

# Oral English Performance and Language Styles and Strategies of Nursing Freshmen: Inputs for Improved English Instruction

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**Abstract:** The study assessed the correlates of the oral English performance in the seven language functions by Halliday (1975) and the learning styles and strategies of the freshmen nursing students of Samar State University. The study used both descriptive and inferential statistics in analyzing the collected data. It utilized the following instruments: Oral Productive Test, Motivational Orientation Index, Questionnaire Checklist in Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), and the Questionnaire Checklist of Style Orientation for Language Learning. It revealed that the students were fairly proficient in the six language functions except for the representational function where they performed modest. “Organizing and Evaluating” as learning strategy showed to be generally true to the respondents where they were able to monitor and evaluate their mistakes and made use of these pieces of information to help them do better in English. “Using All Mental Processes” and “Organizing and Evaluating” posted a significant relationship with their oral English performance in the imaginative and representational functions. Their learning styles in terms of their relations with others depicted a significant relationship with their oral performance in the interactional and representational functions. The assessment of the students’ oral English performance and learning strategies and styles was the primary input in the improvement of English instruction for nursing program.

**Keywords:** ESL, oral language skills, learning strategies, SILL, Oral Productive Test

## 1. Introduction

Speaking is the most basic means of human communication. For most people, the ability to speak a language is synonymous with knowing and mastering it. Of the four macro skills in communication, speaking in a second language, like English, has often been viewed as the most demanding of the four skills (Bailey & Savage, 1994).

The April 2008 survey of the Social Weather Station (SWS), a private, independent, non-partisan, non-profit scientific institute in the Philippines which conducts social surveys and does survey-based social science research, revealed the self-assessed proficiency in English of the Filipinos that three-fourths of the Filipino adults (76 percent) say they understand spoken English, 75 percent say they read English; three out of five (65 percent) say they write English; close to half (46 percent) say they speak English ([www.promote-](http://www.promote-)

[english.com/index.htm](http://english.com/index.htm)). This survey implied that from the four macro skills in English, speaking appeared to be the hardest among Filipinos. This implication is partly confirmed by the Business Processing Association of the Philippines (BPAP), that out of 100 applicants for call center positions, only less than five percent are hired because of inadequate English skills, specifically on spoken English (Tormes, 2008).

With approximately 2,500 Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) leaving the country everyday for employment abroad, Filipinos, then, are expected to equip themselves with English proficiency to communicate with the world. Filipino nurses, for example, who are taking Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL) and Test of Spoken English (TSE) before getting employed abroad, shall be adept on the different language functions to pass these English language tests. Mata and Soriano (1998) stressed that a person's success in his chosen profession or any field of endeavor is invariably linked with his ability to express his thoughts, not only in written but also in spoken English. Padilla (2003) also emphasized that a person's ability to say what he feels, to express his ideas, to persuade others to believe in him and convince others to react or respond on him are all factors to a successful career.

This poses a big challenge to English teachers in making each student in the class globally competitive when it comes to proficiency in second language learning. Students' motivation and attitudes toward second language learning, their language learning strategies and styles are just among the many factors to be considered. At present, the attainment of optimum performance on the part of students in institutions of higher learning is a central

issue vis-à-vis an impending economic depression. The country ultimately visualizes in producing productive and motivated graduates who are equipped with competitive advantage in academics, especially in communication skills.

Samar State University (SSU), as one of the higher learning institutions of the country, also acknowledges this challenge of harnessing students' English proficiency through offering articulated English courses in the different degree programs. Recognizing this need, this study attempts to gain instruction-related inputs that will somehow improve the teaching-learning environment in second language learning specifically for the future nurses.

*Framework of the study:* This research finds theoretical anchorage on Placement Evaluation espoused by Ornstein (1990). Placement Evaluation, sometimes called Pre-assessment, takes place before instruction. Its primary function is to find out what knowledge and skills the students have mastered to establish a starting point of instruction. It also finds out how much a student known and what are his/her interests and work habits in order to decide on the best type of instruction, methods, and materials to be used on teaching.

