand or has been informed of shortly before the test (Harrison 1993:93-109).

Learners could be assessed by group oral testing and or in a language laboratory (see Weir 1988:82-95). The group oral test offers scheduling as well as pedagogical advantages. It is interactive testing at its best. Interaction increases through a combination of exchanges offered by the performance of dramatic scenes such as debates, discussions, role-playing, or other group activities. Some of the examples of the group-oral testing are *Interaction Tasks*, where students normally work in pairs and each is given only part of the information necessary for completion of the task (Weir 1988:93).

Besides the above factors mentioned, the approaches and methods used in language teaching also have a great effect in additional language learning. These will be discussed in the following section.

2.5 Approaches and methods in language teaching

This section describes the most effective approach and method of language teaching, according to the underlying theories of language and language learning; the learning objectives; the role of teachers and learners and the classroom procedures and techniques that the method uses.

In order to contextualize the nature of exposure to the formal study of the language for learners in Eritrea, it is necessary to describe the language teaching method that has been and still is the *status quo* in Eritrean English language classrooms.

2.5.1 The Grammar-Translation method

Nowadays and in the past, English teachers in Eritrea adopt the structural method to language teaching (see Chapter Four, section 4.4.2.2, for more detail). Its principal characteristics are described in Richards and Rodgers (1986:3). Firstly, it is a way of studying language through detailed analysis of its grammar rules. Accuracy is emphasized rather than fluency. This means grammar is taught deductively and explicitly, that is by presentation and study of grammar rules. In the structural approach to language teaching, the teacher controls the learners and the input, rather than acting as a catalyst, as is the case in the communicative approach to language teaching (refer to Appendix 3, Table 1).

This method emphasizes the teaching of the second language grammar; its principal practice technique is translation from and into the target language (Stern 1983:453). It places little or no emphasis on the speaking of the second language or listening to the second language speech; it is mainly a book-oriented method of working out and learning the grammatical system of the language (Ibid: 454). The language is presented in short grammatical chapters or lessons, each containing a few grammar points or rules which are set out and illustrated by examples. The learner is expected to study and memorize a particular rule and examples, for instance a verb paradigm or a list of prepositions. No systematic approach is made to vocabulary or other aspects of the second language.

2.5.2 The communicative approach

The communicative approach encompasses a number of techniques that emphasize the importance of meaningful communication. These approaches de-emphasize the explicit teaching of grammatical structures and language rules and emphasize that it is in the use of the language for communication purposes that language is learnt. Grammatical structures are therefore not presented in a formal and explicit way, but implicitly.

Ellis (1997:79) advocates that in communicative language teaching, learners do not need to be taught grammar before they can communicate. They will acquire it naturally as part of the process of learning to communicate. Moreover, according to Butcher-Poteaux (1998:98), the communicative approach to language teaching is based on a distinction between linguistic competence and communicative competence, between the capacity to generate grammatically correct sentences and the ability to produce situationally appropriate utterances. However, in the Eritrean situation, the classroom is the only context for the learners to practise games and simulations. Learners should be involved in debating, discussions, drama and role-playing, besides the learning of formal structures.

The communicative approach has opposite ideals to the traditional approaches, i.e. the Grammar-Translation and/or the structural approach to language teaching. Ndhlovu (1993:29) mentions the main characteristics of the communicative approach, as outlined below.

Firstly, language is used within learning-teaching situations as a means of communication which helps the learners to develop their oral proficiency skills. Savignon (1987) puts it more clearly when she says that communicative competence has to do with a real speaker-listener. However, in the traditional classroom, as in the present classrooms in Eritrea, learners do not express and negotiate meaning in the same way as in communicative language teaching. They are involved in activities such as memorization of dialogues and they focus on language structures rather than on meaning.

Secondly, the teacher's role becomes that of facilitator of communicative activities and is no longer at the centre of the teaching-learning situation. In other words, the teacher's role is different to that in the more traditional approaches in which the teacher plays the role of 'knower', who must present knowledge to the passive recipients.

Thirdly, in a communicative lesson, language is acquired as learners engage in authentic communication using the language they have already acquired, without any conscious focus on the language structure still to be learnt.

Fourthly, unlike the traditional approach, the communicative classroom gives a significant portion of the time for interactive activities. Students are given opportunities to use the language for meaningful communicative purposes. Ellis (1990) quotes a study conducted by Barnes (1976), which found that a group of junior school children produced language marked by a rich vocabulary complexity and a range of grammatical structures and long utterances when the teacher ceased to control the moment-by-moment progression of the discussion. This suggests that where the interaction is not restricted to short responses to teacher questions and other prompts, but enables learner discourse in a communicative environment, language ability develops more fully and communicative proficiency is achieved (Ndhlovu: 29). Teacher-centred and dominated lessons, as happens in Eritrea (see Chapter Four), are characterized by short, often meaningless and out-of-context responses and do not give learners an opportunity to learn how to take part in classroom discourse, which naturally leads to a lack of communicative proficiency in life outside the classroom as well.

Krashen (1985) asserts that learners acquire language in only one way: by understanding messages or receiving comprehensible input (Cook 1993:51). This is to say language acquisition depends on understanding or comprehending what people are saying. In other words, L2 acquisition fails to occur when the learner is deprived of meaningful language. So, from this theory, the insistence on the use of the information gap in communicative activities, as in pair work or group work, is necessary. Moreover, authenticity of the communication is crucial, especially in listening activities. Learners acquire a language by hearing it in contexts where the meaning of sentences is made plain to them. Thus it is better

to provide more listening material for the learner to work on. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) offers a more effective approach to language teaching in Eritrean classrooms.

2.6 Language ideology and linguistic imperialism

Having said that Eritrean learners need to be communicatively competent in English, we now need to explore what is meant by language ideology and linguistic imperialism for English as a world language.

This section will examine the learning of English by non-native speaking learners, in general, and Eritrean learners, in particular. This is because English has both positive and negative aspects in its functional use all over the world. It also looks at the global role of English, i.e. English dominance, and theories of linguistic imperialism.

At the present time English has become the international language *par excellence* (Phillipson, 1992:5). For example, it has a dominant position in science, technology, and computers; in research, books, and software; in transactional business, shipping and aviation; in diplomacy and international organizations; in mass media entertainment; and in education systems throughout the world. It is also the most widely learnt foreign language. In international organizations and universities, English is used for contact purposes and as a medium of instruction. English-intrinsic arguments (Ibid.274) describe English as rich, varied, noble, well adapted for change, interesting, etc. English-extrinsic arguments describe English as having both material resources (trained teachers, materials, literature, computers, software, etc.) and non-material resources (knowledge, skills, know-how via its 'experts')(Ibid.278)

Bevant and Grant (1983:12) illuminate how English-extrinsic resources are displayed, in the following way (Ibid.27).

" - - - We must teach in the languages which have highly developed technical and scientific terminology and concepts. "

English also functions as a gatekeeper to positions of prestige in society (Ibid: 6). English is important in many educational systems around the world and is thus the most powerful means of inclusion in to, or exclusion from, further education, employment, or social positions. In this way it could be perceived as playing a negative role.

Phillipson defines English linguistic imperialism by relating it to 'Imperialism', in the sense of exploitation. According to him, 'Imperialism embraces both an economic order and wider 'civilizing' goals (Ibid, 44). Even though much analysis has been primarily economic, later versions of imperialism theories also encompass the political, social and ideological dimensions of exploitation. Phillipson (Ibid, 47), for example, describes English linguistic imperialism as:

“ The dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages. ”

For example, it challenges the status of other languages. According to Phillipson (1992:17):

“ The use of one language generally implies the exclusion of others, although this is by no means logically necessary. Functional bilingualism or multilingualism at the individual societal level is common throughout the world. However, the pattern in core English-speaking countries has been one of increasing monolingualism. ”

The utility (that is, economic value) of English in international commerce and in access to technology and development has hastened its spread and the displacement of hundreds of indigenous regional languages, many of which had historically served as regional *lingua francas* (Ricento and Hornberger 1996: 412). For example, Eritrean vernacular languages are not used in international commerce since they are not fully developed like English. In addition, they are not used as a means of communication throughout the world in technology, commerce, education and other aspects. However, this does not mean that the application of

vernacular languages in Eritrea is useless. They can be used as a means of communication internally in domains such as civil services, in court, health services and other aspects. English does not take over in these domains.

In brief, the policy of Eritrea concerning the legitimating of English lies between what Phillipson called the 'diffusion model' and the 'ecology model.' The diffusion model, according to Phillipson, is the dominance of English all over the world and the dominant use of that language in most domains of a society. According to an 'ecology' model', all languages are viewed as resources; which is currently the case in Eritrea to a large extent.

In Eritrea, since the vernacular languages are not fully developed in technology (computers), mass media (TV and radio), it may be necessary to teach learners in a language which is highly developed in technology and terminology, namely English. For instance, it may be difficult to teach Eritrean learners in a university with vernacular languages, because the vernaculars are not developed fully and there are no experts (teachers) who are highly qualified to teach in vernacular languages. Moreover, there is lack of material resources in the vernacular languages.

Lacking knowledge of English could be referred to as linguistic deprivation. Burchfield (1985:160) claims linguistic deprivation is the same as ignorance of English. In his own statement (Ibid, 5):

"English has also become a lingua franca to the point that a literate educated person is in a very real sense deprived if he does not know English..."

In Eritrea, for example, a person could be deprived of using computers, the Internet and watching news (BBC, VOA) if he does not know English well, since the language of communication in all of these is English.

From this conclusion, the Ministry of Education in Eritrea should promote English besides the mother tongue. This is because it is an international language. However, it should be an “additive bilingualism” (Heugh *et al.*, 1995: 73). Luckett (1995) defines “additive bilingualism” as the gaining of competence in a second language while the first language is maintained. This form of bilingualism can only be developed in social contexts where both languages (and cultures) are valued and reinforced. Most researchers agree that additive bilingualism usually has a positive effect on a child’s social and cognitive development. South African research on the *Threshold Project* (1990) (see 1.3) has shown that many black pupils suffer the ill-effects of subtractive bilingualism owing to the sudden changeover from a first language medium of instruction in standard three. The pupils could not explain in English what they already knew in their first languages; nor could they transfer into their first languages the new knowledge that they had learnt through English. In other words, the pupils had failed to achieve CALP in both languages. Eritrean learners learn English while maintaining their mother tongue (vernacular) languages, so as to maintain the culture and language of the ethnic groups in Eritrea. Macdonald maintains that it would be better to teach learners in their mother tongue at the early stages of school (elementary and junior). However, at the secondary level of school, it would be better to teach them in the language of the world, which is the most advanced in technology, mass media and communication.

In the next chapter, the methods the researcher used to collect data for the research and the research design will be discussed.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research paradigm

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1996:6) define a paradigm as follows:

“Paradigms are all-encompassing systems of interrelated practice and thinking that define for researchers the nature of their enquiry along three dimensions: ontology, epistemology and methodology”.

Ontology specifies the nature of reality that is to be studied, and what can be known about it. *Epistemology* refers to the nature of the relationship between the researcher (knower) and what can be known. *Methodology* specifies how the researcher may go about studying whatever he/she believes can be known. In the present study, the nature of reality that is to be studied (ontology) is the causes for the weak oral proficiency of Eritrean learners; the epistemology in the present study is that of participant observer and discoverer through systematic observation, interviewing and discussions with the participants; and the methodology gathering information naturalistically through ethnographic methods. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1996:6) mention three types of paradigms. These are positivist, constructionist, and interpretive

“If the researcher believes that what is to be studied consists of a stable and unchanging external reality (for example, laws of gravity), then he/she can adopt an objective and detached epistemological stance towards that reality, and can employ a methodology that relies on control and manipulation of it. The aim of such research would be to provide an accurate description of laws and mechanisms that operate in social life. This kind of research is recognized as a positivist approach” (Terre Blanche and Durrheim 1996:8).

On the other hand, if the researcher believes that reality consists of a

“fluid and variable set of social constructions, she/he may adopt a critical and politicized epistemological stance and can adopt methodologies that allow him/her to deconstruct versions of reality. This is a characteristic of constructionist research.”

(Ibid: 8)

Finally, if the researcher believes that the reality to be studied consists of subjects' subjective experiences of the external world, she/he may adopt an intersubjective or interactional epistemological stance towards the reality and adopt methodologies (such as interview and participant observation) that rely on the subjective relationship between the researcher and the subject. These are the characteristics of the interpretive approach (Ibid: 7).

During the two months of data collection in the present study, the researcher gathered information from the classroom interaction between the learners and the teachers in an EDL classroom. The study was conducted on a small scale. In brief, the researcher followed the interpretive approach. The researcher studied the cases starting from the individual, i.e. the learners and teachers, and then proceeded to the general theory. Moreover, the study focused on action (i.e. the classroom interaction), which is one characteristic of the interpretive paradigm. Moreover, the researcher used interviews, focus group discussions and observations of classroom interaction, which are the techniques used by interpretive researchers.

3.2 Research approach

There are two basic approaches to research: *qualitative* and *quantitative*. The quantitative approach is mostly related to statistical aspects which can be quantified, such as using questionnaires. The present researcher used a questionnaire which is a quantitative method of data collection. The responses which the researcher got from the questionnaire from the students were quantified and were used to discuss and compare with the data gained from other methods.

The researcher also used qualitative methods of data collection, such as interview, focus-group discussion and classroom observation (COLT).

