

A Discourse Analysis of Fluency Features in Learners' Output During Speech Shadowing: A Case Study of Eighth-Grade Students in Libya

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تحليل الخطاب لسلمات الطلاقة في كلام المتعلمين أثناء ترديد الكلام: دراسة حالة لطلاب الصف الثامن في ليبيا

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Abstract:

Speech shadowing is a pedagogical strategy that has been proposed as an effective approach to enhance learners' oral fluency. Despite its effectiveness, limited research has been conducted to investigate how fluency features are enhanced through the shadowing technique. This study employs a qualitative discourse analysis method to analyze the learner's utterance during the process of shadowing. The findings reveal notable improvements in students' oral performances after participating in shadowing activities. Therefore, language teachers who seek to develop their students' fluency are encouraged to incorporate this technique in their lessons due to its various benefits in the enhancement of spoken language skills.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis, Speech Shadowing, fluency features, EFL Learners, Libyan Students.

المخلص:

يُعد أسلوب ترديد الكلام استراتيجية تربوية تم اقتراحها بوصفها منهجاً فعالاً لتحسين الطلاقة الشفوية لدى متعلمين اللغة. ومع ذلك، وعلى الرغم من فاعليتها المعترف بها، لا تزال الأبحاث محدودة فيما يتعلق بأبعاد الطلاقة التي تتطور من خلال استخدام هذه التقنية. تعتمد هذه الدراسة منهج تحليل الخطاب النوعي لفحص وتحليل أقوال المتعلمين أثناء عملية التردد الكلامي. وتُظهر النتائج وجود تحسن ملحوظ في الأداء الشفوي للطلاب بعد مشاركتهم في أنشطة التردد. وبناءً على ذلك، يُشجع معلمو اللغة الذين يسعون إلى تطوير طلاقة متعلميهم على دمج هذه التقنية في ممارساتهم التعليمية، نظراً لما تتمتع به من إمكانات في تعزيز جوانب متعددة من تنمية مهارات اللغة المنطوقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل الخطاب، ترديد الكلام، متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، الطلاقة اللغوية، طلاب المدارس الليبية.

• Introduction

Language researchers have employed a variety of learning strategies for English as a Foreign Language learners. Shadowing is an approach that plays a vital role in language learning.

Shadowing is an active and highly cognitive activity in which learners track the speech they hear and vocalize it as clearly as possible while simultaneously listening. (Hamada,2014). It enables the learner to enhance fluency and pronunciation of their utterance.

• Statement of the problem

Speech shadowing has been proposed as a technique to enhance learners' spoken fluency by engaging them in immediate repetition of auditory input. However, there is limited understanding of which fluency features of speech production are developed through speech shadowing. In particular, how do these features—such as speech rate, pausing, or smoothness—develop during shadowing practice in preparatory school students?

• Research questions

The study seeks to find an answer to the following question:

1- How are fluency features developed through speech shadowing among grade 8 EFL learners?

- **Purpose of the study**
The study aims to investigate the development of fluency features among grade 8 EFL learners during speech shadowing tasks, employing a formal approach of discourse analysis.
- **Significance of the study**
This study is significant because it contributes to a deeper understanding of how speech shadowing can be used to improve learners' oral fluency. By identifying which features of fluency develop first through speech shadowing, the study provides insight into how learners process and reproduce spoken language in real time. This can help educators better understand the nature of fluency development beyond traditional accuracy-focused approaches. The findings may also benefit curriculum designers by supporting the integration of shadowing techniques into language programs.
Overall, this study contributes to the field of language teaching by offering empirical evidence on the effectiveness of speech shadowing as a tool for enhancing spoken fluency.
- **Literature review**
- **Definition of fluency:**
According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, "Fluency is the ability to speak a foreign language easily and effectively".
Fluency features are the elements in a learner's speech that measure his/her ability to speak the language naturally and smoothly. Common examples of these features are: speech rate, pausing patterns, self-repair patterns, automaticity, hesitation, and repetitions.
- **Definition of Speech Shadowing:** (The Human Echo) it is "a technique of listening to a source language message and at the same time repeating (in the same language) what one hears" (Sin-wai, 2004)
Shadowing is a simple exercise where a language learner listens to a native speaker and repeats exactly what they say. Speech shadowing focuses more on the phonological aspect of a language. It draws attention to what sounds students hear rather than what they mean (Shiki et al., 2010). During this process, the written text is kept in front of the student to support accurate tracking. It provides real-time imitation.
- **Background of Speech Shadowing**
Speech Shadowing was first introduced by Alexander Arguelles, a polyglot and a scholar of language learning. In the 2000s, he developed the shadowing technique, which he refined as a way to rapidly improve fluency and pronunciation.
- **Advantages of Speech Shadowing**
Shadowing provides learners with repeated, meaningful exposure to authentic input—intonation, stress patterns, rhythm, and natural sentence structures.
By listening and speaking simultaneously, learners internalize new language patterns subconsciously and automatically.
Practicality: It requires minimal preparation, making it easy to integrate into regular classroom routines.
Affordability: It requires little to no financial cost—no specialized equipment is necessary.
- **Disadvantages of Speech Shadowing**
Cognitive overload: Shadowing requires listening, processing, and speaking at the same time, which can overwhelm lower-level learners.
Focus on form over meaning: Learners may repeat mechanically without understanding the content, limiting real communicative development.
- **Steps to Implement Speech Shadowing**
Shadowing tasks in EFL classrooms are implemented by the facilitator according to the learner's level. The teacher selects an appropriate audio for the learner to hear, then imitates immediately with no time gap. As the learner repeats, several cognitive and linguistic processes happen at the same time. It develops the learners' speaking fluency and pronunciation, including stress, rhythm, and intonation. Learners are also exposed to language patterns and structure, which helps them internalize language.
- **What is Discourse Analysis?**
Discourse analysis (DA) is a multidisciplinary approach that draws on linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and other fields to investigate meaning beyond text. It discusses questions like what, why, and how words are said in different contexts, considering social, political, and cultural factors.