In consonance with the Placement Evaluation theory, Belkin and Gray (1977) stressed that individuals learn without teaching in their natural environments, but teachers arrange special contingencies which expedite learning, hastening the appearance of behavior which would otherwise be acquired slowly or making sure of the appearance of behavior which otherwise never occur. The concept of teaching then includes the teachers providing knowledge to the learners through setting up of contingencies. Among the examples of this

theory, as applied to the teaching-learning process are as follows: (a) the use of exams to measure observable behavior of learning, (b) the use of rewards and punishments, and (c) the breaking down of the instruction process into “conditions of learning.”

Based on the foregoing theory, the learner’s oral English proficiency is a function of the reward/punishment directed to the learner. It follows that the learner has already been imposed with certain “contingencies” that made him either proficient in oral English or fair poorly in same aspect early in his pre-elementary education. It follows that the people involved in the learner’s early education participated in providing “contingencies” of learning and in translating them into different levels of either correct or incorrect responses on the part of the learner.

The learner’s oral English proficiency will, in turn, determine how he will fair in his English subject in higher education such as in college. As such, collegiate English serves as the ultimate measure of how “contingencies” of learning worked while they were still in school studying basic education.

This study is a descriptive research using a correlation analysis. The study assessed the significant differences in the oral English performance of the student-respondents by function and the significant relationships between student-respondents level of oral English performance in the seven language functions and their learning strategies and styles. The findings and recommendations of the study ultimately hope to improve the English instruction of the College of Nursing of Samar State University.

## 2. Objectives

The study assessed the correlates of oral English language in the seven language functions of the freshmen nursing students of Samar State University, Catbalogan City, thus, providing some inputs for an improved English instruction. Specifically, the study had the following objectives:

- a) Determine the level of oral English performance of the first year nursing students of Samar State University in the following language functions, namely: instrumental; regulatory; interactional; personal; heuristic; imaginative, and representational.
- b) Determine the learning strategies and styles of the student- respondents.
- c) Show significant relationship between student-respondents’ level of oral English performance in the seven language functions and their language learning styles and strategies.
- d) Provide inputs for improved English instruction program especially for the Nursing English Program, may be derived from the results of the study.

## 3. Methodology

The study employed the descriptive-correlation research design. Descriptive data were collected to determine the level of oral English language performance of the first year Nursing students in the seven language functions of Halliday (1975). Correlation analysis was used to assess the relationship between the level or the respondents’ oral English language performance in the seven language functions and each their learning strategies and learning styles.

The following questionnaires and tests were used in gathering the necessary data: Oral Production Test (Magdua,2005), the Questionnaire Checklist on Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) devised by Oxford (1998) and modified by De la Cruz (2000), and Questionnaire Checklist as Style Orientation for Language Learning (SOL-L) advocated by Keefe (1987) and adapted by De la Cruz (2000).

Frequency and percentage distribution, mean and standard deviation, One-way ANOVA, Posteriori test, Fisher’s t test for independent samples were used in the statistical treatment of data.

The study employed total enumeration method. The respondents of this study were the 93 first year Nursing students of Samar State University enrolled in the School Year 2008 – 2009. The Oral Productive Test was conducted in three separate sessions with three English language instructors from the university and a nearby private college as raters.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

This section capitalizes the findings, analyses and interpretation of results, thereby answering the specific questions.

##### 4.1 Level Oral English Performance of the Student-Respondents in the Seven Language

Table 1 presents the comparison of the student-respondents’ oral English performance by function using the One-Way ANOVA. The first year nursing students were fairly proficient in the instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal, heuristic and imaginative language function. It could be implied that these students had moderately adequate vocabulary, were somewhat precise on expression, and had somewhat smooth and effortless speech in these six language functions. In the representational function, where the respondents used the language to convey facts and information, they were described modest. Using this function, the first year

