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Polish pre- and upper-intermediate learners' opinions on the significance of linguistic and non-linguistic determinants of speech in developing their EFL speaking skill: A quantitative study

Abstract. Since "spontaneous verbal expression is not solely a product of knowledge and skill in using a language code" (Rivers 1968: 192), many scholars have emphasised the interdisciplinarity of the ability to speak. Having stressed the multifaceted character of speaking in the light of the selected linguistic and non-linguistic determinants of speech, we aim to explore Polish learners' opinions on what components underlying a speech production process influence their ability to speak English. The quantitative study that we conducted among the group of 66 Polish EFL secondary school and university students revealed that out of 12 linguistic and non-linguistic determinants of speech, the knowledge of FL vocabulary and culture were respectively judged to be the most and least relevant. Even though some statistical differences in pre- and upper-intermediate students' choices were keenly anticipated, between-group comparisons of A2 and B2 level subjects' answers did not render any statistically significant similarities or differences.

Keywords: FL speaking, EFL pre-intermediate speakers, EFL upper-intermediate speakers, linguistic determinants of speech, non-linguistic determinants of speech, learners' opinions, Polish EFL classroom.

1. Introduction

With the growing importance of English as a lingua franca and a high utility of speaking in communication, interaction as well as knowledge sharing and building, many researchers have underlay a decisive role of oral proficiency in EFL instruction

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(Bailey 2003; Boonkit 2010; Brown & Yule 1983; Byrne 1976; Chastain 1971; Dakowska 2005; Daszkiewicz et al. 2018; Hinkel 2006; Komorowska 2005; Lazaraton 2001; Nation 2011; Thornbury 2006). Nevertheless, the mastery of the ability to speak in a foreign language (FL) requires a range of issues to be addressed and explored in classroom contexts – including linguistic and non-linguistic determinants of speech, which can be further categorised into student- (e.g.: knowledge of the target language, TL, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation, intercultural competence, personality traits, motivation, age of onset, exposure to the TL), teacher- (e.g.: qualifications and teaching expertise, teaching and learning materials, teachers' attitudes towards the teaching of speaking) and context- (e.g.: differences between L1 and FL culture, the role of the TL in the community, language examinations and their influence on teaching) related factors – therefore, fluent and accurate production of spoken language poses many challenges to FL instructors and learners, who frequently refer to speaking as the least teachable and learnable language ability (Bailey 2003; Byrne 1976: Thornbury 2005; Pawlak 2011).

For the purpose of the present paper, we would like to limit the scope of the discussion to EFL learners by providing an overview of student-related linguistic and non-linguistic determinants of speech (e.g.: Bailey 2003; Boonkit 2010; Brown 2001; Bygate 1987, 2009; Canale & Swain 1980; Chastain 1971; Erdonmez 2014; Goh 2007; Goh & Burns 2012; Levelt 1989; Nation 2011; Nerlicki 2011; Savignon 1976; Thornbury 2005; Wilson 2014). In order to find out what the significance of selected factors as perceived by EFL students in a Polish instructional context is, we carry out a quantitative study with an intention of examining pre- and upper-intermediate learners' views on the importance of the linguistic and non-linguistic aspects underlying their ability to speak English. The goal of the study is, first, to reveal which of the 12 factors is judged to be the most and least significant by the secondary school and university students, and, second, to find out whether any correlation between the age, the level of the respondents' proficiency and their choices can be observed.

The objectives of the paper are threefold: (1) to provide a literature review on speaking skill in the light of student-related determinants of FL speech, (2) to describe the results of the study conducted among secondary school and university students, and (3) to discuss pedagogical implications of our research with reference to the teaching of EFL speaking in a Polish classroom.

2. Speaking and student-related determinants of FL speech

In the literary investigations devoted to the study of FL speech, it has been a common procedure to juxtapose the productive oral skill, speaking, with its productive written sister skill, writing. The most noticeable difference between the two is said to lie in the medium used with the former, auditory, discussed at the level of phonemes

and the latter, visual, requiring the use of graphemes (e.g.: Bailey 2003: 48; Thornbury 2005: 2). Such a distinction conditions not only the temporary versus permanent character of spoken and written texts, but also their organisation which is governed by para-linguistic/non-verbal resources and punctuation respectively. Some differences between speaking and writing that point to the simplicity of the former have been also identified. Spoken and written texts are characterised by distinctive syntactical and lexical structures. While speech is known for a repetitive use of selected linguistic forms, the relationships between sentences are more complex, resulting in an extensive use of subordinate clauses in writing. The majority of vocabulary used by native speakers is organised at the very basic level of cognition with non-specific nouns, such as *stuff*, *sort of* or *you know*, constituting a large part of everyday speech (Brown & Yule 1983: 9).