Nunan (1992:47) describes a qualitative approach as follows:

“the qualitative methods of data collection, that is, observation and interviewing, permit rich detailed observation of a few cases, and allow the researcher to build up an understanding of the phenomena as they emerge in specific contexts”

In the present study, the researcher adopted the use of observation, interview and questionnaire to collect data for the study. It is qualitative in the sense that the researcher used methods of data collection which are used in qualitative studies. Moreover, the study was done in specific schools which is one characteristic of a qualitative research.

Bryman (1988) (in Wragg 1994: 53) has identified the main influences on qualitative research as: phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, ‘*verstehen*’, naturalism and ethogenics. Of these, phenomenology, symbolic interactionism and naturalism apply to the present study. *Phenomenology* is a term that embraces those people who concentrate on how we interpret our world, the phenomena that surround us (Wragg: 53). It rejects the quantitative approach on the grounds that this imposes the observer’s rational presuppositions on to events in a systematic way, rather than seeing them through the eyes of those being observed. The major benefit of this type of observation is that it draws on the richness of the individual’s personal insights. This was obtained from the interviews with both teachers and learners in this study.

Symbolic interactionism has a strong focus on the self, especially on the symbols such as language and gesture that we employ when engaging in interaction with others. Our definition and assessment of how our actions will be perceived by others is influential on how we behave. A classroom observer might, therefore, watch others interpret lessons and interview teachers and pupils looking at how both perceive their actions. This could include

fellow teachers, fellow pupils, or teachers' interpretation of pupils' actions and *vice versa*. The qualitative approach to data collection in the present study enabled the researcher to assess personal views and ideas based on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

The study of classrooms in what are often termed 'naturalistic' settings means that the observer tries to see life as it really is. The researcher adopted a qualitative case study method of data collection, such as observation of classroom interaction, field notes and interviews. These methods enabled him to get rich data from a specific sample. A case study researcher observes the characteristics of an individual unit, for example a child, a clique, a class, a school or a community (Cohen and Manion: 124). The purpose of such observation is to probe deeply and to analyze intensively the phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit, with a view to establishing comparisons about the wider population to which that unit belongs. The researcher used a case study because he studied the research in a small and selected sample and the phenomenon studied was one, that is, English classrooms at grade nine level. However, the researcher extended the research to two classrooms which are homogenous but involve the same case for the students and teachers.

3.3 The study

3.3.1 Research questions

The broad research question for this study was whether various external and internal factors (such as input, interaction, culture, language teaching approach and forms of language assessment, i.e. the kind of language assessments that teachers give to learners) are the causes for weaknesses of Eritrean learners in their oral proficiency. In other words, the researcher examined the reasons for the low proficiency levels of high school learners in Asmara, Eritrea. This included the following sub-questions:

1. What are the classroom resources, time and allowed class size?
2. What tasks do the learners engage in?
3. What are the forms of assessment for the learners' oral proficiency?
4. How do the teachers make classroom decisions? Do they request learners to choose topics for discussion or do they select the topics themselves?

5. In what language do the teachers interact with the students in the classroom and outside of the classroom?
6. What kind of questions (predictive or non-predictive, closed or open-ended) do the teachers ask learners in class?
7. What are the teachers' and learners' verbal interaction in classroom activities, that is whether the teachers and learners use sustained or minimal speech and how they both react to each other's responses.
8. Do the students have exposure to language outside of the class, such as media, TV, friends and clubs?

3.3.2 Research context and participants

The researcher selected the respondents and site for his study in the following way.

He observed two out of seven high schools in Asmara. These were Secondary School A and Secondary School B. The average class size was between 50 and 60 students. The classes were mixed, with both males and females in the same class. The main reason for choosing only two schools was due to financial and time limitations.

The researcher was granted permission by the principals of the two high schools to observe English teachers after he had explained the purpose of his study. Based on the discussions with the principals, the researcher selected those teachers with more years of experience in English language teaching because of the information on additional language teaching that these teachers would bring to the research.

The researcher used two methods of sampling for selecting respondents and research site, that is a probability sample, in which the probability of selection of each respondent is known; and non-probability samples, in which the probability of selection is unknown (Cohen and Manion, 101). Small-scale surveys often resort to the use of non-probability sampling because they are far less complicated to set up and because they are less expensive (Ibid 101).

In selecting the respondents for the study, the researcher adopted the use of the non-probability sampling method. For example, the learners were chosen systematically (systematic sampling), according to the researcher's and the teachers' judgments regarding the learners' proficiency levels. The teachers were chosen according to the idea that the more experienced the teachers the more information the researcher would obtain. This was based on the opinion of the principals of the schools and the researcher's point of view. The respondents, therefore, were chosen in a systematic way for the study. However, the research sites (schools) were selected randomly, because all the schools were of the same standard.

3.3.3 Methods of data collection

The researcher used different methods of collecting data from different sources, in order to obtain multiple perspectives. He used field notes in observation, tape recordings, interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussions. This helped him to get accurate and reliable data. In other words, triangulation provided a means of testing one source of information against other sources. It also enhanced the credibility of the research. Triangulation is defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour. Cohen and Manion (1991:269) refer to the advantages of multimethod approaches in social research. They maintain that the more the methods contrast with each other, the greater the researcher's confidence. If, for example, the outcomes of a questionnaire survey correspond to those of an observational study of the same phenomenon, the researcher will be confident about the findings. In other words, the use of various methods reduces the chances that any consistent findings are attributable to similarities of methods (Lin 1976 in Cohen and Manion 2001:270).

Classroom observation

The interactional dynamics of a classroom are largely a product of choices the teacher makes about the learning arrangements he or she sets up within a lesson (Richards and Lockhart 1995:144). Most teachers use the following learning arrangements, depending on the kind of lesson they are teaching, though teachers use some more frequently than others. In whole-class teaching, the teacher leads the whole class through a learning task. For example, the teacher conducts a class discussion of an article from a newspaper, asking questions about it

and eliciting comments around the class. The whole-class arrangements have a number of the disadvantages (Ibid: 148). Such instruction is teacher-dominated, with little opportunity for active student participation. As a result, teachers tend to interact with only a small number of students in the class.

In individual work, each student in a class works individually on a task without interacting with peers or without public interaction with the teacher. For example, students complete a grammar exercise by going through a worksheet. It includes such activities as completing worksheets, reading a comprehension passage and answering questions, doing exercises from a text or workbook and composition and essay writing.

In pair work, students work in pairs to complete a task. In group work, students work in groups on learning tasks. In these kinds of tasks, students can be given an opportunity to draw on their linguistic resources in a non-threatening situation and use them to complete different tasks. Indeed it is through this kind of interaction that researchers believe many aspects of linguistic and communicative competence are developed (Richards and Lockhart 1995: 152). Long (1983) and Krashen (1985) have argued that when additional language learners interact, focusing on meaningful tasks or exchanges of information, then each learner receives comprehensible input from his or her conversational partner, a choice to ask for clarification as well as feedback on his or her output, adjustments of the input to match the level of the learners' comprehension, and the opportunity to develop new structures and conversational patterns through this process of interaction. In group work, the teacher's dominance over the classroom interaction is reduced. However, the amount of student participation in the class increases. It increases the opportunity for individual students to practise and use new features of the target language.

Second language researchers examined the contribution of teachers' questions to classroom additional language learning (Richards and Lockhart 1995:185). Richards and Lockhart have proposed that the questions play a crucial role in language acquisition. The questions can be used for maintaining students' participation in classroom activities. Although there are

several questioning types, three kinds of questions are distinguished in examining classrooms (Richards and Lockhart 1995: 185): procedural, convergent and divergent.

“Procedural questions have to do with classroom procedures and routines, and classroom management, as opposed to the content of learning” (Ibid: 186).

Questions which are designed to engage students in the content of the lesson, to facilitate their comprehension and to promote classroom interaction can be classified into convergent and divergent questions (Ibid: 186).

“Convergent questions encourage similar student-responses, or responses which focus on a central theme. These responses are often short answers such as “yes” or “no” or short statements. They do not usually require students to engage in higher-level thinking in order to come up with a response but often focus on the recall of previously presented information. Divergent questions, on the other hand, encourage diverse students responses which are not short answers and which require students to engage in higher-level thinking” (Ibid: 186-7).

Divergent questions encourage students to provide their own information rather than to recall previously presented information. Eritrean English teachers need to ask divergent questions which encourage students to give more information and lead to their communicating more freely, as opposed to yes-no questions.

Providing feedback to learners on their performance is another important aspect of teaching. In language classrooms, feedback on the students’ spoken language may be a response either to the content of what a student has produced, or to the form of an utterance.

A variety of strategies are available in giving feedback on content (Ibid: 188), for example acknowledging a correct answer by saying “good” or “yes, that is right”. Another strategy is to indicate an incorrect answer, for example “no, that is not quite right” or “Mmm”. Teachers can also give feedback by expanding or modifying a students’ answer, for example,

rephrasing or providing more clarification for a vague or incomplete answer. Repetition is another strategy, whereby the teacher repeats the student's answer. The kind of feedback affects the way learners give sustained or minimal speech or conversation. For example, 'yes' or 'no' type of feedback does not encourage the learners to engage in L2 conversation.

Feedback on form can be accomplished in different ways, such as asking the student to repeat what he or she said, pointing out the error and asking the student to self-correct, commenting on an error and explaining why it is wrong, without having the student repeat the correct form, asking another student to correct the error, or using a gesture to indicate that an error has been made.

Observation schemes

There are several different styles of classroom observation that have been developed over the years. Some observers may be influenced by the context in which the lesson takes place and may concentrate on some specific aspect of the teaching. This, in turn, may influence whether they adopt a qualitative or quantitative approach. The classroom interaction between teacher and students can be recorded and written down. These authentic data can be examined, categorized and analyzed by different kinds of observation instruments.

Researchers of classroom interaction have developed observation systems to describe and clarify patterns of student-teacher interaction in teacher-led, whole-class activities. A well-known observation scheme developed for observing teacher-student interaction in mainstream classes, the FLINT, uses seven categories for describing verbal exchanges (Brown (1975) cited in Richards and Lockhart (1995:147)).

TL *teacher lectures*- describes, explains, narrates, directs.

TQ *teacher questions*- about content or procedure, which pupils are required to answer.

TR *teacher responds*- accepts feeling of the class; describes past feelings and future feelings in a non-threatening way.

- i. Praises, encourages and jokes with pupils.

- ii. **Accepts or uses pupil's ideas. Builds upon pupil responses, uses mild criticism such as "no" and "not quite".**

PR *pupils respond*- directly and predictably to teacher's questions and directions.

PV *pupils volunteer*- information, comments or questions.

S *silence*- pauses, short periods of silences.

X *unclassifiable*- confusion in which communication can not be understood.

These observation instruments have been devised for the observation of classroom pedagogic interaction: the teaching and learning that goes on in the classroom. This involves focusing on various aspects of classroom methodology, strategies, activities and techniques that the teachers employ to communicate their teaching point.

In a participant observation system, the observer records behaviour at intervals, whenever feasible, and at other times is engaged with the pupils or the teacher as a participant in the lesson. The observer may also actually sit with the pupils as a participant in their discussion or small group teaching, following up the teachers' work. In each instance it is difficult to participate and record at the same time and so the data is somewhat limited. Standing back from the situation and looking at overall patterns is not really possible in this method. As a participant, the observer is also responsible for creating and changing some of the data and thus responsible for the success or failure of the lesson with the teacher (Montgomery 1999:32). There is less interference of this nature with non-participant observation.

The aim of non-participant observation is to record and study events as they normally occur. In such a situation the observer purposely does not control or manipulate anything and in fact, works very hard at not affecting the observed situation in any way. Although the researcher was non-interfering in the interaction in this study, he actively sought different means of confirmation, that is the researcher elicited data by observing for a long time in the context, using field notes for the classroom interaction. However, in the present study the presence of the researcher had an effect on the learners and teachers at the beginning of the observation period (see 1.2).

Rating scales are another form of assessment through observation. They consist of pairs of bi-polar opposites, which are often scored based on the teachers' personality on a five or more point scale. The ratings focus on classroom traits or individual personality features. Observers using rating scales use a measure of frequency that involves the rater in circling a number from 1 to 5, to indicate how often something seemed to happen in a lesson. The range might be 1= never, or almost never, 2= rarely, 3= sometimes, 4= often, 5= always, or almost always. One of the major problems with rating scales is that they appear objective, but are in practice heavily laden with the values of those who conceived them. This system contains twelve basic categories, seven for teacher behaviours such as 'deals with feelings', 'uses ideas of students', 'asks questions', directs pattern drills', two for student responses ('specific response' and 'open-ended or student-initiated response') and a number of other verbal and non- verbal categories.

Category systems are observation schedules that require the observer to exercise considerable subjective judgment and are often referred to as high inference measures. By contrast, low inference measures involve the observer much more in recording whether or not something happened. In this kind of observation method, each member of a group under observation is given a code number. Bales (1950) (cited in Wragg 1994:8) conducted an observation on small groups of adults.

The Flanders Interaction Analysis (FIAC) is another example of a simple category system that has been widely used in its original or modified form, in teacher training, lesson analysis and research. The FIAC involves the following steps (Wragg1994: 35):

- A. The observer has a data-recording sheet. Every three seconds, the category number is recorded which best describes what is taking place.
- B. The observer records across the sheet so that each line represents one minute of classroom time.
- C. Separate 'episodes ' can be identified in the margin.
- D. The observer can use a stopwatch to remind him to record a category every three seconds.