Table 1. Comparison of the Student-Respondents’ Oral English Performance by Function

| SUMMARY              |        |        |       |                   |          |        |                         |
|----------------------|--------|--------|-------|-------------------|----------|--------|-------------------------|
| Grouping by Function | n      | Sum    | Mean  | Description       | Variance |        |                         |
| Instrumental         | 91     | 286.72 | 3.15  | Fairly Proficient | 0.34     |        |                         |
| Regulatory           | 91     | 255.13 | 2.80  | Fairly Proficient | 1.01     |        |                         |
| Interactional        | 91     | 247.00 | 2.71  | Fairly Proficient | 0.57     |        |                         |
| Personal             | 91     | 243.50 | 2.68  | Fairly Proficient | 0.68     |        |                         |
| Heuristic            | 91     | 250.53 | 2.75  | Fairly Proficient | 0.60     |        |                         |
| Imaginative          | 91     | 239.51 | 2.63  | Fairly Proficient | 0.68     |        |                         |
| Representational     | 91     | 218.49 | 2.40  | Modest            | 1.07     |        |                         |
| ANOVA                |        |        |       |                   |          |        |                         |
| Source of Variation  | SS     | df     | MS    | F                 | p        | F crit | Evaluation              |
| Between Groups       | 27.66  | 6      | 4.610 | 6.516             | 0.000    | 2.113  | S/Reject H <sub>0</sub> |
| Within Groups        | 445.72 | 630    | 0.707 | -                 | -        | -      | -                       |
| Total                | 473.38 | 636    | -     | -                 | -        | -      | -                       |

nursing students were noted to have inadequate vocabulary and were hesitant in speech expression.

#### 4.2 Student-respondents' Learning Strategies and Styles

Table 2 shows the learning strategies employed by the respondents in learning English. Organizing and Evaluating Learning as a learning strategy showed to be generally true to the respondents. This only showed that the first year nursing students found ways to use English in different set-up they could. With this strategy, they were able to monitor and evaluate their mistakes and made use of these pieces information to help them do better in English. Using All Mental Processes as learning strategy appeared to be somewhat true to the

respondents. This learning strategy provided the respondents to talk like native English speakers. Watching English shows, movies and documentaries also provided them an avenue in learning English. This result more likely affirmed the findings of Espada (2000) that these learners preferred watching English shows, movies and documentaries to improve their English performance. Compensating for Missing Knowledge as learning strategy showed the least strategy used respondents. Using this strategy, the respondents used gestures and guesses to understand unfamiliar English words. These results portrayed that the respondents use different learning strategies based on their preferences in learning English.

Table 3 depicts that majority of the

Table 2. Student-Respondents' Language Learning Strategy

| Learning Strategy                     | Mean | Description    | Rank |
|---------------------------------------|------|----------------|------|
| 1. Remembering More Effectively       | 3.16 | Somewhat True  | 4.5  |
| 2. Using All Mental Processes         | 3.42 | Somewhat True  | 2    |
| 3. Compensating for Missing Knowledge | 3.14 | Somewhat True  | 6    |
| 4. Organizing and Evaluating Learning | 3.62 | Generally True | 1    |
| 5. Managing Emotions                  | 3.16 | Somewhat True  | 4.5  |
| 6. Learning With Others               | 3.40 | Somewhat True  | 3    |

Table 3. Students' Language Learning Style in Terms of Sensory Preferences

| Sensory Preference          | f  | Percent | Rank |
|-----------------------------|----|---------|------|
| 1. Visual                   | 56 | 60.22   | 1    |
| 2. Visual-Auditory          | 14 | 15.05   | 2    |
| 3. Visual-Hands-on          | 5  | 5.38    | 4    |
| 4. Visual-Auditory-Hands-on | 2  | 2.15    | 6    |
| 5. Auditory                 | 13 | 13.98   | 3    |
| 6. Hands-on                 | 3  | 3.23    | 5    |
| Total                       | 93 | 100.00  | -    |

respondents were visual learners. As visual learners, they liked to read and obtained a great deal from visual stimulation. For them, lectures, conversations, and oral instructions without any visual backup could be very confusing. They remember 75 percent of what they read and see. This study confirmed the study of Reid (1987) who revealed that Asian learners are highly visual. It also paralleled with the study of Zartiga (2006) and Ramos (2003) whose respondents were generally visual learners. While the visual-auditory learners would enjoy visual inputs with lectures and discussions, the auditory students were comfortable without visual input and they enjoy and profit from unembellished lectures, conversations, and oral instruction. These learners remember 75 percent of what they hear in a normal 40-50 minute lecture. Hands-on learners, on the other hand, enjoy working with tangible objects, collages, and flashcards. It could be implied then that these students learn in various ways in terms of physical and perceptual learning channels.