Even though a seemingly less demanding structure of spoken language with regard to grammar and vocabulary seems to work to the speakers' advantage, the complexity of a speech production process has been one of the critical issues concerning FL speaking. Since the processes of planning and speaking usually take place simultaneously, the burden is placed on speakers' cognitive and linguistic resources because, following Levelt's (1989) monolingual model of speech production, they have to, first, conceptualise, then, formulate and, finally, produce speech. Oral language is produced in real time and an utterance is based on the preceding one what conditions the contingency, spontaneity, instantaneity, reciprocity, transience and temporariness of speech, *ergo*, speakers are expected to concurrently apply different kinds of knowledge, including the knowledge of subject matter, language as well as sounds and prosody (Bygate 1987; Pawlak 2011; Thornbury 2005, 2006; Tonkyn 2000; Wilson 2014).

Apart from speaking- versus writing-oriented considerations of the ability to speak, frequent references to speaking as a combination of different types of knowledge and subskills have been made:

> A description of the characteristics of speaking in a foreign language can be approached from different angles, but typically it is conceptualized in terms of two interrelated facets, that is the various types of knowledge that learners possess and their expertise in adeptly using this knowledge in real communication (Pawlak 2011: 5).

One of the trends concerning the analysis of FL speaking has traditionally centred on the presentation of language-related aspects of speech production. Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) theoreticians and practitioners have been unanimous in describing the role of the FL grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation in developing speaking (Chastain 1971: 338-342; Brown 2001: 272; Bygate 2009: 565; Boonkit 2010: 1306; Brown & Bown 2014: 61-63; Erdonmez 2014: 40-41; Goh 2007: 5; Tarone 2005: 498; Gilakjani 2011: 74; Wilson 2014: 18-19). Nonetheless, some have claimed that declarative

knowledge of a FL is not satisfactory in the context of oral proficiency since both accuracy and fluency underlie speaking (Gower et al. 1995: 99; Levelt 1989: 10; Nation & Newton 2009: 152)[2]. Probably the most convincing explanation for their significance in acquiring the ability to speak is offered by Bygate[3] (1987, 3) who draws an analogy between an act of learning to speak and drive a car. Following that line of reasoning, those who produce speech as well as those who operate a vehicle are obliged to acquire, first, declarative knowledge, for instance, how sentences are built or uttered and a car's wheel is steered and, second, procedural knowledge how to perform these tasks in real life situations.

The concept of communicative competence discussed in the context of Communicative Language Teaching by, among others, Savignon (1976) has revealed the complexity of speaking which is by no means limited to linguistic competence. Apart from fluent and accurate oral performance, successful production of a spoken language requires the use of strategies, which adjusted to a culture-specific context, help speakers appropriately manage conversational turns. By way of illustration, Savignon (1976) argues that communicative competence:

> requires much more than a knowledge of the linguistic code. The native speaker knows not only how to say something but what to say and when to say it. The linguistic features of an exchange are embedded in a cultural context which includes the role of the speaker in a particular context, the roles of the other participants and a host of non-verbal communication cues such as distance, posture, gestures, facial expressions (Savignon 1976: 4)[4].

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2 Accuracy and fluency have attracted a lot of attention in the field of FLT. While the former shares some similarities with the concept of knowledge, involving the mastery of language subsystems, that is grammar, lexis and pronunciation, the latter concerns spontaneous oral language performance in which more attention is paid to the meaning conveyed in an utterance rather than its form (Bailey 2003; Jong & Perfetti 2011; Leon & Cely 2010). The relationship between these two concepts is an intricate one because learners' attempts to improve their speech in terms of grammatical, lexical or phonological correctness usually have a negative impact on their fluency. Similarly, speakers' excessive preoccupation with the communication of their message might put at stake the accuracy of their utterances. Alternatively, a pair of notions, *what learners know* and *what learners do,* discussed by Thornbury (2005: 1), can be applied to maintain a close link with the concepts discussed above.

3 In his more recent publication, Bygate (2009: 415) divides theoretical and practical knowledge into that of phonology, lexis, grammar and discourse. The latter, or procedural knowledge, denotes knowledge "how to" and enables the processing of the former, or declarative knowledge, to take place, which, on the other hand, stands for encyclopaedic knowledge of concepts, lexis and situational discourse (Bot 1992: 3).