Another instrument is the Foreign Language Interaction Analysis System (FLINT) that was adapted from the widely used Flanders scheme and slightly extended by Moskowitz (1970,1971). It was developed to give L2 teachers objective feedback about the classroom interaction, specifically with regard to the affective climate established by the teacher.

The observation scheme used in this study was a category system called the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) observation scheme, Allen, Frohlich and Spada (1983) (see Appendix 8). The scheme is divided into two parts. The first part describes classroom events at the level of activities and the second part analyzes communicative features of verbal exchanges between teachers and students as they occur within each activity. The COLT observation scheme is designed to provide broad pictures of the types of activities that characterize L2 classrooms (Allan *et al.*) in Harley *et al.* (1990:59).

It is also one of the observation instruments that aims to examine the effects of additional language instruction on the acquisition of the target language (Allan *et al.*, 1983). The instrument is designed to describe essential features of the additional language classroom that differentiate among various approaches to L2 teaching. With this instrument, the observer concentrates on each activity and describes it in his or her own terms, for example a listening comprehension exercise with pre-set questions; introduction of new vocabulary. The observer also notes the starting time of each activity in the classroom.

The observation instrument is composed of two parts. The first part describes classroom activities, that is distinct teaching/learning units, as well as non-pedagogically motivated interaction units (Malamah-Thomas 1987: 65). These are:

- A. **Activity type:** - each activity is described separately, for example drill, conversation, role-play, dictation, management.
- B. **Participant organization:** - this describes the basic patterns of organization for classroom interaction, for example whole class, group work, individual seatwork.

- C. **Content:** - this describes the subject matter of the activities; that is, what the teacher and the students are talking, reading or writing about or what they are listening to.
- D. **Student modality:** - this part identifies the various skills that may be involved in a classroom activity. The focus is on the students and the purpose is to discover whether they are listening, speaking, reading or writing, or whether these skills are occurring in combination.
- E. **Materials:** - this introduces categories to describe the materials used in connection with classroom activities.

The second part consists of an analysis of the communicative features occurring within each activity. Seven communicative features have been isolated. These are:

- A. **Use of target language:** - it is designed to measure the extent to which the target language is used in the classroom.
- B. **Information gap:** - it refers to the extent to which the information requested and/or exchanged is unpredictable, that is, not known in advance.
- C. **Sustained speech:** - it is intended to measure the extent to which speakers engage in extended discourse, or restrict their utterances to a minimal length of one sentence, clause or word.
- D. **Reaction to code or message:** - it is closely related to the 'content' parameter of the first part. It focuses on the language code, that is grammatical correctness, or on the message or meaning being conveyed.
- E. **Incorporation of preceding utterances:** - this relates to the reactions given to the students by the teacher in the classroom situation.
- F. **Discourse initiation:** - it refers to the way students initiate talk in the classroom.
- G. **Relative restriction of linguistic form:** - this is related to whether the focus is on fluency or accuracy and how free the communication is.

The researcher observed each class twice a week. He selected those classes in which the students were doing oral (speaking) activities. He used the COLT observation scheme for

each class to observe verbal interaction between the teacher and the learners. He worked with the scheme by dividing each activity according to the time spent by the teacher. If the classroom activity contained three separate activities, the researcher took notes from the scheme for each activity. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:137) describe the purpose of observation as follows:

“Observation is more than being a passive spectator; it entails actively seeking out answers to your question.”

Moreover, Neumann (2000:361) says:

“Good field researchers are intrigued about details that reveal ‘what is going on here’ through careful listening and watching.”

Concerning the present study, field notes gave the researcher information on the approaches or methods language teachers adopted in English classrooms. This helped the researcher to back up the information which he got from audio-recorded data as an *aide me'moire*.

Interview

There are different kinds of interviews that are used as research tools (Cohen and Manion 1991: 309). These are structured, unstructured, semi-structured, and focused.

The *structured* interview is one in which the contexts and procedures are organized in advance. This means the sequence and wording of questions are determined by means of a schedule and the interviewer is left little freedom to make modifications. In contrast to this, the *unstructured* interview is an open situation having greater flexibility and freedom. In *semi-structured* interviews, there is a possibility of changing the sequence and wording of questions. It gives the researcher more freedom and flexibility in designing his questions for the interview.

In the present study, semi-structured interviews were used with the teachers. This method was used to elicit the views of participants using pre-designed questions, but with probes and open-ended questions that encouraged a certain amount of natural conversation.

“Classroom researchers often prefer semi-structured interview schedules, as they raise key questions, but also allow the observer and teacher to have some natural conversation about events” (Wragg 1994:107).

The researcher interviewed two teachers from each high school (altogether four), to collect the necessary data for the research project. The teachers were selected purposefully, based on their experience of English language teaching. The researcher adopted a structured interview initially, but during the actual interview he changed it a little to semi-structured. This is because he thought that it would give the respondents more freedom to respond at length and to add follow-up questions (see Appendix 2 for detail).

Focus Group Discussion

Finally, the researcher had a focus group interview with six students in each high school (see Appendix 5). He used semi-structured interviews because these would give the respondents freedom to express their feelings and attitudes. The students were selected from high, average and low levels of oral proficiency in the English language, because it helped the researcher to obtain different views from different levels of students. The students were selected according to the teachers' judgment of the students, that is participation in lessons and English results assessment. The teachers helped the researcher in selecting the respondents who would fill in the questionnaire. In addition, the first month of observation helped the researcher to select the respondents for a focus-group discussion. The researcher asked the respondents questions that he needed to confirm or triangulate with the teachers' interview and observation of classroom interaction.

The researcher asked questions that would help him to compare (triangulate) the information that he received from the teachers during the interview, to the learners' point of view (see Appendix 5). This method helped the researcher to obtain more reliable information from

respondents by comparing and discussing each other's point of view. Patton (1990:335-6) sees the focus group interview as a highly qualitative data collection technique, which provides some quality control on data collection, in that participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other, which weed out false or extreme views. It is also easy to assess the extent to which there is a relatively consistent, shared view among the participants (Flick, 2002: 113). They also confirm or negate data collected in the questionnaire.

Questionnaire

The researcher adopted a complementary quantitative method for collecting data by distributing a questionnaire to 200 Grade nine high school students (see Appendix 4).

A pilot study was carried out in the preliminary stages of data gathering by the researcher. This helped him discover some of the problems in the draft questionnaire. It was tested on 50 students altogether in two different schools. The questions were prepared in English. The questionnaire was distributed as a pilot study to check the level of difficulty of the questions, that is, whether there were ambiguous or repeated words. It also helped the researcher to detect whether or not there were some questions which were irrelevant or incomplete; or redundant, lengthy questions that would make the respondents reluctant to complete it. The content of the questionnaire was based on the research question that was framed in relation to the COLT observation scheme. The researcher planned to ask questions in this questionnaire that he felt needed more clarification, such as issues that he observed during the observation time and from the teachers' interview. This method helped the researcher to perform triangulation. The students were selected purposefully from weaker, average and competent students in their oral proficiency. In filling in the questionnaires, the researcher gave the students clarification orally in L1 in response to spontaneous questions.

Conducting interviews with both teachers and students helped the researcher to ascertain learners' attitudes towards the strategies teachers adopt in teaching them the language and how teachers view the learner's weaknesses in oral skill. The next chapter deals with the analysis and discussion of the data that were gathered from the observations, interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher analyses and discusses the data (findings) in relation to the theoretical framework (literature review in Chapter Two) and conceptual framework (Chapter One). The data were gathered from the observations of classroom interaction, questionnaires that were distributed to students, interviews with teachers and focus group discussions with students, in order to know the causes or factors that significantly affect the English oral proficiency of Eritrean learners. The discussion will be framed by the criteria or features of the communicative approach to language teaching based on the Communicative Orientation to Language Teaching (COLT) observation scheme (Allan, Spada, and Frohlich 1983; see Appendix 8).

4.2 Pilot study

From the results of the pilot study (see Chapter Three section 3.6.4), the researcher noted some minor errors in the questionnaires. There was only one content change (in number 9) from the pilot study. This is because the researcher had already set one question which was related to learners' communication with their English teachers. So the question was changed from giving their views on communicating with their English teacher to other subject teachers. The main reason for this was that it would be better to get information on the language the learners use to communicate with other subject teachers apart from the English teachers.

There were some superficial errors. Question number 9 was repeated twice. To avoid errors, the researcher reorganized the numbering of the questions.

4.3 Data analysis approaches

There are two basic approaches to analyzing data in research (Terre Blanche 1999:47). These are categorized as *qualitative* and *quantitative* methods of analysis.

In the quantitative method, statistical procedures are used to analyze quantitative data (Durrheim 1996:96). Once the researcher has measured the relevant variables, the score on these variables are usually transformed statistically to help the researcher describe the data and make inferences about the characteristics of the population on the basis of the data from the samples. In the present study, the questionnaires were analyzed using Statistical Programs for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software for statistical analysis.

Qualitative techniques begin by identifying themes in the data and relationships between the themes. Clifford Geertz (1973) in Terre Blanche (139) feels that:

“The purpose of interpretive analysis is to provide thick description of the characteristics, processes, transactions, and contexts that constitute the phenomenon being studied, couched in language not alien to the phenomenon, as well as an account of the researcher’s role in constructing this description.”

The interviews, focus group discussions and the observations of classrooms were analyzed using content analysis techniques and the COLT framework categories. The researcher chose this method because he wished to analyze the theme or content of the data and the relations among the variables, i.e. the factors that affect the oral proficiency of the learners.

4.4 Observation of classroom interaction

The observation was divided into two parts (see section 3.6.1 in Chapter Three). The COLT was used in four classes at grade nine level in English classrooms. The researcher conducted the observation of lessons during formal classroom periods. He tape-recorded the interaction of the lessons. However, due to the poor quality (voice audibility) of the tape recorder, the

researcher experienced problems in transcribing the recorded data. To alleviate this problem the researcher supplemented it with field notes.

He told the teachers in advance that the purpose of his visit to the classroom was not to evaluate their performance but for research purposes. The learners were not informed of the purpose of the research. This would have avoided influencing learners' behaviour during the lessons.

The researcher observed two teachers in each school, i.e., four teachers, once a week over two weeks. He labelled those who were in school A as Teacher "A" and "B" and those in school B as Teacher "C" and "D". Labelling of teachers was as follows:

School A

Teacher A (17-12-02)
Teacher B (18-12-02)
Teacher A (24-12-02)
Teacher B (31-12-02)

School B

Teacher C (19-12-02)
Teacher D (20-12-02)
Teacher C (26-12-02)
Teacher D (27-12-02)
Teacher D (02-01-03)

In this section, the transcribed data of the observed lessons, interviews, questionnaires and focus-group discussions give a clear picture of English classrooms (EAL) in the observed schools. The researcher interprets the data in terms of the basic features of the COLT observation scheme.

4.4.1 Participant organization

Long and his colleagues (1976), in Allwright (1988:153), described the difference between verbal interaction in lockstep (such as pair and group work) and small group classroom situations. They made a general statement as follows:

“ Lockstep work sets severe restraints on discourse potential. It is believed to do so through its denial to students of certain options as to roles they may take up, and hence of the variety of uses to which they may put language –the things, that is, they may do with words.”

Widdowson (1990:184) says that this kind of engagement, where the students and teachers have identifying roles as learners and master respectively, does not allow the learners to take the initiative. It does not give the learners scope to draw on the available resources of intuition and inventiveness, or to engage freely in the activity. To develop learners' oral skills, teachers should give learners more opportunity to initiate talk themselves, rather than simply responding to what the teacher says. To attain this, teachers need to use different participant organization patterns such as pair-work, group-work and individual work.

One way of increasing the opportunities for comprehensible output is to involve students in group activities (see Ellis 1997:79) in section 2.5). No group work, however, was observed in the present study. Out of four teachers that were observed, none used authentic group work methods such as games, simulations and role-play. The students worked individually during all the observation periods. In all of the lessons observed, the participant organization for the lesson was teacher instructing the whole class (Teacher to Students). For example, if we look at Teacher A from school A (17-12-02) (Appendix 1), he was acting as a controller by giving the learners instructions during the whole period. He was talking for the entire period, without giving them a chance to speak or to discuss the topic individually, in pairs, or in groups. Some examples from the excerpt follow:

Line 3 Teacher: Ya...let's do the home work together.

4 Teacher: There are two kinds of love...

5 Teacher: What are they?

6 Students: ^

7 Teacher: Two kinds of love (writing on the board)

This excerpt shows that the teacher was controlling the learners. He was asking and answering questions himself without trying to probe the learners. The classroom organization was teacher dominating the classroom activities.

If we look at the way Teacher C organized his class (19-12-02) (Appendix 1), he also used the same participant organization as Teacher A. He asked the students as a whole what gender means, rather than letting them discuss the topic in pairs or groups. To see some examples from the excerpt:

Line 33: Teacher what does *gender* mean? *Gender?* Any one? [L1: What does it mean by gender?]

34 Student: sex

35 Teacher: Gender means sex but not the other sex...

36 Students: (Laugh)

37 Teacher: OK in exercise two read the chart below and...[read silently and fill the chart]

38 Students: reading silently (individually)

39 Teacher: (moving around the classroom to check their exercise books)

In the above excerpt, the information for the interaction was not shared, but rather the teacher held all of the information required to complete the task.