Table 4 presents how the respondents learn English in terms of relation with others. As projected on the table, the respondents were equally extrovert and introvert. The respondents who were extrovert gained their greatest learning energy from the external world. They

wanted interaction with people and had many friendships, some deep and some not. In contrast, the respondents who were introvert derived their greatest learning energy from the internal world. They wanted independent learning. Other respondents were both introvert and extrovert in their relations with others. This would denote that the first year nursing students project no specific personality type.

Table 5 depicts the respondents' learning style in relating with ideas. More than half of the respondents were concrete learners. This revealed that they preferred facts than theories; they wanted guidance and specific instruction from their teachers. In contrast, a number of them were intuitive. It could be denoted then that only few of the first year nursing students could think in abstract, futuristic, large-scale, and non-sequential ways.

Table 6 projects the respondents' learning style in terms of their orientation to learning tasks. Respondents who are close oriented wanted to reach judgments or completion quickly. They were noted to be serious, hardworking learners who liked to be given specific tasks with deadlines. On the other hand, respondents who are open oriented disliked deadlines and perceived learning as a game to be enjoyed rather than a set of tasks to be completed. Close and

Table 4. Student-Respondents' Language Learning Style in Terms of Their Relations to Others

| Category                 | f  | Percent | Rank |
|--------------------------|----|---------|------|
| 1. Extrovert             | 37 | 39.78   | 1.5  |
| 2. Extrovert - Introvert | 19 | 20.43   | 3    |
| 3. Introvert             | 37 | 39.78   | 1.5  |
| Total                    | 93 | 100.00  | -    |

Table 5. Student-Respondents' Language Learning Style in Terms of Their Relations With Ideas

| Category              | f  | Percent | Rank |
|-----------------------|----|---------|------|
| 1. Concrete           | 56 | 60.22   | 1    |
| 2. Intuitive-Concrete | 23 | 24.73   | 2    |
| 3. Intuitive          | 14 | 15.05   | 3    |
| Total                 | 93 | 100.00  | -    |

Table 6. Student-Respondents' Language Learning Style in Terms of Orientation to learning Tasks

| Category      | f  | Percent | Rank |
|---------------|----|---------|------|
| 1. Close      | 39 | 41.94   | 1    |
| 2. Close-Open | 25 | 26.88   | 3    |
| 3. Open       | 29 | 31.18   | 2    |
| Total         | 93 | 100.00  | -    |

Table 7. Student-Respondents' Language Learning Style in Terms of Their Overall Orientation

| Category            | f  | Percent | Rank |
|---------------------|----|---------|------|
| 1. Analytic         | 36 | 60.22   | 1    |
| 2. Global-Analytics | 23 | 24.73   | 2    |
| 3. Global           | 33 | 15.05   | 3    |
| 4. Not Specified    | 1  | 1.08    | 1    |

open oriented learners provide a good balance in learning process for they were both good in judging and perceiving.

### 5.3 Student-respondents' language learning style in terms of their overall orientation

Table 7 shows the overall orientation of the respondents on their learning styles. A number of respondents were analytic. This group of students tended to concentrate on grammatical details and they were always concerned for precision. Analytics learn more easily when information is presented step-by-step in a cumulative sequential pattern that builds toward a conceptual understanding. Many analytics tend to prefer learning in a quiet, well-illuminated classroom. They rarely eat, drink, smoke, chew, or bite on objects while learning. This result affirmed their learning strategies to be effective, hence they used organization and evaluation in learning English. This also jibed with their result on the other dimensions of learning styles. Hence, they were concrete learners and close-oriented learners--indications of being analytic learners. Global students liked social interaction and communicative events in which they could emphasize the main idea and avoid analysis of grammatical rules. It also revealed that the respondents were visual analytics. They have the tendency to remember words and numbers than illustrations, symbols, and spatial designs. In