4 Canale and Swain (1980: 27) make a distinction between grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competences in their conceptualisation of communicative competence. The first, grammatical competence – similarly to the concepts of accuracy or declarative knowledge – highlights the importance of syntactical, phonological and morphological structures in speaking. The remaining two, sociolinguistic and strategic competences, describe speakers' abilities, first, to use appropriate language forms

Goh (2007) provides a slightly different, because skills-oriented, approach to FL speaking, putting forward the concept of speaking competence and discussing it from the perspective of (1) phonological skills, (2) speech function skills, (3) interaction management skills and (4) extended discourse organisation skills. The first subcategory suggests that successful FL speakers should be prepared to operate at the level of phonemes. Since the fundamental property which underlies FL speaking is the learners' familiarity with the sound structure of the TL and the knowledge how to pronounce words, speakers are expected to know how to articulate sounds of a given language or, more importantly, use proper intonation to convey intended meanings of their communiques[5]. The second component, speech function skills, directs speakers attention to the goals of communication. Since "in learning a second language, one must learn more than pronunciation, the lexical items, the appropriate word order; one must also learn the appropriate way to use those words and sentences in the second language" (Gass & Selinker 2001: 243), FL speakers ought to be equipped with the interlanguage pragmatics, the concept which stands for the pragmatic knowledge. It enables one to produce language whose form is adjusted to the function it ought to serve in a given situation. The third element of speaking competence concerns interaction management skills[6]. Having mastered the abilities underlying the set of skills in question, speakers initiate a conversation, sustain it for a desired period of time, and, eventually, end it in an entirely appropriate manner. In a similar vein, Brown & Bown (2014) analyse speech from the point of view of public speaking. The scholars refer to three responsibilities of speakers, that is construction, framing and deconstruction, each of which refers to a different set of abilities to be possessed by speakers. Considering the guidelines referred to by Brown and Bown (2014), learners are expected to construct new ideas, (1) construction, input them to general discussion, (2) framing, and, if necessary, refute other interlocutors' propositions, (3) deconstruction, by communicating counterarguments and providing solutions. The fourth component of Goh's (2007) speaking

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to match the context of a given situation and, second, to handle communication breakdowns which necessitate the introduction of reformulation- or repetition-based strategies.

5 Tarone (2005) puts into the centre of attention FL learners' phonology, referred to as interlanguage phonology, stating that a FL learner is obliged to learn how to correctly pronounce each individual phoneme of the TL, and, next, to be able to follow the so-called allophonic rules and appropriately change the sounds to adapt them to a given context. For instance, in British English voiced plosives /b, d, g/ are fully voiced when they occur between two voiced sounds whereas they are partially voiced in word-initial and word-final positions. Native speakers of Polish learning English as a FL are accustomed to devoicing the word-final voiced sounds and, thus, they find it difficult to maintain the partial voicing of sounds in word-final positions.

6 In the majority of cases, excluding instances of lecturing or giving public presentations, speaking is not synonymous with a monologue, but instead it is based on turn-taking, in which the reception of a spoken language, listening, intermingles with actual production of speech, speaking.

competence framework includes extended discourse organisation skills. It helps speakers function as competent speakers who are able to make themselves heard and understood. The very asset to the set of skills in question is that once mastered, they enable speakers to produce and structure coherent and cohesive utterances in such a way that their messages are comprehensible to other interlocutors.

Similarly, Erdonmez (2014) foregrounds the significance of (1) mechanics, (2) functions as well as (3) social and cultural rules and norms, three prerequisites to spontaneous conversation. Each of them is later divided into more specific subcategories. Mechanics, for instance, involve the notions of grammar, lexis, pronunciation, expressive devices and connected speech. Functions concern negotiation of meaning whereas rules and norms refer to, first, conversational rules and structure, such as turn-taking or the rate of speech, and, second, conversational strategies, including paraphrasing, approximation, asking or checking[7].

Since an individual's speech is instantly evaluated by other speakers, speaking is not only a linguistic matter. It, in fact, touches upon a psychological and emotional sphere of human life because "in many contexts, people judge a language user 'at face value' upon speaking skill" (Erdonmez 2014: 40). As a result, it is common to make assumptions about other interlocutors on the basis of the quality of their speech[8]. Therefore, the field of psychology has proven to be a primary source of insights into the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and FLT with students' emotions, identity and personality traits claimed to determine the success or failure in learning a FL. It has been repeatedly confirmed that FL speaking is the most emotional language skill. This is exemplified in Bogdanowska-Jakubowska's (2013) study carried out among MA students whose task was to prepare and present a presentation in front of their classmates and MA supervisor. What the results of the research point to is that student-presenters tend to experience the so-called stage fright since an act of performing in public is believed to be a stressful experience.

One of the psychological concepts frequently investigated in the context of the productive oral skill is willingness to communicate (WTC). It originated in the study of L1 speakers' fondness towards speaking and it is connected with both production modes,

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7 A similar classification of the features of speech to that of Erdonmez's (2014) is encapsulated in Brown and Bown's work (2014), who investigate the ability to speak from the perspective of debates. They discuss a variety of speech-influencing factors, including pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, knowledge of tasks as well as sociolinguistic and cultural appropriateness (Brown & Bown 2014: 61-63), maintaining that it is not only linguistic, but also the socio-cultural knowledge that ensure successful speaking.