This kind of student organization had a great effect on the oral proficiency of the learners, as the learners did not get an opportunity to practise the language freely. However, with a different kind of organization learners will be encouraged to talk more freely. The students were expected to give only one single correct response, rather than having more than one possible alternative.

Different researchers have studied the type of tasks and modes of classroom organization which facilitate the acquisition of second language (Ibid: 54). Long *et al.* (1976) said students produce a greater quantity and variety of language in group work as opposed to teacher-

fronted activities. Pica *et al.* (1987) showed that learners who have the opportunity to negotiate meaning (request clarifications and request information and check comprehension) as they listen to a set of instructions, understood much more than students who received a simplified set of instructions.

In general, group work is essential to any classroom that is based on the principles of experiential learning and communication. Through group work, learners develop their ability to communicate through tasks that require them, within the classroom, to apply the kinds of things they will need to be able to do to communicate in the world beyond the classroom (Nunan 1999:84). In other words, learners should be given an opportunity to activate their language in the classroom. Social interaction is an important strategy in teaching students an additional language. This is because good communicative activities can be done best in a language class that operates with socially flexible arrangements, including individual work, pair work and in small groups. Whole class, teacher-directed activities are not excluded, but interpersonal relationships should be more diversified.

4.4.2 Language focus

In the present study, most of the observed teachers spent their time on teaching language structure using form-focused activities, but in this case the activities often consisted of decontextualized grammar practice or isolated grammatical structures, such as asking questions clearly lacking in genuine communicative intent. The teachers' focus was in all cases on the accuracy of the target language (form). They did not concentrate on the functional aspect of the language, that is communication. For instance, Teacher C (19-12-02) (in Appendix 1). He was lecturing on isolated grammatical structures, i.e. adjectives and nouns, as follows:

(4) Teacher: I am shy of speaking in front of others and let him speak.

I will stay silent and one day I will ask to speak. I did not take my money from my brother. I usually only...

(5) Student: confined

(6) Teacher: sorry

(7) Student: confined

(8) Teacher: I usually only...

Student: depend

Teacher: depend on [L1:it takes preposition on].

(25) Teacher: [L1:prefer is followed by a preposition to]

Teacher D (20-12-02) (Appendix 1)

The teacher discussed direct and indirect speech. For example:

(15) Teacher: last time we have seen about direct and indirect speech. Tell me the rules to change from direct to indirect speech.

Teacher: three...yes

Teacher: the first one is tense change

Teacher: present tense must be changed to what?

Student: past tense

(22) Teacher: pronouns... all pronouns must be changed. And the third one time

He was also teaching the learners about different types of questions, that is, yes/no or Wh-questions. For example,

(22) Teacher: [L1:how do we change it?] He asked were...where the subject must come first...therefore where did he go or where he went...the same. What is the difference between he did go and he went? [L1:He explained about stress or emphasis]. Here is also a second type of question ... [L1:what kind of question is this.... yes/no?] Is this yes/no? If it is yes/no question there is one preference or one answer. [L1:Explained the use of 'if' and 'whether']. For example, He asked it does, he does, he was... (What kind of questions is this...yes/no. Another example (writing on the board) will you come tomorrow? [L1:Who can answer the question?] What is the answer?
Student: yes/no question.

Teacher A in both (24-12-02) and (31-12-02) (Appendix 1) and Teacher C (02-01-03) (Appendix 1) focused on the teaching of past tense and present perfect tense. In an interview, Teacher B (14-01-03) (Appendix 2) and A (16-01-03) (Appendix 2) told the researcher that most of the time is spent on teaching grammar which confirmed the researcher's impressions from field notes and transcripts of classroom observation. They did not spend too much time on practising oral skills. The main reason, according to the interviewee, was class size (there were more than seventy students in one class) and the teachers' lack of experience using the textbooks. Teacher C (14-01-03) (Appendix 2) said that he used the language laboratory for listening comprehension. He added that most of the teachers did not give enough time to speaking skills. The students in the focus-group discussion, denied this, saying that they had used the language laboratory only once.

The above excerpts indicate that the teachers were focusing on the explicit teaching of grammar or form rather than teaching language for communication, or teaching grammar implicitly. We can also see from the students' questionnaire in Table 1 (Appendix 5) that 98% of the students responded that the teachers rely mostly on the teaching of form or grammar rather than communication. This was supported further by focus-group discussion (Appendix 3). Grammar is taught deductively and explicitly, that is by presentation and study of grammar rules, at the expense of communication (see section 2.5 for detailed discussion).

Recent ideas about language use and learning illuminate the primacy of communicative activities in the classroom. This does not mean that the teaching of grammar should be abandoned. Grammar (form) should be taught implicitly along with the teaching of the communicative functions of language. In an interview, Teacher C (14-01-03) (Appendix 2) supported the idea that grammar should be taught implicitly, but felt that the emphasis should be more on communication rather than form or grammar. He pointed out that:

“Language should be used for communication, not for mastering rules. Therefore, learners will acquire the rule or grammar along with function of language”.

Spada (1987) said that instruction that primarily focuses on meaning (that is communication-based) but allows for a focus on grammar within meaningful contexts, works better than grammar only, or communication-only, instruction (see section 2.2.1 in Chapter Two).

In brief, learners should know not only the grammatical rules of language but also the norms governing speech acts, discourse features and communication strategies, in order to acquire both linguistic and communicative competence (for detailed discussion refer communicative competence 2.1).

4.4.3 Other topics

All the observed teachers focused their interaction solely on pedagogic issues, i.e. they focused on teaching points which are from the English textbook. They did not go beyond it. For example, there was no discussion about abstract things such as world politics, daily news and personal life. Teachers' did not introduce topics of interest other than classroom issues. The students confirmed in a focus-group discussion that the teachers did not introduce other topics for discussion in the classroom (See Appendix 7).

If the students were discussing their day-to-day activities such as what they did before they came to school, things they watched in their area or on TV, other daily news (for example, sport activities, weather conditions), they would have had more opportunity to develop their oral competence, since they would have been practising the target language. Results from the students' questionnaire show that 87.6% of the students responded that the teachers did not introduce other activities beside those they were using in the textbook (see Table 2 in Appendix 5).

The learners are thus deprived of real-life or genuine input such as newspaper articles, television programmes, and other material for classroom discussion. This would have a great influence on improving the learners' oral proficiency. In order to develop the learners' oral

proficiency skills, teachers should introduce different kinds of stimulating material into the classroom.

4.4.4 Topic control

Teachers were in constant control of the topic being discussed. Students had no chance in the topic for discussion. In other words, the learners did not negotiate the choice of the topic for the lesson or have any say. The learners confirmed in a focus-group discussion that they did not get an opportunity to select a topic for classroom discussion (see 18-01-03 Appendix 7). This had an impact on the learners' oral language development because they were merely responding to what the teachers were saying rather than raising issues themselves in a genuine, real-life communication.

4.4.5 Student modality

In most of the lessons observed, the students were listening to what the teacher was saying. They were also doing isolated grammatical exercises from textbooks by reading questions and then answering individually in writing in the classroom (see, for example, 19-12-02 in Appendix 1). They did not get an opportunity to practise the language during speaking or oral activity. We can see from the students' response in the questionnaire (Table 3 in Appendix 5) that the teachers' were concentrating on the lecturing of grammatical structures (such as tenses, types of questions). Table 3 shows that the teachers were teaching solely from the textbook. They did not give enough attention to aural/oral skills (refer to Appendix 7, 18-01-03). The following excerpt shows this.

Interviewer: Which skill of language does your teacher mostly focus on in language teaching?

Student 1: The English teachers mostly focus in teaching grammar or isolated grammatical points. For example, they teach us about present tenses, past tenses and conjunctions.

4.4.6 Materials

The materials the teachers used were textbooks, only. They did not use audio-visual aids such as newspaper magazines, TV, video, or tape recorder for listening comprehension. The students confirmed that they did not use other materials (refer to Appendix 3, 18-01-03). In an interview, Teacher C (14-01-03) (see Appendix 2) said he used a tape recorder and video for listening comprehension activities once a semester. Teacher A also said that students used the language laboratory once or twice a year. From this we understand that the learners did not get an opportunity to practise the language using materials other than the textbooks they were using. The role of input (such as TV) is very important in the development of second language acquisition (see section 2.2.1. input).

4.5 Teachers' verbal interaction

In this section, the teachers' verbal interaction will be analysed according to the COLT categories and conceptual framework and will be discussed in relation to the literature review.

4.5.1 Use of target language (L2)

The teachers used L2 (English) for the formal presentation of the grammar and for reading from the textbook, i.e. for instructional use only. L2 was used very restrictedly for meaningful and genuine communication.

The teachers used L1 (Tigrinya) for the following functions: explanation of terms, confirmation, checking comprehension, elaboration of instruction, discussing the lesson, giving directions and talking individually inside and outside the classroom.

For example, they used L1 for clarification in the middle of formal presentation of the grammar. Teacher C, for example (26-02-03 in Appendix 1), discussed the use of the preposition in the L1 (line 49). Moreover, he explained the term "prefer" in line 24 in L1. In line 43, he asked the learners a question in L1 for confirmation. He (Teacher C 19-12-02) also explained how to fill the chart exercise (from the textbook) (37) and to define gender in

L1 (line 35). Teacher D (20-12-02) (Appendix 1) used L1 in line 24 to request the learners to answer a question. In line 41, he also used L1 to check learners' comprehension (line 36). He also elaborated upon the aspect of general truth in L1 (line 34).

Teachers used L1 for giving instructions for the exercise (more clarification) from the textbook. For example, teacher C (26-12-02) (Appendix 1) in line 57 explained the instruction for the exercise in L1. Moreover, he would clarify the instructions further in L1 (last line) (Appendix 1).

Teacher D (20-12-02) communicated to the learners in L1, asking about their homework (line 1). In line 23 (26-12-02), both the teacher and the students discussed an issue about "infinite school" from the textbook in L1. He explained some words in L1, for example, in line 34 (for example, the words ignorant, fit and achieve). In line 57, he explained the word '*contextual meaning*' in L1.

Teachers used L1 in giving direction outside of the classroom. For example, teacher A told one student outside the classroom to inform the other students to do exercise 3 for the next day. They also used it when talking individually in the class. This usually happened while the students were doing exercises in class and needed more clarification for the exercise. Teachers used L1 in explaining a question. For instance, Teacher C (02-01-03) explained a question in L1 in line 5 to explain the use of 'would'. He also explained "use of past perfect tense" in L1 by giving them examples.

Lastly, teachers used L1 in translating sentences and vocabulary. For example, Teacher C (02-01-03) (Appendix 1), in line 5, translated the sentence into L1. He also explained the parts of a clause, that is the 'if clause' and the 'main clause', in L1. In the last line, he gave them an order or instruction in L1 to do the exercise. Teacher C (26-12-02), in line 53, explained the word "improve" in L1.

In an interview, Teacher A (14-01-03) said the main reason for using the mother tongue (L1) while teaching the students was due to some expressions in English that are difficult to understand and explain to the students.

Insights from these findings would suggest that learners could benefit from using the L2 for these functions in order to obtain more genuine, meaningful and communicative L2 exposure. For example, the teachers need to communicate to the learners in L2 while lecturing, giving direction for exercises, greeting them, informing them to do something and clarification or elaboration apart from the presentation of lessons. From this, it would be better that the teachers should try to use L2 both in and out of the class while giving a lecture, procedures, elaborations, informing and greeting. As a result, learners would have more opportunity to be exposed to L2.

4.5.2 Information gap

The information gap refers to the extent to which the information requested and/or exchanged is unpredictable, that is not known in advance. In the present study, the teachers gave learners predictable information. For example, Teacher A (17-12-02) (Appendix 1), in line 13, says, “*stand up... what is this, for example love between opposite sexes? Romantic or rational?*” The answer for this question is obviously “romantic”. We cannot expect the learners to *speak* about this question at length because the question is closed, or in a choice format. Rather, for genuine communication to occur, the teacher would need to ask more open-ended questions which require the learners to speak at length and explain in full, rather than in short responses.

The way the teachers conducted the lessons precluded any genuine communicative exchange. Another example would be the following.

Teacher A (17-12-02) (Appendix 1)

(40) Teacher: what does it mean “*irrational*”?

Student: not rational

Teacher: yes, it means not able to reason out or not rational

Teacher: next, objective
Student: not subjective
Teacher: yes, objective...it means
Student: not subjective
Teacher: ordinary

From the above excerpts, we can see that the learners did not get unpredictable information which would help them to speak more at length and express their ideas freely and negotiate meanings to explain and respond with further elaborations.

4.5.3 Sustained speech

Allan *et al.* (1983) defined “minimal speech” as referring to one or two words (including spelling) and sustained speech as referring to an utterance containing more than one clause

The teachers asked the kinds of questions that are “minimal”. In other words, the questions were ‘yes or no’ type questions or answering exercises from their textbooks for which the learners have already answered the questions at home. In these cases, the learners were only required to answer minimally. The following excerpts from the transcribed data illustrate this:

Teacher A (17-12-02) (Appendix 1)

- (5): what are they?
- (6): ^
- (7): Two kinds of love (writing on the board)
- (8): Romantic
- (35): what is the meaning of misbehave?
- (36): ^
- (37) It means not to *behave*...negative. For example, courage...discourage
- (50): is it *real* or *unreal*?
- (51): unreal.