- **Discourse analysis and speech shadowing**

Discourse analysis is a vital analytical approach that particularly focuses on speaking fluency and patterns of interactions that are particularly relevant to speech shadowing. It enables researchers to closely examine how learners reproduce, process, and use spoken language. Although discourse analysis and speech shadowing are indirectly connected in terms of language learning and spoken communication research, integrating both of them provides a broader view of oral language development.

- **Overview of previous studies**

Previous studies have largely emphasized the effectiveness of speech shadowing on learners' speaking abilities, with limited exposure to the discourse feature of learner output during speech shadowing tasks.

The technique of speech shadowing has gained increasing attention for EFL learners due to its effectiveness, according to many studies conducted in the field of language learning.

This section will provide previous studies conducted on the field of speech shadowing and its effects on speech development, and the role of discourse analysis in understanding learners' speech.

Hamada(2016a) conducted an experiment on 44 Japanese university students for a month, by giving them shadowing-based lessons (for 20 min/ twice a week), to examine the effectiveness of speech shadowing on pronunciation. The participant's phoneme perception skills have drastically improved.

In addition, Duong & Nguyen (2025) explained that shadowing develops the verbal reflexes as it limits the process of making decisions on grammar and vocabulary, making the process more spontaneous, like that of children when they acquire their first language.

According to Buffy and Nicholson (2007), disfluencies happen as a result of the speaker's inconsistencies and the pressure that points at the speaker during the process of speaking. As language learners tend to suffer from speech disfluencies such as repetition, hesitation, and self-repair, speech shadowing tries to minimize these issues, making the process more cognitive.

- **Gaps in the literature**

Although speech shadowing is recognized as a useful technique for improving fluency, several gaps remain. Previous studies often focus on overall fluency gains without analyzing shadowed speech. Fluency is also frequently treated as a single construct, with limited attention to how its features develop over time. Additionally, few studies have been conducted in the Arab world in general, and in Libya in particular.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the features of shadowed speech and identifying the early-developing elements of fluency in EFL contexts in Libya.

- **Theoretical framework**

This study is based on various theories explaining second language acquisition, speech development, and discourse analysis in order to examine how speech shadowing develops fluency features, i.e., repetition, pauses, and self-repair. It is grounded in three main theories: the input hypotheses of Stephen Krashen, The Output Hypotheses of Merrill Swain, and Zellig Harris's Formal Discourse Analysis.

The Input Hypotheses of Stephen Krashen highlight the importance of language acquisition through exposure to authentic language sources. According to Krashen (1985), language input is crucial for EFL learners, especially when it is slightly above their level ($i+1$). During the shadowing process, students are exposed to an input that is higher than their current level. Similarly, EFL learners are expected to produce an output through immediate repetition during the shadowing process, in which they become more aware of their fluency issues. This highlights the role of language production in the acquisition process, which is an approach examined by Merrill Swain's Output Hypothesis. Thus, Swain (1985) argues that "producing language may force the learner to move from semantic processing to syntactic processing" (p.249). This is the core idea of speech shadowing practice.