8 Tarone (2005) stresses the importance of suprasegmental phonetics, or stress, intonation and rhythm, in FL learners' interlanguage since prosodic features are frequently believed to be the main source of judgement, conditioning the perception of speakers' linguistic proficiency.

speaking and writing in a FL (Piechurska-Kuciel 2011a: 239). It is defined as readiness to engage in written or oral communication which is conditioned by, among others, learners' anxiety[9], their cultural background, the topic of a written or oral assignment[10] as well as the ethnolinguistic vitality[11] of the TL (cf. Figure 1).
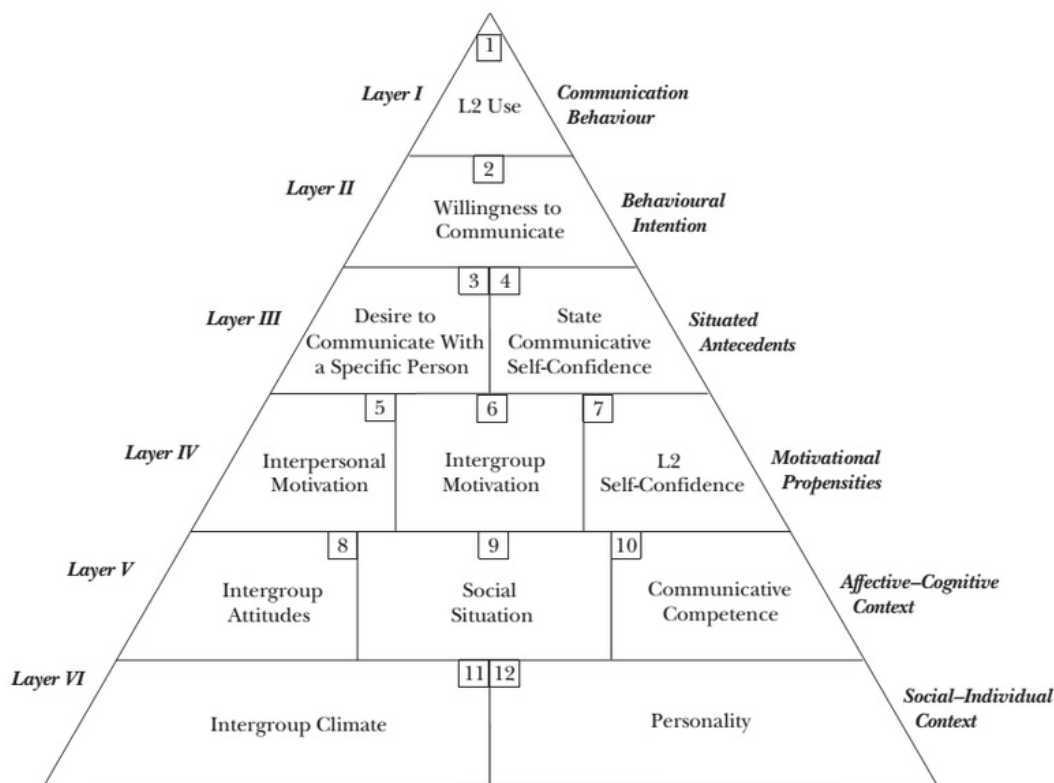

Figure 1. Willingness to communicate (WTC) pyramid model
(taken from MacIntyre et al. 1998: 547)

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9 Pawlak (2011: 153) states that anxiety is a complex concept whose influence has a serious impact on learning events. Acknowledging the results of previous studies as well as the findings of his own research, Nerlicki (2011: 134), who investigates the topic of speaking-related anxiety among Polish students of Germanic studies, concludes that this problem occurs when speakers face communicative acts. Goh and Burns (2012: 27) also refer the problem of language anxiety, comparing an act of speaking to a considerably unpleasant and unwanted experience.

10 If it is does not match the interests of students, there is every likelihood that they will remain silent, at the same time withdrawing from the participation in the discussion (Rivers 1968).

11 Ethnolinguistic vitality should be taken into account while considering the level of EFL WTC since it determines learners' attitude towards the FL community. Languages characterised by high ethnolinguistic vitality gain greater prestige and attract more speakers in contrast to less popular languages (MacIntyre 2004). Nowadays, English, as a global lingua franca, outranks other less prominent languages, such as, for instance, Polish. Therefore, the higher status of the English language suggests that Polish EFL students are more likely to participate in communication in English with a view to becoming a part of a more prestigious community.

As seen in the figure above, WTC is a complex psychological construct which is highly dependent upon the speakers, context and language. This can be seen in Piechurska-Kuciel's (2011b) study examining the effect of self-perceived FL skills on the strength of WTC in Polish EFL secondary grammar school students. She found out that the subjects' degree of WTC positively correlates with their own perceptions of the level of their FL skills. The results of the questionnaires conducted among 278 students of English demonstrate that the subjects communicate with increased self-confidence, lowered language anxiety and improved WTC provided that they report higher levels of their self-perceived FL skills.