(52): yes. *Next* may be...

Teacher C (26-12-02) (Appendix 1)

(7): Basic education needs the country in two ways. What are the two points?

(19): The minimal time at the school for basic education is

(23): Infinite school should be from dash to dash?

(25): number children of this age...what does this age mean?

Teacher C also asked questions requiring learners to match 'A' with 'B'. This kind of exercise did not allow the learners to communicate more with each other, or with the teacher, as they did it individually. This is because there was only one answer for each question.

These results suggest that greater opportunities for sustained talk by students are needed, and that this might be accomplished through group work, the provision of more opportunities for student-initiated talk, and teacher's asking more open-ended questions. Extended talk of a clause or more would be more likely to occur if students initiated an interaction and if they had to find their own words.

4.5.4 Reaction to responses (feedback)

During the observations of the lessons, the teachers reacted to students' responses mostly by using repetition, i.e. repeating what the learners said instead of asking learners to elaborate more on the topic, or expanding on the learners' contribution by giving more examples. They did not use expansion or prompting. The excerpts below show this clearly.

Repetition:

Teacher A (17-12-02): (10): relational
(11) Rational
(25) Yes, romantic love
(26) Yes, romantic love.

- (32) Rational
- (33) Next, a love which is difficult to achieve. Any body?
- (35) Yes, rational is a love which is difficult to achieve
- (36) It means not to behave...negative. For example, courage...discourage
- (56) Probably... may be means perhaps
- (57) Now do the exercise in class on page 46 (from the passage).

- Teacher C (26-12-02):
- (9): to increase production...and
 - (11): yeah... for health
 - (11): five years
 - (21): yes 7 to 11
 - (41): unable to read and write
 - (45): yes... to grow means develop

This way of handling students' responses severely restricted the learners' opportunity to use the language and also restricted their own use of strategies, such as elaborating and extending their utterances.

In the next section, the learners' verbal interaction will be analysed in relation to the COLT categories and conceptual framework.

4.6 Learners' verbal interaction

4.6.1 Use of target language

The students used L2 (English) for the following functions. Firstly, they used L2 when answering questions for the exercises which they had already done at home, for example in making corrections for the home assignment. They used L2 in responding to the teacher's questions for which they selected from given choices in short responses. They also used L2 in responding to the teacher's question by reading from their exercises or textbook. In the excerpt below, we see that students' responses are extremely short.

Teacher D (20-12-02) (Appendix 1)

(22) Teacher: what kind of question is it? Wh-question or ye/no question?

Student: Wh-question.

(24) Teacher: what is the answer?

Students: yes or no.

(36) Teacher: question, statement, or...

Student: order

Teacher A (24-12-02) (Appendix 1)

(3) Teacher: which one is past tense and which one is past perfect?

Student: The first one is past perfect I had had

(13) Teacher: There are two happenings one event is entering and the other arriving

... now which event took first ...event took first? Arriving or entering?

Student: Arriving

Students they used L1 in requesting clarification for exercises. For example,

Teacher B (18-12-02) (Appendix 1)

(2): Teacher: Come here with your exercise book.

Student: ... [L1: I did not bring]

They also used L1 in responding to the teacher's questions which were asked in the L1. For example,

Teacher D (20-12-02)

(1): Teacher: [L1:what did we learn the previous day?]

Student: [L1:we learnt about direct and indirect speech]

Teacher C (26-12-02) (Appendix 1)

(41) Teacher: unable to read and write

Student: [L1:Ignorant]

Results from the students' questionnaires in Tables 4 and 5 (see Appendix 5) show that the students perceive themselves as communicating equally in both Tigrinya and English with their English and other subject teachers. This means that the students did not get the opportunity to use English much and so develop their oral English skills.

Students did not use L2 out side of the classroom, either. The reason for this, according to the learners, is that they feel shy communicating with each other in L2 out of the class. They restricted learning a language to inside the classroom, even though they only listen to the teachers lecturing. Table 6 (see Appendix 5) shows that the learners did not communicate either with each other or with friends outside the classroom or with others in English.

4.6.2 Information gap

In all the lessons observed the students gave predictable answers to the teacher's questions. To take some examples from the transcribed data,

Teacher A (31-12-02) (Appendix 1)

(36): Teacher: Ok, you at the back, what is this one?

Student: arrived is past tense.

Teacher C (26-12-02)

(39): Teacher: Illiteracy...illiteracy

Student: not able to read and write

02-01-03

(27): Teacher: I had not...

Student: called

Teacher A (19-12-02) (Appendix 1)

(32): Teacher: What does gender mean? Gender? Anyone?

[L1:What does it mean by gender?]

Student: Sex.

Teacher D (20-12-02) (Appendix 1)

(36): Teacher: Why? In which rule does it say no tense? [L1:Repeats the question], statement, question, or...

Student: order

The above excerpts show that the teachers' way of asking questions had an effect on the oral development of the learners. If the teachers had asked the learners open-ended questions, rather than closed questions, the learners might have been able to speak at greater length. They might have given more elaborations and clarifications in answer to the question. In other words, having an information gap helps the learners to express their ideas in a more expanded and elaborated way which, in turn, helps to improve their oral skills.

4.6.3 Sustained speech

The most frequent source of students' talk was selecting from limited choices, which appeared to encourage minimal responses (see Appendix 1). If the teachers had provided more opportunities for student-initiated discourse and asked more open-ended questions that require students to find their own words, the amount of sustained student talk would have increased. In brief, part of the content of the lesson needs to be substituted with activities which demand longer, more complex and more coherent language from the learners.

4.6.4 Reaction to responses

Most of the time the students reacted to the teacher's questions by giving short and precise answers. They did not ask for clarification concerning the topic under discussion. If they did, it would be in the L1 (see 4.6.1). Students did not try to argue or challenge the teachers' points of view. In order to improve learners' oral proficiency, teachers should encourage learners to argue, criticize and reflect on points for discussion, by including activities such as debating, discussions and other communicative interactions.

4.6.5 Linguistic form

All the observed classes were distinguished by the following characteristics: minimal utterances in spoken interaction, reaction to code (grammar) rather than message, restricted choice of linguistic items (see Appendix 1).

4.6.6 Discourse

In all the cases under study, the students were restricted to giving responses to the teachers' question rather than initiating talk themselves. The teachers' speech was sustained, sometimes consisting of up to six sentences (see Appendix 1). In all the lessons observed, the students did not initiate talking, but were only responding to what the teacher was saying or asking. They were also silent or unresponsive to some questions. For example,

Teacher A (17-12-02)

(3):

Teacher: What are they?

Student: ^

(27)

Teacher: what is the meaning of misbehave?

Student: ^

(34 Teacher: imagination?

Student: ^

Learners should be encouraged to initiate talk for classroom discussion. This would help them practise starting a conversation in a more natural way.

4.6.7 Language skills

This section covers the learners' receptive and productive skills, which are discussed in relation to the conceptual framework (see section 1.2 Chapter One).

From the students' focus-group discussion (18-01-03) (Appendix 3), it emerged that the national media in Eritrea, i.e. TV and radio broadcast transmissions, are in the L1 (vernaculars) and the L2 (English). The transmission in L2 (on TV) includes programmes such as the children's programme (which is transmitted daily for half an hour), national and international news (daily for 15minutes), interviews on current issues (daily for 30minutes), documentary films (daily) and entertainment (music, movies). Despite all these programmes, the students do not watch them, with the exception of movies, music and videos because the "programmes are not interesting". They said that the Ministry of Information should introduce other programmes such as distance education, general knowledge and debates on different issues. There is no transmission in L2 on radio.

In brief, some concluding remarks can be drawn from the findings in the present study. Out of four teachers that were observed, none used authentic group work methods such as games, simulations and role-play. The students worked individually during all the observation periods. In all of the lessons observed, the participant organization for the lesson was teacher instructing the whole class (Teacher to Students). Secondly, most of the observed teachers spent their time on teaching language structure using form-focused activities, but in this case the activities often consisted of decontextualized grammar practice or isolated grammatical structures, such as asking questions clearly lacking in genuine communicative intent. The teachers' focus was in all cases on the accuracy of the target language (form). Thirdly, all the observed teachers focused their interaction solely on pedagogic issues, i.e. they focused on teaching points which are from the English textbook.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The first section of this chapter will attempt to draw conclusions from the study and the second section will contain some recommendations regarding the teaching and improvement of the oral proficiency skills of Eritrean learners'.

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study enable conclusions to be drawn about all contributors to the students' oral proficiency development of English: the students themselves, the teachers and the context.

From the summary of focus-group discussion responses and questionnaires, a number of possible reasons for the students' weakness in oral proficiency of English becomes apparent. Firstly, English teachers have teaching techniques that are ineffective in developing learners' aural/oral proficiency. They are using the Grammar-Translation approach to language teaching, which is outdated.

Secondly, from the teachers' interviews it was apparent that classroom teaching was mostly based on the Grammar approach. Conclusions can be drawn from both the students and teacher interview summaries. The learners saw teaching and learning as happening only in the classroom and not as a continual process reaching into wider contexts. They considered that learning is completed after school, so they need to be shown other resources and how to use them. They were given simple homework tasks that emphasized reliance on classroom learning only, which is not sufficient, and did not encourage them to continue the learning process outside the classroom setting. For example, they did not get enough L2 exposure from mass media such as TV, video, radio and movies.

There was no coverage for oral work in the syllabus that requires the learners to have practised an oral activity. More class time was not devoted to a variety of creative exercises in speaking. Rather, more time was spent on the formal teaching of isolated grammar.

In the present study, the teachers did not insist that students use the target language to develop and express their own ideas. This would have helped them to establish links between the text and the world of their own experience.

The results of the observation show that the students had few opportunities to produce language both in and out of class. Furthermore, from the learners' responses in the questionnaire, the teachers did not assess learners' oral performance. From Table 7 (see Appendix 3) we can see that the learners did not take an oral exam. The teachers did relatively more talking than the students and to the whole class, as opposed to individual students.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The present researcher makes the following basic recommendations which cover the following broad issues: oral/aural language assessment techniques, language teaching methods, in-service teacher training and bilingualism.

Eritrean learners need more comprehensible input in the classroom, rather than relying only on grammar instruction. In other words, the classroom should be established on meaningful and authentic language contexts and use. They need more "pushed output", in order to develop their oral proficiency.

The students need to spend more time in speaking; visual aids and L2 materials should be used. Language teaching should be integrated with the right kind of focused input. There needs to be activities that enable the learners to produce extended discourse and to experience language in real-life communication. For example, according to the comprehensible output hypothesis (Swain 1985), students need to produce language as well as listen to it if they are to move toward native-speaker proficiency. Secondly, feedback

needs to be provided so that learners can develop their linguistic and communicative knowledge of the target language. Most of the students commented that more oral (speaking) classes should be included in the learning of language to achieve oral development. Teachers must therefore foster a supportive classroom environment and stress the importance of oral classes in language learning.

There should be arrangements for tape recording of lessons and analysing these in terms of teacher-statement and pupil-statement. This would allow learners to experience speech in the classroom situation.

Eritrean education should be “ Bilingual Education”. Learners have the right to be taught in their mother tongue. However, English should also be used as a subject, starting from the earlier stages of school in parallel with the vernacular languages. In other words, the “gradual transition” would be appropriate instead of “straight into English”. This is because a great deal of importance should be attached to learners’ being effectively literate in their mother tongue before introducing English literacy.

Students should take part in some extra-curricular activities like debating and drama, in order to acquire experience in spoken language activities.

It would be better to teach Eritrean learners in both the mother tongue and TL in a parallel way in the early stages of school (elementary and junior), in order to increase exposure to expertise in the TL. However, Eritrean learners should not be taught English at the expense of the mother tongue (vernacular) languages.

It is recommended that the recruitment and supply of L1 English teachers is necessary, since the teaching of English is viewed as a big concern (see 2.6). The advantage of L1 teachers is that learners could understand the sociocultural aspects of the TL if L1 speakers teach them. They could know how to use the language in society because the learners need not only know the grammar and function of the language, but also how to use it appropriately in the TL. Eritrean learners who go abroad for further education need to communicate in English since

the medium of instruction for higher grades is English. Moreover, English is widely used as an international language all over the world.

Teachers should themselves have some qualifications and experience in teaching aural/oral skills in order to assess the oral proficiency of learners. The examiner (teacher) should know and have expertise in the technical and artistic factors involved with this skill. In addition, special facilities for teaching, such as high-quality tape recorders and video recorders, and sufficient books for use as, stimulating material by teachers and students, should be made available.

Finally, in-service and refresher courses, demonstrations and meetings should be arranged by the Ministry of Education to provide for this training. English language teachers need to be given an opportunity for both in-service training and refresher courses at least once a year. This might help to upgrade their English Language teaching in general and aural/oral skills in particular.

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APPENDIX 1

Excerpt one

17-12-02 (School A-Teacher A)

(1)Teacher: (Writing on the board the date)

Students: (shouting)

Teacher: Ya...let's do the home work together

Teacher: There are two kinds of *love*...

(5)Teacher: What are they?

Students: ^

Teacher: Two kinds of love (writing on the board)

Student: romantic

Teacher: *romantic* and ...

(10)Student: relational

Teacher: rational

Teacher: What do you mean by *rational* and *romantic* love?

Students: ^

Teacher: romantic and rational love?