To evaluate how The Input and The Output hypotheses are portrayed in Speech Shadowing practice, this study adopts Harris's Formal Discourse Analysis. In his approach, Harris (1952) focuses on the structural relationship within connected text. Harris's approach provides a clear framework of how discourse features of spoken production, such as repetition, hesitations, and grammatical patterns, can provide a clear evaluation of the acquisition process. This analytical approach coordinates with the Speech Shadowing process, in which the perceived language (input) and the spoken utterance (output) are both crucial elements in the learning experience.

- **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative discourse analysis method to investigate and analyze the learners' utterances during the process of shadowing. The method was designed to examine speech shadowing disfluency features such as repetition, pauses, and self-repair.

● **Participants**

The participants of the study were four grade-eight students in a preparatory school in Tripoli/ Libya.

● **Data Collection**

Data was collected using audio, where the researchers recorded students’ speech while implementing the shadowing process. It took the researchers one day to complete the process. The participants were given an audio that was specially designed to apply this technique, which also aligned with the students’ level. The participants were first introduced to this approach to raise awareness of the objectives. Their speech was recorded twice, once at the beginning of the process before practicing, and the second recording was taken after practicing several times.

● **Data analysis**

The recorded audios served the research as a primary source for analyzing discourse features. The transcriptions helped precisely analyze and compare the disfluency features.

The collected data was analyzed by repeatedly reviewing the recorded speech to identify disfluency features that occurred during shadowing and to compare utterances before and after practice.

A comparative discourse analysis was conducted to examine changes between participants’ initial and later speech recordings throughout the speech shadowing process.

● **Findings**

This section presents the findings observed from the discourse analysis of four participants.

The data analysis revealed three key fluency features in learners’ output during the shadowing activity: repetition patterns, self-repair patterns, and pause patterns.

1. Repetition Patterns

The first area analyzed in the discourse data was the presence of repetition patterns. In a language learning context, speakers repeat sounds, words, or phrases, which can be a strategy to provide learners additional time to formulate the next part of their utterance.

Repetition appeared more frequently in the initial recordings, as shown in Table 1 below. The learners repeated words, phrases, and short sentences before moving on to the next part. It was a survival strategy for all participants. Most repeated words were caused by several factors, such as hesitation and difficulties in lexical retrieval. However, in the final recordings, repetition of words and phrases was less frequent as the target text became more familiar to the student’s brain, allowing them to produce smooth and continuous speech.

Table 1 Repetition Patterns

1. Repetition Patterns				
Participants	Pre-shadowing		Post-shadowing	
	No. times	Examples	No. times	Example
Participant 1	12 times	We learn how to sss subtract” “We learn about different cu clu cultures’	7 times	“We learn how to subtract subtract” “We learn about different cul cultures”
Participant 2	9 times	“In math.. in math.. class class.. We learn about numbers”	4 times	“In math class, we learn about numbers”
Participant 3	7 times	“We also do expermts experiments?”	twice	“We also do experiments”
Participant 4	5 times	“In science .. in science class, we learn about the world”	3 times	“In science class, we learn about the world”

2. Self-repair patterns

Self-repair behaviors were also observed between the first and final recordings, as shown in Table 2. The speakers corrected, modified, or reformulated their utterance during speech production. In the first session, students were rarely able to repair themselves independently if they mispronounced a word or stumbled, and either asked for help or waited.

After practicing, all participants showed a movement towards self-repair. They did not stop or wait for help when a slip or a mistake happened. Instead, they insisted on correcting themselves immediately as they were aware of their own mistakes. This shows that speech shadowing helps learners shift from relying on the help of the teacher to monitoring and adjusting their own speech automatically.

Table 2 Self-repair patterns

2. Self - repair Patterns				
Participants	Pre-shadowing		Post-shadowing	
	No. times	Examples	No. times	Example
Participant 1	Self-repair: 5 times	“We can read stories and write or stories” Teachers correction: “our own stories”	Self - repair: 8 times	“We can read stories and write our own stories”
	Assistance repair: 12 times		Assistance repair: 3 times	
Participant 2	Self -repair: 7 times	“Today, we will talk about ed...” Teachers help: “education”	Self-repair: 7 times	“Today we will talk about uh ... ed... education and learning”
	Assistance repair: 8 times		Assistance repair: 3 times	
Participant 3	Self-repair: 6 times	“We can learn about different clu...” Teacher: “cultures”	Self-repair: 3 times	“We can learn about different cultures”
	Assistance repair: 2 times		Assistance repair: none	
Participant 4	Self-repair: 3 times	“Science helps as understand how things work” Teacher: “us”	Self-repair: 4 times	“Science helps us understand how things work”
	Assistance repair: once		Assistance repair: none	