Far from being exhaustive, Table 1 offers an overview of selected student-related linguistic and non-linguistic factors in FL speaking.

Table 1. Student-related linguistic and non-linguistic factors in FL speaking

Author(s)	Student-related determinants of speech
Chastain (1971)	knowledge of FL pronunciation knowledge of FL vocabulary knowledge of FL grammar
Savignon (1976)	communicative competence
Canale & Swain (1980)	grammatical competence sociolinguistic competence strategic competence
Bygate (1987)	theoretical knowledge practical knowledge
Levelt (1989)	declarative knowledge procedural knowledge
Gower et al. (1995)	accuracy fluency
Brown (2001)	sixteen microskills, i.e.: segmental and suprasegmental phonetics, fluency, pragmatics, knowledge of FL grammar, knowledge of FL vocabulary, cohesion, turn-taking, non-verbal clues, etc.
Linnebrick & Pintrich (2003)	self-efficacy
Tarone (2005)	segmental phonetics suprasegmental phonetics
Thornbury (2005)	what learners know what learners do

Author(s)	Student-related determinants of speech
Goh (2007)	phonological skills speech function skills interaction management skills discourse organizational skills
Bygate (2009)	knowledge of phonological features knowledge of lexico-grammatical features knowledge of discourse features
Boonkit (2010)	knowledge of FL pronunciation knowledge of FL vocabulary knowledge of FL collocations
Gilakjani (2011)	knowledge of FL pronunciation
Nation (2011)	knowledge of FL pronunciation knowledge of FL vocabulary knowledge of FL grammar sociolinguistic competence
Nerlicki (2011)	language anxiety self-construct
Piechurska-Kuciel (2011a, 2011b)	willingness to communicate (WTC) language anxiety self-efficacy
Goh & Burns (2012)	language anxiety
Brown & Bown (2014)	knowledge of FL pronunciation fluency knowledge of FL vocabulary grammatical accuracy knowledge of tasks sociolinguistic and cultural appropriateness
Erdonmez (2014)	mechanics functions social and cultural rules
Mills (2014)	motivation
Rubio (2014)	motivation self-concept self-esteem
Wilson (2014)	linguistic correctness appropriate behaviour
Daszkiewicz et al. (2018)	personality traits

Having presented the selected student-related determinants of speech, it is justified to claim that speaking is the most problematic skill to be sharpened. The specificity of the language skill under discussion, different kinds of knowledge and subskills as well as a highly emotional character of FL speech production are said to be the main culprits responsible for posing grave problems with speaking. For the purpose of the current quantitative study, we would like to focus on 12 student-related linguistic, cultural, cognitive, psychological and socio-psychological determinants of EFL speech – knowledge of FL grammar, vocabulary and culture, TL pronunciation, topic of the discussion, fear of other people's assessment and mistakes, WTC, self-confidence as well as extrinsic and intrinsic motivation – and their importance in EFL speaking as perceived by the secondary school and university students.

3. The quantitative study

Below there is the description of the study with regard to its goals, participants, procedure, instruments and results.

3.1. Goals

In contrast to a vast quantity of empirical research done with the aim of investigating the influence of linguistic or non-linguistic constructs on the production of FL speech, there is a scarcity of studies conducted with an intention of assessing their significance in speaking as perceived by students. Due to the shortage of learner-centred investigations concerning their ability to speak in Polish EFL educational contexts, this small-scale quantitative study aimed to demonstrate the relevance of 12 linguistic and non-linguistic determinants from the perspective of pre- and upper-intermediate students of English. Two research questions guided this study:

RQ1. Which of 12 factors was judged to be the most and least relevant in EFL speaking as reported by the secondary school and university students?

RQ1. Was any correlation between the age, the level of the respondents' proficiency and their choices found?

3.2. Participants

The study was conducted with the learners from Kazimierz Wielki Secondary School and The Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (MCSU) in Lublin, Poland during the 2019/2020 academic year. In total, 91 Polish EFL first-grade secondary school pupils and first-year students from the English Department at MCSU participated in the pre-study.

3.3. Instruments

Two quantitative methods, New Enterprise Placement Test[12] and a questionnaire, were adopted. The former consisted of 100 closed-item questions which aimed to evaluate the participants' knowledge of grammar and vocabulary as well as their comprehension of written texts. Its results were later used to divide the test-takers into two groups. The aim of the questionnaire, on the other hand, was to examine the subjects' views on the significance of selected linguistic and non-linguistic factors in their EFL oral proficiency. In the first section, the respondents were to provide information concerning their schooling, age and gender. In the second part, using a five-point Likert scale, they assessed their frequency of FL speech production inside and outside instructed settings and judged the relevance of student-related linguistic (knowledge of FL grammar and vocabulary, TL pronunciation), cultural (knowledge of the TL culture), cognitive (topic of the discussion), socio-psychological (fear of other people's assessment, WTC) and psychological (fear of lexico-grammatical mistakes, fear of pronunciation mistakes, self-confidence, motivation) determinants of EFL speech. The questionnaire was written in the subjects' L1, that is Polish.