(15)Students: ^

Teacher: stand up (pointing to one student). What is this, for example, love between opposite sexes, Romantic or rational love?

Student: romantic

Teacher: what is *rational*?

Student: ^

(20)Teacher: rational is...

Student: ^

Teacher: what is rational love? Anybody?

Teacher: rational means...ok let's put the following under romantic or rational love (asking them to do the exercise from the textbook)

Teacher: ok number one

(25) Student 1: romantic

Teacher: yes, romantic love.

Teacher: ok number two?

Student 2: rational love

(30) Teacher: yes correct. Number 3...understanding one's partner?

Student: rational

Teacher: rational

Teacher: Next, a love which is difficult to achieve? Any body?

Students: ^

(35) Teacher: yes, rational is a love which is difficult to achieve. Now check the meanings of the following words...*rational, objective, romantic, and ordinary*. These are the words and find their meaning according to the passage. What is the meaning of *misbehave*?

Students: ^

Teacher: It means not to behave...negative. For example, courage...discourage

Teacher: next...ok *rational*

Student: irrational

(40) Teacher: what does it mean *irrational*?

Student: not rational

Teacher: yes, it means not able to reason out or not rational. What about next?

Student: Not subjective

Teacher: yes objective means not subjective. Next...*ordinary*?

(45) Student: common

Teacher: common...common person. What does it mean *imagination*?

Students: ^

Teacher: imagination?

Students: ^

(50) Teacher: is it *real* or *unreal*?

Student: unreal

Teacher: yes. Next may be...

Student: not true

Teacher: what else?

(55) Student: perhaps

Teacher: probably...*may be* means perhaps

Teacher: Now do the exercise in class on page 46 (from the passage).

Go ahead.

Excerpt two
18-12-02 (School A-Teacher B)

(1) Teacher: open your books all (writing correction on the board). Number 4 stand up

Student: yes.

Teacher: come here with your exercise book.

Student: [L1:I did not bring my exercise book].

(5) Teacher: [why? Bring it next time]. Ok write the answer on the board (the correction was finding the meanings of some words from the passage, i.e. contextual meaning)

N.B. The teacher corrects the students' exercise book during the rest of the period.

Excerpt 3
24-12-02 (School A-Teacher A)

(1)Teacher: (writing correction on the board for the home work) please write it down...write it down.

Students: (writing down the correction from the board.)

Teacher: (moves around the classroom to check their exercise book). Now, look at the sentences (from the text book). The first one is action completed in the past while the other one is past perfect. (Reading from the text book) which one is past and which one is past perfect?

Student: the first one is past tense and the second one is past perfect

(5)Teacher: yes, but what about the *simple past tense*?

Student: I had

Teacher: Great. Ok what about this one "I have never seen a traditional wedding ceremony"

Student: present perfect

Teacher: yes, because have plus verb-3...seen. So, if there are many past tenses the one is more past than the other. So, we use past perfect tense for the one and simple past for the second. So, we use the past perfect to show that one event...one event happened earlier...when one event happened earlier than the other...we use...past perfect. For example, " the bus left when I had arrived at the bus station. Which event took place first...which event? Leaving is first...what about the second action..., which comes next?

(10)Student: I arrived

Teacher: So, arrival is the earlier event...so it should be in simple past. We only use *past perfect tense* if both of the tenses are in the past but...separate the happenings we use past perfect tense...one event happens in the past perfect tense and the other in the simple past tense. Ok it is clear now every one read silently the passage silent...reading individually.

Students: (reading the passage individually)

Teacher: Ok I gave you enough time. What is the difference between the two sentences? What is the difference between those two sentences? "I entered the church"...write them down. Write this sentence as "a"...when the bride arrivedI entered the church when the bride arrived. There are two happenings. One event is entering and the other arriving. Now

which event took place first? Both of them are in the past...so which event took first...entering or arriving?

Student: Arriving

(15)Teacher: yes I arrived the church when the bride entered. So is arrival first or second?

Please one at a time.

Student: After

Teacher: raise your hands and answer.

Student: before

Teacher: After the arrival of the bride, now, jot down the following sentences (writing four sentences on the board) what is the difference in meaning? Which one is correct? Why?

Write it down.

(20)Students: (writing down the sentences).

Teacher: now, close the books...close the books all of you. Go ahead write down the meaning. Ok it is time answer it at home we will discuss it tomorrow. Please do it at home.

Excerpt 4

31-12-02 (School A-Teacher A)

(1)Teacher: Silence please...silence. Take out your textbook, please. Ok let us read the passage (entitled “ wedding ceremony in Eritrea” from the textbook). Today we are looking at the use of simple past and past perfect. In the passage, for example, had arrived is what?

Students: ^

Teacher: is it past tense or past perfect tense?

Students: past perfect tense.

(5)Teacher: yes because had plus verb-3. Again, I have never seen such a wedding ceremony (code mixing some words) this is present perfect tense. Even if you look at the last sentence in paragraph 3 the bride arrived in the church. What is this tense?

Students: (shouting together)

Teacher: one at a time

Student: past tense

Teacher: yes because arrive is simple present and arrived is simple past. Next, the man had given...had given...what?

(10)Student: past perfect tense

Teacher: Now, exercise (reading instruction from the textbook) [L1:explaining the instruction]

Students: doing the grammar exercise from the textbook individually.

Teacher: (moving around the classroom) [L1:explaining the exercise]

Teacher: Ok let us do the exercise together...correction please. Raise your hands those who have finished all the exercises.

(15)Students: raising their hands to show that they have finished doing the class exercise

Teacher: Ok question, number one, last month I had been ...what is this?

Student: past perfect tense

Teacher: ok correct number two have arrived what?

Student: present perfect.

(20)Teacher: In number three what is the tense?

Student: past perfect tense.

Teacher: yes past perfect tense. Ok next have lived is what? What is the tense?

Student: past perfect tense

Teacher: all right ...I was very surprised...what about this one

(25)Students: ^

Teacher: was surprised...was?

Student: past tense

Teacher: yes (reading lines from the passage) what does it mean "surprise"?

Student: amuse me.

(30)Teacher: it is amuse me amuse me. Ok now from exercise two take out the tenses that are past tense and past perfect (writing two columns on the board). Ok who can tell me one...please?

Student: had taken

Teacher: what is this?

Student: past perfect

Teacher: what else?

(35)Student: arrived

Teacher: Ok, you at the back, what is this one?

Student: arrived is past tense.

Teacher: what about others?

Student: told

(40)Teacher: ok, what?

Student: simple past tense

Teacher: good. Try to do at home the rest of the exercises. Please do it at home. It is homework.

Excerpt 5
19-12-02 (School B-Teacher C)

(1) Teacher: Let's do correction. My brother and I have 32 and...(---). Now therefore, they are....

Student: confident

Teacher: yes, they are *confident*.

.....(---)

..... (---)

Teacher: I am shy of speaking in front of others and let him speak. I will say silent and one day I will ask to speak. I did not take my money from my brother. I usually only...

(5) Student: confined

Teacher: sorry

Student: confined

Teacher: I usually only...

Student: depend

(10) Teacher: depend on. [L1:It takes the preposition on]. The next question...

Students: acceptance

Teacher: no, *relevant* is the best because *important* means relevant. Number 6, it was about Eritrea's fight for...

Students: independence

Teacher: independence. Number 7, so Eritrea's fight for independence in 1991, I was very about dash (it means blank space) because I knew so dash (blank) of history. Yes at the back?

(15) Student: ignorant

Teacher: *ignorant* or *ignorance*?

Students: ignorance

Teacher: the *noun* or the *adjective*

Students: (shouting together) noun.... Adjective

(20) Teacher: I was very dash (blank) [L1:explaining the difference between ignorance and ignorant]. So, we use the noun form not the adjective.

Teacher: (reading from the text book) but it does not matter. In fact the judges dash (blank)

Student: prefer

Teacher: um...

Student: prefer

(25) Teacher: preferred. [*Prefer* means to choose one from the other] For example, I prefer milk to...um. (Explaining the use of prefer more) I prefer milk than tea is wrong. Which one is correct?

Students: To

Teacher: in fact the judges prefer me dash (blank) him.

Student: to

Teacher: yes prefer me to him. Next...I won the competition. I was very happy at the end whom 200 people were in dash (blank)

(30) Students: ^

Teacher: *attendance*. Ok now let's turn our textbook to page 68. What does *gender* means?

Students: ^

Teacher: what does *gender* mean? Gender? Any one? [L1:What does it mean by gender?]

Student: sex.

(35) Teacher: gender means *sex* but not the other sex...

Students: (Laugh)

Teacher: Ok in exercise two read the chart below and...[L1:read silently and fill the chart]

Students: reading silently (individually)

Teacher: (moving around the classroom to check their exercise book).

Excerpt 6

20-12-02(School B-Teacher D)

(1)Teacher: ok student, what did we do yesterday?

Students: [L1:We learnt direct and indirect speech]

Teacher: ok let's do correction. Number one (from the text book) she told me she said...

Student: she love

(5)Teacher: she said what, be careful about punctuation. Don't forget the comma...the comma and the beginning letter in the quotation with a capital letter and the punctuation either with exclamation, full stop, or question. Number two...Tedros asked me what his name is. Tedros said...

Student: what his name is

Teacher: Tedros said what?

Student: (writing on the board) his name

Teacher: and the comma after the quotation. Number 3? They said that what... They said what? (---). Number 4, the teacher told me to rewrite the essay

(10)Student: (---)

Teacher: what does it mean *essay*?

Students: ^

Teacher: essay means?

Student: ^

(15)Teacher: a kind of writing...long writing. It is a kind of writing or composition but it is very long. And the last line, my mother said I must go before seven o'clock.

Teacher: She told me that I must go before seven o'clock. Last time we have seen about direct and indirect speech. Tell me the rules to change from direct to indirect speech.

Student: three

Teacher: three...yes

Teacher: the first one tense change. Present tense must be changed to what?

(20)Student: past tense

Teacher: second?

Teacher: *pronouns*...all pronouns must be changed and the third one. There are two kinds of questions...*wh-question* and *yes/no question* (writing on the board). What kind of question is this one, Wh-question or yes/no question?

Student: Wh-question.

Teacher: [L1:how do we change it?] He asked where...where the subject must come first...therefore where did he go or where he went...the same. What is the difference between he did go and he went? [He explained about stress or emphasis]. Here is also a second type of question...[interrupted and started explaining]. Look at this example (writing on the board). [L1:What kind of question is this?] Is this yes/no? If it is yes/no question there is one preference or one answer. [L1:Explained the use of "if" and "whether"]. For example, He asked it does, he does, he was.... what kind of question is this...yes/no. Another example (writing on the board) Will you come tomorrow? [L1:Who can answer the question?]. What is the answer?

(25)Students: yes/no question

Teacher: yes...if it is yes/no question you have to use if or whether. We have two kinds of questions, wh-question and yes/no question. When we change wh-question you will use the question word 'wh' and to change yes/no question we use 'if' or 'whether'. (Writing on the board) 'The sun is a star' how do you change it? From direct to indirect?

Student: The teacher said the sun is a star.

Teacher: The teacher said that...

Student: the sun is a star

(30)Teacher: [L1:the sun is or was]

Student: is

Teacher: [L1:every present must be changed to past]. Why don't change here? Is or was?

Students: is

Teacher: what do we call it, *a general truth*? When the sentence is a general truth we do not change the tense. [L1:There is no tense change in the above sentence. So, if it is general truth no change in meaning...sorry tense.] Another example...'he said what is your name' is changed to 'he asked what his name is or was?'

(35)Students: is

Teacher: why? In which rule does it say no tense? [L1:Repeats the question], statement, question, or...

Students: order

Teacher: order, yes. If it is an order we do not change the tense.

(In the last minutes, there was no verbal interaction between the teacher and the students. The teacher was moving around the classroom to check the students' exercise book.)

Excerpt 7

26-12-02 (School B-Teacher C)

(1)Teacher: [L1:Ok take out your exercise book]. [L1:Do you have homework?]

Students: [L1:Direct and indirect speech]

Teacher: (checking their exercise book by moving in the classroom). Ok correction...what is the answer for number one?

Student: *basic education* needs...should be...

(5)Teacher: [L1:at the back]

Student: literacy and ...

Teacher: basic education needs benefit the country in two ways. What are the two points?

Student: production

Teacher: to increase production and ...

(10)Student: health

Teacher: yeah...for health, and number three...basic education...intend the individual of how

Student: ^

Teacher: [L1:wrong]

Student: (---)

(15)Teacher: yeah, but I am asking number three

Student: health

Teacher: No, *sanitation, production* and the third one...

Student: (---)

Teacher: the minimal time at the school for basic education is

(20)Student: five

Teacher: five years. Number of primary school under the Ethiopians...

Students: ^

Teacher: [L1:um... you forget]. It is none. Infinite school should be from dash (blank) to dash (blank)

Student: from seen to eleven

(25)Teacher: [L1:explains the question]. Number seven... number of children of this age...what does this age mean?

Students: seven to eleven.

Teacher: yes, seven to eleven...ok the last question

Student: 440,000 elementary school children

Teacher: ok second exercise

(30)Students: matching

Teacher: *healthy*...b

Students: fit and well

Teacher: [explains the words fit and well]

Student: numeracy...ability to count

(35)Teacher: *numeracy* means number. Enrolment?

Students: ^

Teacher: those students who are part of the school. Next, literacy means...