reading, visual analytics learn to read best through "word recognition" approach. The instrumental and representational pairing showed to have a high significant difference. It can be implied that in the instrumental function, where the respondents used the language to express their needs, the respondents were somewhat precise in expressing their needs, used moderately adequate vocabulary and were somewhat smooth and effortless in expressing their needs. Whereas, on the representational language function, where the students used the language to convey facts and information, the respondents were found to be vague and hesitant in conveying these facts and information and generally had inadequate vocabulary.

As shown on Table 8, the respondents' oral English performance on the imaginative function posted a significant relationship to one of their learning strategy. It could be interpreted then, that the respondents who performed high on the oral language performance on the imaginative function used "Remembering More Effectively" and "Compensating for Missing Knowledge" less. It could be inferred from the results, that the respondents used the language to tell stories and jokes and create an imaginary environment, used the cognitive means of guessing or gesticulating strategies less than the other strategies.

Table 8. Correlation Between the Respondents' Level of Oral English Performance in the Imaginative Function and Their Learning Strategies

| Learning Strategy                  | $r_{xy}$ | Fisher's $t_c$ | Evaluation |
|------------------------------------|----------|----------------|------------|
| Remembering More Effectively       | -0.25    | 2.15           | S          |
| Using All Mental Processes         | -0.13    | 1.09           | NS         |
| Compensating for Missing Knowledge | -0.26    | 2.22           | S          |
| Organizing and Evaluating Learning | -0.11    | 0.94           | NS         |
| Managing Emotions                  | -0.23    | 1.95           | NS         |
| Learning With Others               | -0.15    | 1.22           | NS         |

$t_c$  . computed Fisher's t-value evaluated at  $\alpha = 0.05$ ,  $df = 67$ ; critical  $t = 1.96$

Table 9. Correlation Between the Respondents' Level of Oral English Performance in the Representational Function and Their Learning Strategies

| Learning Strategy                  | $r_{xy}$ | Fisher's $t_c$ | Evaluation |
|------------------------------------|----------|----------------|------------|
| Remembering More Effectively       | 0.04     | 0.34           | NS         |
| Using All Mental Processes         | 0.25     | 2.07           | S          |
| Compensating for Missing Knowledge | 0.03     | 0.28           | NS         |
| Organizing and Evaluating Learning | 0.23     | 1.93           | NS         |
| Managing Emotions                  | 0.08     | 0.67           | NS         |
| Learning With Others               | 0.02     | 0.16           | NS         |

Legend:  $t_c$  . computed Fisher's t-value evaluated at  $\alpha = 0.05$ ,  $df = 67$ ; critical  $t = 1.96$

Table 10. Correlation Between the Respondents' Level of Oral English Performance in the Interactional Function and Their Learning Styles

| Learning Styles              | $r_{xy}$ | Fisher's $t_c$ | Evaluation |
|------------------------------|----------|----------------|------------|
| Sensory Preferences          | -0.01    | 0.11           | NS         |
| Relations with Others        | 0.25     | 2.13           | S          |
| Relations with Ideas         | 0.18     | 1.49           | NS         |
| Orientation to Learning Task | 0.02     | 0.19           | NS         |
| Overall Orientation          | 0.07     | 0.56           | NS         |

Legend:  $t_c$  . computed Fisher's t-value evaluated at  $\alpha = 0.05$ ,  $df = 67$ ; critical  $t = 1.96$

Table 11. Correlation Between the Respondents' Level of Oral English Performance in the Representational Function and Their Learning Styles

| Learning Styles              | $r_{xy}$ | Fisher's $t_c$ | Evaluation |
|------------------------------|----------|----------------|------------|
| Sensory Preferences          | 0.12     | 1.01           | NS         |
| Relations with Others        | 0.26     | 2.25           | S          |
| Relations with Ideas         | 0.18     | 1.51           | NS         |
| Orientation to Learning Task | 0.07     | 0.53           | NS         |
| Overall Orientation          | 0.05     | 0.39           | NS         |