3.4. Procedure

In the pre-study, the students were given 45 minutes to take a placement test. The maximum number of points that they could get was 100 points, including 55 points for grammar, 25 points for lexis and 25 points for reading comprehension. The majority of secondary school pupils scored between 35 to 60 points, which means that they were assigned to the A2 level group while the university students achieved more than 90 points on average and, therefore, they were allocated to the B2 level group. Out of 91 EFL learners who participated in the first stage of the study, 66 students, that is 33 pre-intermediate secondary school learners and 33 upper-intermediate university students, obtained the intended scores. The two groups differed with respect to a number of variables (cf. Table 2) and comparing them was particularly interesting since between-group differences were expected to be found.

Table 2. Comparison of the two groups of subjects (n=66)

Major differences	Teenage learners	Students of English
Age	14-16 years old	19-21 years old
Level of TL proficiency	pre-intermediate (A2 level)	upper-intermediate (B2 level)

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12 Taken from https://egis.com.pl/pl/newenterprise/placementtest

Major differences	Teenage learners	Students of English
Amount of exposure to spoken English	six hours of English lessons a week	approx. 25 hours of classes conducted in English a week
Type of exposure	one English teacher provides one speaking and pronunciation model	many teachers with various speaking and pronunciation models
Amount of speaking practice	all four language skills are practised during one class	specific course devoted to speaking
Amount of phonetic instruction and training	limited to occasional practice	specific course in theoretical and practical phonetic training
Goal of learning	basic communication with foreigners/passing the Matura exam	becoming English-language professionals: teachers and interpreters

In the study proper, the participants were requested to fill in the questionnaire. It took them approximately 10 minutes to provide answers to the questions asked in the survey.

3.5. Results

The respondents' answers were counted and then analysed by means of the programme STATISTICA. Two types of operations were performed, descriptive statistics, the mean, median and SD, and inferential statistics, the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test.

Sixty-six Polish EFL learners, including 41 girls and 25 boys, filled in the questionnaire. The average age of secondary school and university students was 15,2 and 19,5 respectively. Their answers revealed a statistical difference between A2 and B2 level students' frequency of FL speech production inside ($p<0,01$) and outside ($p<002$) instructed settings, with the students from the English Department speaking English more often than secondary school learners.

The results of the survey indicated that the knowledge of vocabulary, self-confidence and WTC were assessed to be the most significant by the subjects (n=66). Slight differences between the means and medians concerning the knowledge of grammar (**±0,57),** self-confidence (±0,81) and WTC (±0,80) could be noticed. On the other hand, as seen in the table below, the knowledge of the TL culture and community was judged to be the least important by the Polish speakers.

Table 3. Means, medians and SD presenting the significance of 12 linguistic and non-linguistic factors as reported by the respondents (n=66)

	Mean	Median	Min.	Max.	SD
F_1 – Knowledge of FL grammar	4.03	4	1	5	1.01
F_2 – Knowledge of FL vocabulary	4.64	5	3	5	0.57
F_3 – Knowledge of FL culture	2.26	2	1	5	1.04
F_4 – FL pronunciation	4.12	4	1	5	0.97
F_5 – Topic of the discussion	3,76	4	1	5	1,05
F_6 – Fear of other people's assessment	4.12	4	1	5	0.97
F_7 – Fear of lexico-grammatical mistakes	3.36	3	1	5	1.24
F_8 – Fear of pronunciation mistakes	3.47	3,5	1	5	1.18
F_9 – Self-confidence	4.27	4	2	5	0.81
F_10 – WTC	4.39	5	2	5	0.80
F_11 – Extrinsic motivation	4.21	4	1	5	0.87
F_12 – Intrinsic motivation	3.48	4	1	5	1.18