3. Pause Patterns

The final important feature that was observed among the participants was the reduction in speech disfluency, such as pauses and silences. In discourse analysis, pauses are primarily divided into unfilled pauses and filled pauses. Unfilled pauses are when pauses are silent with no sound production, whereas filled pauses are when the speaker produces sounds like (“um”, “uh”, or “ah”). As shown in Table 3, in the initial section, the participants’ speech was heavily fragmented by filled pauses. As learners processed English input during speech production, pauses frequently occurred between words, which disturbed the flow of their speech.

By the final section, pausing patterns changed completely; the participants no longer paused out of confusion or cognitive lag. Instead of pausing randomly, their pauses followed natural grammatical boundaries such as commas and periods. Students produced fewer filled pauses like “uh” and “um” and showed improvement and stronger synchronization with the native speaker.

The data prove that pauses may function as an additional time for learners; it also helps them reduce segmented speech delivery. Students learned to automate the timing of English clauses, turning fragmented silence into smooth and natural sentence delivery.

Table 3 Pause Patterns

3. Pause Patterns				
Participants	Pre-shadowing		Post-shadowing	
	No. times	Examples	No. times	Example
Participant 1	Unfilled: twice	“Uuuh each subject is different and fun”	Unfilled: once	“Each subject is different and fun”
	Filled: 7 times		Filled: 3 times	
Participant 2	Unfilled: 5 times	“Math helps uh uh us solve problems”	Unfilled: twice	“Math helps uh us solve problems”
	Filled: 7 times		Filled: 5 times	
Participant 3	Unfilled: 4 times	“Today we will talk about education and learning”	Unfilled: once	“Today we will talk about education and learning”
	Filled: once		Filled: once	
Participant 4	Unfilled: twice	“In English class uuuh .. we learn to read a write”	Unfilled: none	“In English class we learn to read and write”
	Filled: 5 times		Filled: once	

● **Discussion**

All participants showed changes in speech production immediately after practicing. Recordings before and after shadowing showed differences related to pause behavior, repetition patterns, and self-repair strategies. Participants showed clear awareness and improvement in their progress during the final recording. This method narrows the gap between vocabulary knowledge and the ability to speak fluently, continuously, and independently.

● **Conclusion**

The study investigated the development of fluency in EFL learners by tracking their progress during speech shadowing tasks. By analyzing the spoken discourse of participants before and after practice, learners showed significant improvement in their oral fluency and a clear change from fragmented speech into smoother oral production.

Initial sessions showed frequent disfluencies such as repeated words and phrases, backward repetition, and continuous pauses.

By the final session, the issues were considerably reduced, which allowed speech to flow naturally.

Overall, speech shadowing can be an effective tool for developing learners' fluency if integrated successfully within EFL contexts.

● **Limitations of the study**

The study was conducted with a limited number of grade eight students at one Libyan preparatory school and was carried out over a short period. The findings cannot be generalized to all eighth-grade students in Libya. A larger sample over a longer period may result in a more reliable conclusion about learners' output during a speech shadowing task. Furthermore, the study's methodology may not fully capture all the characteristics of discourse analysis. Finally, the teachers' teaching style and familiarity with speech shadowing could have influenced the effectiveness of the intervention.

● **Recommendations**

- Speech shadowing should be integrated into the EFL curriculum to support listening and speaking development.
- Teacher training programs should be provided to ensure effective classroom implementation.
- Appropriate audio materials and transcripts should be developed and distributed to schools.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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● **Appendix**

The following transcript is taken from the audio recording used in the speech-shadowing activity conducted with the participants:

(Hello, everyone! Today, we will talk about education and learning. I like to learn new things. Learning is very important. We go to school to learn. At school, we have many subjects. We learn math, science, history, and English. Each subject is different and fun. In math class, we learn about numbers. We learn how to add, subtract, multiply, and divide. Math helps us solve problems. We can use math in everyday life, like when we go shopping or cook food. In science class, we learn about the world. We learn about plants, animals, and the stars. Science helps us understand how things work. We also do experiments, which are very exciting. In history class, we learn about the past. We learn about important people and events. History helps us understand our world. We can learn about different cultures and how people lived a long time ago. In English class, we learn to read and write. We learn new words and how to use them. English helps us talk to people from other countries. We can read stories and write our own stories. It is very fun.)