Student: read and write

Teacher: *illiteracy*...illiteracy

(40)Student: not able to read and write

Teacher: yes, unable to read and write

Student: [L1:ignorant]

Teacher: [L1:Literate means educated...no but at least can read and write]. Next, *to grow*

Student: develop

(45)Teacher: yes to grow means to develop and ...achieve

Student: to do what you have tried to

Teacher: to do what? [L1:Explains the meaning of achieve], next self-confidence

Student: ^

Teacher: I am confident...he is confident [L1:It takes preposition of]

(50)Student: C

Teacher: yes...being sure of your self [L1:explains more]. Next improve

Student: made better

Teacher: [L1:*improve* means to become better]. Next

Student: *increase* means to become more

(55)Teacher: the last one

Student: to take some thing going on

Teacher: ok that is all. Now let's discuss "contextual meaning". [L1:It means finding the meaning of a word from the context]. Now let us do revision. Let us read exercise one

(reading the instruction from the book). Ask your partner questions from the table below.

Here you are given some hints on how to form a question and answer. Write out a short six line dialogue [L1:explains the instruction].

Students: write dialogues as a class work for the rest of the period.

Excerpt 8
27-12-02 (School B-Teacher D)

The teacher gave the students a quiz for the whole period on tenses (simple present, simple past, and present perfect tenses).

The quiz is as follows.

Quiz

Choose the correct answer from the given choices.

1. Last year, I – to Nakfa to visit my friends.

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| a. Visit | c. visited |
| b. Am visiting | d. visits |

2. I had- my lunch right now.

- | | |
|--------|----------------|
| a. Eat | c. eaten |
| b. Ate | d. been eating |

3. I – in 1978 in Asmara.

- | | |
|------------|-------------|
| a. Born | c. was born |
| b. Am born | d. - |

4. Have you ever- Massawa?

- | | |
|---------|-----------|
| a. Saw | c. sees |
| b. Seen | d. seeing |

Excerpt 9

02-01-03 (School B-Teacher C)

(1)Teacher: Ok let us do the homework please. Number one, what is the answer?

Student: g

Teacher: (reading the second question from the textbook) what is the answer?

Student: ^

(5)Teacher: [L1: Explains more]. So the answer is would. Ok question number three [L1: explaining the use of would and past perfect]. [Did we learn 'if' or 'may'?] [Giving them more clarification on past perfect]. [L1: For example, my father had lived in Asmara for forty years and therefore...]. Number four?

Students: ^

Teacher: had saved ...had saved (code mix in mother tongue) he had saved enough money for his house. And number five...before I was born...um

Student: used to

Teacher: they used to live in a small house [L1: gives them more explanation]. And d, my husband...after years

(10)Student: would

Teacher: [L1: repeat the answer, please]

Student: had reach

Teacher: had had reached. Ok next my brother...number seven...yacob told me and I dash (blank) what my mother told me [giving them more clarification on the two clauses] which one is the first action?

Students: ^

(15)Teacher: My father dash Yacob told me and I dash what my mother told me...um

Student: had

Teacher: had what?

Student: did

Teacher: [L1: explains the sentence]. If we have two actions... (Interrupts and starts to speak in mother tongue). There are two actions. The first one is they have chosen for me and the

second that he did something so it will be either the first one in past perfect tense, and the second part must be what?

(20)Students: ^

Teacher: past tense...did. Ali and I did not tell my mother told me. It was terrible I did not tell my mother about that but he dash his secret

Student: used to

Teacher: used to. We dash (blank) to my playhouse and I told yacob and our fathers

Student: would go

(25)Teacher: yes would go (explains it more in mother tongue). Next, they were angry because I had not dash (blank)

Student: call

Teacher: I had not...

Student: called

Teacher: (gives them more clarification mother tongue). Next, I had not called them but they agreed to meet them earlier. What is the past tense of meet?

(30)Student: met

Teacher: yes past perfect of meet is met...with one e. [L1: Now do the exercise...matching from your textbook].

Students: (doing the exercise individually)

Teacher: [L1: Do the direct meaning from the dictionary].

APPENDIX 2

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW (for teachers)

The following questions are designed for research purposes. Therefore, the researcher kindly requests you to respond freely and frankly to the questions.

1. Can you please tell me your background experience in language teaching?
2. What activities do you implement in language teaching (especially speaking)?
3. What techniques of language teaching do you implement in teaching speaking skills?
4. Do you have the necessary facilities in teaching oral skills? If yes, mention them.
5. What problems do you face in teaching oral skills to your learners?
6. What do you suggest excluding the teaching of grammar from the communicative language teaching?
7. What suggestions or recommendations do you have concerning the improvement of oral skill of learners?

APPENDIX 3

Transcription of the teachers' interview

Teacher A (14-01-03)

Interviewer: Can you please tell me your background experience in language teaching?

Interviewee: Ok I have taught...this is my fourth year in teaching English and I have been teaching in village students the last two years and I am not teaching in the city Asmara and that is it.

Interviewer: What techniques do you employ to teach the speaking skill?

Interviewee: ok the most common thing that we conduct in class activity is the discussion method and some times we use dialogues and short presentations. But most of the time we spend the time teaching grammar. We do not spend too much time in speaking.

Interviewer: What could be the reasons for this one?

Interviewee: the main problem is of course class size. We can not teach speaking activity for 50-70 students in one class for 45 minutes. There are other problems such as we do not have facilities for teaching speaking skills. S o it is impossible to conduct speaking activity in a class. We do not have also teaching background in English language.

Interviewer: what facilities do you do you use beside the English textbook you are using now in class?

Interviewee: I use sometimes...I use video...video and the tape recorder especially in listening activity and that is all.

Interviewer: how many periods do use practice this activity per week, month or semester?

Interviewee: we did not almost use the laboratory but I used only once a semester.

Interviewer: what is your point of view on the teaching of grammar in the communicative approach of language teaching?

Interviewee: I strongly agree that Eritreans should be taught grammar because they are poor in grammar. But this does not help them to improve their oral skills so I would say to teach them communication first and then grammar later.

Interviewer: so do you mean that grammar should be excluded totally from communicative language teaching?

Interviewee: I do not mean that I mean grammar should be taught not directly but indirectly. We should not put much stress on grammar rather on function or communication. The main emphasis should be on communication.

Interviewer: what is your point or idea on the teaching of language by native versus non-native speakers of the language?

Interviewee: on my point of view... I think it is good if Eritreans (non-native) teach them because there are sometimes slang words and expressions that are very difficult to explain to students in English. So if the teacher wanted to explain these words clearly he or she can explain in Tigrinya or the students' language. So I think mother tongue teachers are preferable.

Interviewer: how do you assess learners' oral/aural skill in class?

Interviewee: well as far as I am concerned I did not give them oral tests so far.

Interviewer: what could be the main reasons?

Interviewee: the main reasons are the classroom time is very short...it is only for 45 minutes. Secondly we can not test them that we did not teach or practice the learners in class. I could say in general the way we teach should match the way we test.

Interviewer: What suggestions or recommendations do you have concerning the improvement of the oral skills of the learners?

Interviewee: ok we do not have all the necessary equipment the problem is class size and learners' background. Teachers should teach them more on communication in their background level not only in their high school level. This is because the problem lies in the base not in high school. Another suggestion could be there should be more schools so that the problem of class size should be solved.

Teacher B (14-01-03)

Interviewer: Can you please tell me your background experience in language teaching?

Interviewee: Yes of course I have been teaching for almost three decades and senior secondary English school...as I know of students ...um...do not speak and write ...so the problem is ...the past curriculum... of the then curriculum is not fulfilling the needs of students but this time they are starting to make short conversations dialogues drills etc.so I can say that they are almost improving.

Interviewer: What facilities do you implement in language teaching especially speaking skill?

Interviewee: ya we use...cassettes...tape recorders...um cassettes and tape recorders...we use video cassettes...and sometimes also...we invite some foreign guests this is what we have done up to now.

Interviewer: so what do the students do in the activity of the guest speakers? Are the guests foreign speakers?

Interviewee: well they will...listen to what they are saying but they do not give comments on the topic. The guest speakers are not foreign speakers...they are Eritreans.

Interviewer: but from my observations in classroom I have not seen such things.

Interviewee: I am sorry. It is not the same...um...of course we have a video room. I can check now I do not know how they forget to teach...um...we have speaking and listening periods and some times we ask them to prepare short dialogues and speak in front of the class and at the same time some times I select some important conversations and dialogues and short dialogues...and they will do it subsequently.

Interviewer: so do mean that the students practised oral activity in class?

Interviewee: I can not say that they have practised but some how they have tried it in class but doing the practice at home first. Some times they have dramatized it. For example in our topic...um...unit 3 grade nine there is about love so they have dramatized that as there was a rich man's daughter Ali and twin so they acted like this in this...especially they dramatized it in a very striking manner.

Interviewer: what problems do you have in teaching oral/aural skills?

Interviewee: yes of course...we have some problems...and these problems will be solved soon. Some of the problems are when we...want to teach them using tape recorders the electricity may not work sometimes. And we do not have enough cassettes. The class size is also the major problem.

Interviewer: how many periods do use practice oral/aural activity per week, month or semester?

Interviewee: I did not use the laboratory.

Interviewer: what is your point of view on the teaching of grammar in the communicative approach of language teaching?

Interviewee: yes it is very important to teach communication skills because it gives them...chance to reach some thought from what they listen. From their point of listening and speaking of course...it is also advisable to give some structural patterns in addition. We can not reject grammar totally. We must give them some key structural patterns that help students to write and speak and help them proficient in English.

Interviewer: so do you mean that grammar should be excluded totally from communicative language teaching?

Interviewee: I mean grammar should be taught after communication. We can not exclude grammar from language teaching. It is wrong. For me grammar is secondary.

Interviewer: what is your point or idea on the teaching of language by native versus non-native speakers of the language?

Interviewee: of course of course...if the teachers who are Eritreans are not taking some seminars...courses and some upgrading workshops...they may have some problems in pronunciation teaching and speaking in general. But as for me I have told you I have foreign friends and I think the foreign nationalities will do little more here. It is better if the Eritreans teach them the language.

Interviewer: how do you assess learners' oral/aural skill in class?

Interviewee: never....never I did not give them oral test before.

Interviewer: what could be the main reasons?

Interviewee: we do not have enough time and... skill we do not have the skill to evaluate their oral skills.

Interviewer: What suggestions or recommendations do you have concerning the improvement of the oral skills of the learners?

Interviewee: yeah...you are right here...as I observed some language-teaching...teachers pass the oral and speaking exercise but this is wrong. You know our main idea in language teaching is to communicate and when we start to communicate speaking is very important skill. So they must give enough time to speaking skill. So if they do so our students will improve very easily. So this is all I can say.

Interviewer: thanks so much

Interviewee: pleasure.

Teacher C (16-01-03)

Interviewer: Can you please tell me your background experience in language teaching?

Interviewee: Actually, I started teaching English for the past 16 years. In fact before that I was teaching other subjects like maths. To be true language is going down and down nowadays. There are many factors for this one among which are...we do not have well-trained teachers in that language...we do not have seminars or refreshment courses and secondly concerning students. They have poor backgrounds. The students have really...really come to high school with poor background. They should start learning English earlier in grade two or other...and I am afraid that down classes should be assessed and observed.

Interviewer: What facilities do you implement in language teaching especially speaking skill?

Interviewee: well we do not have much advanced facilities...er...we have only tape recorders and cassettes and some times we make some class activities they talk in class...in front of class. But all these are only once a while.

Interviewer: what about language laboratory?

Interviewee: yes we have but due to some reasons we are not using now.

Interviewer: can you please tell me some of the reasons?

Interviewee: the most important thing is we do not have enough facilities such as tape recorders and video.

Interviewer: Do you have other problems?

Interviewee: yes for example the number of students in one class is too big...45 students in one class. It is very difficult to teach them oral skills.

Interviewer: how many periods do use practice oral/aural activity per week, month or semester?

Interviewee: I used only once a year. I do not dare say we are using the language laboratory.

Interviewer: what is your point of view on the teaching of grammar in the communicative approach of language teaching?

Interviewee:

Interviewee: well basically grammar is very important. They have to know the grammar part in order to construct correct sentences. For example they should know how and when to use tenses and subject verb agreement. With out that language is meaningless.

Interviewee: so do you mean that grammar should be taught before communication?

Interviewee: I mean grammar should be taught together with communication. We cannot exclude grammar from language teaching. But it should be integrated with functions.

Interviewer: what is your point or idea on the teaching of language by native versus non-native speakers of the language?

Interviewee: better if native speakers teach them. I prefer if native speakers teach the learners. This is because they can imitate the native speakers way of speaking the language.

Interviewer: how do you assess learners' oral/aural skill in class?

Interviewee: I did not give them oral tests before.

Interviewer: what could be the main reasons?

Interviewee: time...no enough time only 45 minutes and... teachers should have enough skills or should be proficient to assess the learners' oral skills.

Interviewer: What suggestions or recommendations do you have concerning the improvement of the oral skills of the learners?

Interviewee: well my own suggestion is that they have to practise at least in the school compound. Students should be given freedom to talk in English after a while they may improve it. They should also practise the language both in class and out side. The other point is that other subject teachers should communicate them in English.

Interviewer: thanks so much

Interviewee: welcome.

Teacher D (16-01-03)

Interviewer: Can you please tell me your background experience in language teaching?