Figure 1 presents the respondents' choices made with reference to their evaluation of 12 EFL determinants of speech. The students unequivocally stressed the importance of lexical knowledge (F_2) and such psychological constructs as self-confidence (F_9) and WTC (F_10). The chart also clearly shows the weak position of culture (F_3) in comparison to other factors.
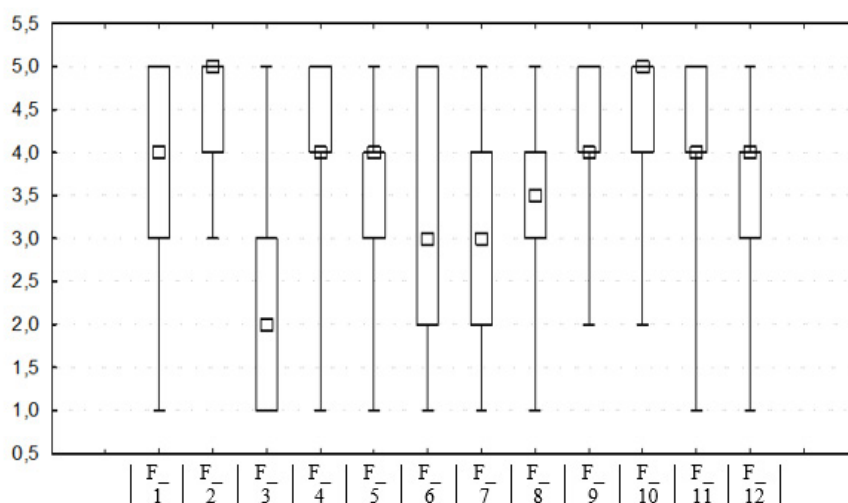

Figure 2. Box plots presenting the respondents' assessment
of the significance of 12 factors

Having provided an answer to *RQ1*, it is worth drawing a comparison between the two groups of students, *RQ2*, with regard to their perception of the 12 factors. Even though some statistical differences in secondary school and university students' answers were anticipated, the mean score comparisons did not render any statistically relevant contrasts between the respondents' choices since U Mann-Whitney test was not relevant (cf. Table 3).

It is useful, however, to compare the answers provided by Group A2 (n=33) and Group B2 (n=33). As shown in Table 4, the mean levels and other statistics were calculated for the two groups. First of all, the knowledge of TL vocabulary (F_2) and culture (F_3), fear of assessment (F_6) and extrinsic motivation (F_11) got similar students' answers with vocabulary and culture being regarded respectively as the most and least relevant factors. The students mostly disagreed on the negative influence of pronunciation mistakes (F_8) and self-confidence (F_9). To be more specific, from the perspective of B2 level students, the fear of pronunciation mistakes was more significant in their EFL speaking than it was for secondary school students. At the same time, secondary school students believed that self-confidence was more relevant in their EFL speaking than it was for university students.

Table 4. Means, medians, SD and between-group comparisons of the significance of 12 linguistic and non-linguistic factors assessed by pre-intermediate, A2, (n=33) and upper-intermediate, B2, (n=33) learners

	Mean		Median		Min.		Max.		SD		p
	A2	B2	A2	B2	A2	B2	A2	B2	A2	B2	
F_1	3.85	4.21	4	4	1	2	5	5	1.12	0.86	0,213991
F_2	4.61	4.67	5	5	3	3	4	5	0.61	0.54	0,746754
F_3	2.15	2.36	2	2	1	1	5	5	0.91	1.17	0,528660
F_4	3.97	4.27	4	4	1	2	5	5	1.07	0.84	0,275191
F_5	3.85	3.67	4	4	2	1	5	5	0.94	1.16	0,615568
F_6	3.30	3.30	3	4	1	1	5	5	1.49	1.38	0,963312
F_7	3.42	3.30	3	3	1	1	5	5	1.25	1.24	0,640024
F_8	3.52	3.42	3	4	1	1	5	5	1.23	1.15	0,741212
F_9	4.42	4.12	5	4	3	2	5	5	0.75	0.86	0,126807
F_10	4.42	4.36	5	5	2	2	5	5	0.75	0.86	0,908408
F_11	4.21	4.21	4	4	2	1	5	5	0.82	0.93	0,862564
F_12	3.61	3.36	4	4	1	1	5	5	1.12	1.25	0,504112

F_1 – Knowledge of FL grammar; F_2 – Knowledge of FL vocabulary; F_3 – Knowledge of FL culture; F_4 – FL pronunciation; F_5 – Topic of the discussion; F_6 – Fear of other people's assessment; F_7 – Fear of lexico-grammatical mistakes; F_8 – Fear of pronunciation mistakes; F_9 – Self-confidence; F_10 – WTC; F_11 – Extrinsic motivation; F_12 – Intrinsic motivation.