Legend:  $t_c$  . computed Fisher's t-value evaluated at  $\alpha = 0.05$ ,  $df = 67$ ; critical  $t = 1.96$



Table 9 shows that “Using all Mental Processes” as a learning strategy showed correlation with their oral English performance in representational function. It portrayed that the capability of the first year nursing students to use the language in conveying facts and information had a significant relation with their learning strategies.

As projected in Table 10, the respondents’ “Relations with Others” as a learning style showed a significant relationship with their oral English performance in the interactional function. This showed that in the interactional function where language is used to develop social relationship and ease the process of interaction, extrovert learners could easily handle it. These learners could be intensively developed through language use on conversation, dialogue and even in role plays.

As presented in Table 11, “Relations with Others” as the respondents’ learning style showed a significant relationship between the oral English performance in the representational function where they used English to convey facts and ideas. Extrovert learners could best relate through interaction with people. While introvert learners, could best represent their ideas through reflection and discernment. It could be implied then that the more they utilize their learning styles, especially on relating with others, the better they perform on the representational function of the language.

#### 5.4 Inputs for an improved English Instructional Program

##### *5.4.1 Oral skills: focal point for second language learning:*

The oral English performance of the respondents served a springboard to teachers in updating and aligning English instruction. These instructional revisions and alignment shall give emphasis on course content, target skills, teaching strategies, and focal points.

Along with the aim of intensifying the oral skills in English as a second language (ESL) program, the following major activities could be implemented: discussions, speeches, role plays, conversations, and audio-taped oral dialogue journals. These oral activities are structured around functional uses of the English language.

##### *5.4.2 On language learning skills and strategies:*

The study provided the following inputs on second language teaching considering the learner’s learning styles and strategies: assessing styles and strategies in the second language classroom, attuning second language instruction and strategy instruction to learner’s style preferences, remembering that no single second language instructional methodology fits all students, and preparing for and conducting strategy instruction.

#### **5. Conclusion and Recommendation**

The level of oral English performance of the respondents in the instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal, heuristic, and imaginative language functions was fairly proficient. It would be implied that the respondents had a moderately adequate vocabulary, somewhat precise in their expression and somewhat smooth and effortless in their speech. In the representational language function, the respondents were described modest. It denoted that in this language function, the

respondents spoke vaguely because of inadequacy of vocabulary.

“Organizing and Evaluating Learning” as a learning strategy revealed to be generally true to the respondents. As to the respondents’ learning styles, majority of them were visual learners in terms of sensory preferences; both extrovert and introvert in terms of their relations to others; concrete learners in terms of their relations with ideas; close oriented in terms of their relations with ideas; close oriented in terms of their orientation to learning tasks, and analytic in terms of their overall orientation.

The respondents learning styles in terms of their relation with others depicted a significant relationship with their oral English performance in the interactional and the representational language function. However, the respondents’ oral English performance in the instrumental, regulatory, personal, heuristic and imaginative function showed no significant relationship with their learning styles.

The study provided inputs in the improvement of English instruction with utmost consideration of the students’ language learning styles and strategies.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are considered relevant in view of improving the English instructional program of the College of Nursing:

1. The revision and articulation of the English program should be considered, making speaking as its focal point among macro skills. This program redirection should give emphasis on providing a unified course syllabus with content integration from other subjects
2. Oral skills classes should be structured around functional use of the language to develop students’ fluency and accuracy. The use of relevant oral activities such as dialogs, one-act-plays discussions, prepared and impromptu speeches and oral dialogue journals should be maximized.
3. Language teachers should administer learning style and strategy instruments to the students to determine their language learning preferences.
4. Language teachers should also be updated on the latest pedagogical breakthroughs on language teaching. Their attendance on seminar workshops, training programs, forums, and conferences on language teaching should be given importance.

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