Interviewee: I have been teaching English for the past twenty years. I am a graduate in Economics but due to lack of English teachers they told me teach English subject for high school students. Until now we have not taken refreshment courses to up grade our skills in the teaching profession. If you look at most of the English teachers they are not graduated in English or related subjects or fields...even most of them have diploma in other subjects.

Interviewer: What facilities do you implement in language teaching especially speaking skill?

Interviewee: I could say that...I did not use any facility to teach oral ...speaking skill. Forget about the facility...we did not teach them oral skills.

Interviewer: what are the reasons?

Interviewee: well we do not have the proper knowledge of how to teach English oral skills. The ministry of education should give us seminars or courses to improve our profession.

Interviewer: what about language laboratory?

Interviewee: As I told you now we did not use it.

Interviewer: Do you have other problems?

Interviewee: sorry please?

Interviewer: For example, the number of students?

Interviewee: of course, we could not manage to teach the students speaking in groups or pairs for 60 students in 45 minutes. We cannot...it is impossible.

Interviewer: what is your point of view on the teaching of grammar in the communicative approach of language teaching?

Interviewee: in fact grammar is necessary but the teaching should focus primarily on speaking and writing...because they will master the grammar through time while they are practising the language in communication.

Interviewee: so do you mean that grammar should be taught after communication skills?

Interviewee: No I mean grammar should be taught with ... the teaching of oral skills such as speaking skill. It is not necessary to teach them grammar alone. They will master it if they are left to speak the language freely in classroom and out side.

Interviewer: what is your point or idea on the teaching of language by native versus non-native speakers of the language?

Interviewee: (laughing) yes it would be better to teach them by foreigners or native speakers of that language. This is because they know their language well than non-native speakers...for example the culture...proper way of saying things, asking questions, informing people and others.

Interviewer: how do you assess learners' oral/aural skill in class?

Interviewee: Up to now I did not give them oral tests. I gave them only grammar tests such as on tenses, articles and adverbials.

Interviewer: what could be the main reasons?

Interviewee: the curriculum is like that. There is no instruction given by the office to give the learners oral tests either at the beginning or end of the semester.

Interviewer: What suggestions or recommendations do you have concerning the improvement of the oral skills of the learners?

Interviewee: well to my point of view the learners are not improving their oral skills. I can not blame the learners because they did not get the necessary attention in oral skills. If they are given all the necessary things I am sure they will improve their oral or speaking skills.

Interviewer: so what do you think the possible solutions?

Interviewee: in my opinion...for example they could do exercises such as group oral work, pair work and ...in laboratory.

Interviewer: thanks so much

APPENDIX 4

QUESTIONNAIRE (for students)

NAME: _____

SCHOOL: _____

GRADE: _____

SEX: _____

AGE: _____

This questionnaire is designed for research purposes. Therefore, the researcher requests you to answer the following questions as frankly as possible. Please answer the questions in the spaces provided below each question or tick the correct response where you are asked to make a choice.

1. How interested are you in learning the English language?

- a. Very interested---- b. fairly interested---- c. does not know--- d. Not at all interested----

2. Have you experienced any problems in communicating with your English or other teachers, or any other foreigner who speaks English?

- a. Yes----- b. no-----

3. What do you see as your greatest difficulty in speaking English?

- a. _____
b. _____
c. _____

4. What kind of activities do you usually practise in your oral English class?

- a. -----
- b. -----
- c. -----

5. Which of the following roles does your English teacher perform while you are practising a certain oral activity?

- a. Observing -----
- b. Commenting (assessing) -----
- c. Participating in the activity -----
- d. Giving directions -----
- e. Other -----

6. Which skill does your teacher concentrate most on developing in his/her students while teaching a lesson?

- a. Speaking ----- b. listening ----- c. reading -----
- d. Writing -----

7. If the answer to question number 6 is 'a' give details or examples.

- a. -----
- b. -----
- c. -----

8. The approach or method of language teaching your teacher mostly adopts is

- a. Grammar ----- b. Communication -----

9. In what language do you communicate with your English teacher in class?

- a. Mostly in English -----
- b. Mostly in Tigrinya -----
- c. Equally in both Tigrinya and English -----

10. In what language do you communicate with other teachers in class?

- a. Mostly in English -----
- b. Mostly in Tigrinya -----
- c. Equally in both Tigrinya and English -----

11. Do all the students participate actively in the class?

- a. Yes ----- b. no -----

12. If the answer to question number 11 is 'no', who participates more and why?

13. How often do you express your self in English out side class to your friends?

- a. All the time ----- b. once a week -----

- b. Not at all -----

14. Have you ever taken an oral exam to test your speaking ability?

a. Yes ----- b. no -----

15. If the answer to question number 14 is 'yes' give the name and result of the exam.

16. Which activities do you think are most important in improving your oral skills (from your English textbooks)?

17. Does your English teacher introduce extra activities besides the English textbooks you are using?

18. If the answer to question number 16 is 'yes', mention some points (newspaper, video).

19. Does the English textbook have activities that help in improving oral proficiency?

a. Yes ----- b. no -----

20. If the answer to question number 19 is 'yes' mention some activities (role-play, game, simulation).

21. If the answer to question number 19 is 'no', list some important activities you would like to include.

22. How do you rate the effectiveness of the present/ current way of teaching speaking skills?

a. Very effective ----- b. effective -----

b. Poor ----- d. very poor -----

23. Do you think mastering grammar is necessary before learning speaking skills?

a. Very necessary ----- b. Necessary -----

c. Not necessary -----

APPENDIX 5

Results of Students questionnaire

Table 1

The approach or method your teacher mostly adopts

	Frequency	Percent
Grammar (structure)	197	98.0
Communication	3	1.5
Total	200	99.5

Table 2

Does your teacher introduce some activities besides the English textbook you are using now?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	24	11.9
No	176	87.6
Total	200	99.5

Table 3

Which skill does your teacher concentrate more?

	Frequency	Percent
Speaking	1	.5
Listening	6	3.0
Reading	186	92.5
Writing	7	3.5
Total	200	99.5

Table 4

In what language do you communicate with your English teacher?

	Frequency	Percent
Mostly in Tigrinya	4	2.0
Equally in both Tigrinya and English	196	97.5
Total	200	99.5

Table 5

In what language do you communicate with other teachers?

	Frequency	Percent
Mostly in English	5	2.5
Mostly in Tigrinya	17	8.5
Equally in both English and Tigrinya	178	88.6
Total	200	99.5

Table 6

How often do you express your self in English outside of the class?

	Frequency	Percent
Not at all	200	100
Always	0	0

Table 7

Have you ever taken an oral exam to test your speaking ability?

	Frequency	Percent
No	200	100

Table 8

Interest of the learners to English language

	Frequency	Percent
Very interested	180	89.6
Fairly interested	14	7.0
Poor	3	1.5
Not at all interested	3	1.5
Total	200	99.5

Table 9

Have you experienced problems in learning L2?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	185	92.0
No	15	7.5
Total	200	99.5

Table 10

What is the role of English teacher during an oral activity?

	Frequency	Percent
Observing	181	90.0
Commenting	9	4.5
Participating	4	2.0
Giving direction	6	3.0
Total	200	99.5

Table 11

Do all the students participate actively in the class?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	18	9.0
No	182	90.5
Total	200	99.5

Table 12

How do you rate the effectiveness of the present way of teaching speaking skill?

	Frequency	Percent
Very effective	1	.5
Effective	4	2.0
Poor	13	6.5
Very poor	182	90.5
Total	200	99.5

APPENDIX 6

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (with students)

The following questions are designed for research purposes. Therefore, the researcher kindly requests you to respond freely and frankly to the questions.

1. Which skill of language does your teacher mostly focus in language teaching?
2. In what language does your English teacher mostly speak in class? Outside class?
What about other subject teachers?
3. Have you ever taken an oral exam?
4. If the answer to question number 3 is 'yes' tell me something about the exam data and your results.
5. How many periods per week does your English teacher teach you oral activity?
6. What does your teacher do while you are performing an oral activity?
7. Do you practise oral activities in language laboratories? How many periods per week or month?
8. What kind of programmes do you watch on TV? Are there programmes that are transmitted in English?
9. Does your English teacher introduce other topics or materials in the classroom activity?

APPENDIX 7

Focus-group discussion with students

Group 1(18-01-03)

Interviewer: Which skill of language does your teacher mostly focus in language teaching?

Student 1: The English teachers mostly focus in teaching grammar or isolated grammatical points. For example, they teach us about present tenses, past tenses, and conjunctions.

Student 2: Yes most of the time the teachers spent their time in teaching grammar such as clauses, tenses and other parts of the grammar. They did not teach us language for communication as in the case of group-work or pair-work.

Interviewer: How does, for example, your English teacher teach the grammar in class?

Student 3: The methods that the English teachers adopt in teaching the grammar is by presenting or lecturing in a formal way. The students did not discuss on the topic under discussion. They listen only to what the teacher is saying and later do exercises from the textbook which is multiple choice or matching exercise.

Interviewer: Do you have any different suggestions or idea concerning this question?

Student 5: Every thing is already said. We do not have different ideas from these points. All I can say is that we did not perform even one oral activity before.

Interviewer: So do you mean that you did not practice oral or listening activity in class or language laboratory?

Student 1: there is a language laboratory in our school but we did not use it even the whole year. It is just a symbol to show that the school has a language laboratory.

Interviewer: How about oral exams? Did you take any oral exam before?

Student 6: well concerning me, I have not ever taken oral exams in my life. The teachers always assess by giving us written exams.

Interviewer: Can you please tell me some of the nature of the exam?

Student 6: for example exercise in which the students are going to select from a given choices such as on tenses as we have said it before or reading a passage and answering questions by reading from the passage.

Interviewer: Is this the same for all of you or do you have different ideas?

Student 2: yes it is the same. We do not have different ideas.

Interviewer: Does your English teacher introduce other topics or activities beside the textbook you are using now?

Student 5: No. The teachers use only textbook while teaching us the language. We do not use video or other materials in classroom.

Interviewer: What about tape recorders?

Student 3: We do not even use it in class.

Interviewer: In what language do you communicate with your English teachers, other subject teachers in class?

Student 4: We speak in both languages.

Interviewer: In what case do you speak in Tigrinya? English?

Student 3: Most of the time we listen to what the teacher is saying but if we want to ask the teacher a question we use Tigrinya. We use also Tigrinya in need of more clarification from the exercises which we are doing in class or at home. We use English only to respond to the teachers' question by reading from the textbook.

Interviewer: In what other functions do you use Tigrinya?

Student 6: We use Tigrinya in chatting with each other in class and out side of the class.

Interviewer: What about with other subject teachers?

Student 2: We use also the same thing as in the case of English teachers. We do not use different things from English teachers.

Interviewer: What kind of programmes do you watch on TV? Are there programmes that are transmitted in English?

Student 1: I usually watch Tigrinya news and programmes transmitted in Tigrinya.

Student 2: I usually watch programmes that are transmitted in Tigrinya like drama, sport news.

Student 3: Mine is the same like student 1.

Student 4: Some times I watch movies which are transmitted in English. But mostly I watch Tigrinya programmes.

Student 5: I have the same idea like these students.

Student 6: Yes there are programmes transmitted in English but they are very boring except the movies.

Group 2 (19-01-03)

Interviewer: Which skill of language does your teacher mostly focus in language teaching?

Student 1: In my case the teachers mostly focus in grammar teaching. They do not give enough attention to speaking skills. I have not seen students performing an oral activity in class.

Student 3: I agree with his (student 1) idea. The teachers focus only in form-focused instruction not in meaning-focused instruction.

Interviewer: How does, for example, your English teacher teach the grammar in class?

Student 4: The teacher gives us lecture on isolated grammatical structures such as tenses and punctuation, direct and indirect speech. We listen to the teachers lecture with out giving any feedback or comments on the idea.

Interviewer: Do you have any different idea concerning this question?

Student 1: No, we do not have different idea.

Interviewer: So do you mean that you did not practice oral or listening activity in class or language laboratory?

Student 2: We even did not know whether there is language laboratory in the school or not. We did not practise oral/aural activity in class.

Interviewer: How about oral exams? Did you take any oral exam before?

Student 6: How can we be assessed our oral/aural skills if we did not practise any activity before in class?

Interviewer: Can you please tell me some of the nature of the exam you are taking in your academic year?

Student 3: The nature of the exam is always to select a correct answer from a given choices. The test is on grammar or structure. For example, selecting correct tenses for a sentence or conjunctions.

Interviewer: Is this the same for all of you or do you have different ideas?

Student 2: We do not have different ideas.

Interviewer: Does your English teacher introduce other topics or activities beside the textbook you are using now?

Student 5: No. The teachers use only textbook while teaching us the language. We did not see different teaching materials.

Interviewer: What about tape recorders?

Student 4: We did not use tape recorders in class even once.

Interviewer: In what language do you communicate with your English teachers, other subject teachers in class?

Student 3: We speak in both languages.

Interviewer: In what case do you speak in Tigrinya? English?

Student 2: If we want to ask the teacher a question concerning exercises we use Tigrinya. We use also Tigrinya in need of more clarification from the exercises which we are doing in class or at home. We use English only to respond to the teachers' question by reading from the textbook.

Interviewer: In what other functions do you use Tigrinya?

Student 1: We use Tigrinya in chatting with each other in class and out side of the class.

Interviewer: What about with other subject teachers?

Student 6: we use the same functions like in English teachers.