3.5. Discussion

The trend that emerged in the subjects' answers provided by them in the questionnaires is clearly indicative of their uninformed and, hence, incomplete outlook on a successful speech production process in the TL. Out of the three components underlying the FL knowledge, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, it was lexical knowledge that was assessed to be the most relevant in developing EFL speaking. It is surprising that in spite of the varying levels of the respondents' language proficiency (A2 versus B2) and the distinct type of instruction (secondary school versus university), no statistically significant difference in the means between the students' choices concerning the relevance of pronunciation in EFL speech production, 3.97 versus 4.27, was shown. Since sounds are "produced in a continuous stream, with many different vocal organs involved concurrently, such that the articulation of one sound will affect the articulation of its neighbours" (Thornbury 2005: 5), the key components which are said to condition learners' ability to produce and comprehend oral language concern the mastery of individual sounds, stress, rhythm and intonation (Lazaraton 2001: 103). Correspondingly, FL learners' awareness of the significance of good pronunciation, the issue of intelligibility as well as the perception of foreign accent in non-native speech by other interlocutors should be gradually increased in EFL classrooms on account of the fact that poor pronunciation rather than lexical or grammatical knowledge causes the most serious breakdowns in communication (Gilakjani 2011: 2; Nation 2011: 448; Nation & Newton 2009: 75).

Despite the fact that FL speakers "should not only form grammatically correct sentences, but also use these sentences in appropriate social contexts taking into account the cultural background and social status of the interlocutors" (Erdonmez 2014: 40), the subjects' displayed almost complete insensitivity towards cultural aspects in their FL learning. The intricate relationship between culture, language and communication has been studied by Hofstede (1991: 14), who makes a distinction between (1) small versus large power distance, (2) individualism versus collectivism, (3) masculinity versus femininity, (4) uncertainty avoidance and (5) long versus short-term orientation, each of which is believed to affect the ways in which people communicate. Even though such insights provide accurate reflection of the close connection between language and culture, both secondary school and university students disregarded the role of the latter in developing their EFL speaking. Therefore, the clash between the respondents' indifference towards cultural aspects in FLT and their factual practical importance in communication ought to be decisive in changing students' attitude towards the treatment of cultural aspects in EFL classrooms.

The participants' tendency to assess the socio-psychological and psychological determinants of speech as considerably significant was in line with the results of research which view speaking as a highly emotional act. Khan and Khattak (2011) and Nerlicki (2011) who investigated language anxiety explain that the fear of speaking occurs

when learners attempt to speak in a FL, concluding that there is a positive relationship between anxiety and failure in learning. In spite of the differences in the level of the EFL proficiency (A2 versus B2 level), the amount of exposure to English (six hours versus 25 hours or more) and the university students' increased production of oral output, the participants' choices with reference to the evaluation of psychological constructs were generally consistent. Both A2 and B2 level students regarded the psychological construct connected with the presence of other interactants as important in their EFL speaking, proving that regardless of non-native speakers' FL linguistic competence, speaking causes natural language anxiety. Since the lower the speakers' self-esteem, the more problems they have with communicating in a FL (Rubio 2014: 48), it is necessary to exploit every classroom situation to provoke positive feelings and improve the students' self-efficacy beliefs.

4. Conclusion

Having enumerated some facets of FL speech production, it becomes evident that the mastery of the skill of speaking is a multidimensional, hence an intricate task for the majority of EFL learners. Speaking is harder and more stressful than the remaining language skills due to a number of reasons. Owing to time constraints and, for instance, simultaneous processes of conceptualisation, formulation and articulation, FL speakers may suffer considerable cognitive, linguistic and emotional hardship since under time pressure they are expected to produce coherent and cohesive speech of different lengths or rates of delivery with the help of grammatical, lexical, sound and discourse structures. It can be, thus, proposed that speaking can be discussed from a variety of perspectives, including linguistic, psychological, interactionist and socio-cultural views on the process of speech production, which raise a series of issues touched on in the present paper.

Taking into account the instruments and procedure of the preliminary small scale study, there are certain limitations that need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the measure used to collect the data in the pre-study, the placement test, did not assess the subjects' oral proficiency. The sole criterion applied to divide the students into two groups was the results of the test which took into account the students' linguistic competence limited to two language subsystems, grammar and vocabulary, and one language skill, reading. Secondly, there is the problem of self-reported data obtained from the questionnaires whose validity can be questioned owing to the fact that no other method – for instance, open-ended questions, in which students could write their own answers, or interviews – was adopted and, consequently, no triangulation took place.

The results of our study cannot be generalised. Nevertheless, they provide a good account of how EFL speech production was approached by the Polish pre- and upper-intermediate learners. Their perception of FL speaking was highly limited since

the majority of the subjects seemed largely ignorant about the key determinants of speech, including, most importantly, English sounds and prosody as well as EFL culture. Vocabulary- and grammar-oriented instruction is necessary, nevertheless it should not occupy the whole classroom time since there is an abundance of other factors about whose influence FL speakers should be aware of. Thus, we are convinced that the learner-oriented investigations of EFL speaking should be further pursued in Polish educational environments with an intention of raising learners' awareness about the importance of a range of factors in developing their EFL speaking skill. With the support of learner-centred insights into FL speaking combined with theoretical considerations and the results of empirical research, a more effective, conscious and successful FL education for both teachers and learners can take place.

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