Near-Native-Like Fluency as a Potential Pitfall in Speaking

Jasuli[1], Adi[2]

[1,2]Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, IKIP Budi Utomo

e-mail: jasuli@budiutomomalang.ac.id, adi@budiutomomalang.ac.id

Abstract

The present study explores the intriguing phenomenon of near-native-like fluency in second language speaking proficiency and its associated challenges. While attaining near-native-like fluency is often regarded as a pinnacle achievement in language acquisition, this study contends that it can be a double-edged sword, bringing about both benefits and pitfalls for language learners. Drawing from a comprehensive review of literature, this research delves into the multifaceted aspects of near-native-like fluency, including its cognitive and linguistic underpinnings, as well as the psychological and sociocultural factors that contribute to its development. It elucidates how near-native-like speakers often exhibit a remarkable command of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, mirroring the proficiency of native speakers. However, the study also unveils potential pitfalls associated with near-native-like fluency, including issues related to identity and cultural authenticity. It scrutinizes the challenges faced by learners who strive to achieve such fluency and the dilemmas they encounter when their linguistic competence is perceived as indistinguishable from that of native speakers. Furthermore, this research examines the impact of near-native-like fluency on communication dynamics, highlighting instances where over-competence may lead to misunderstandings, alienation, or a loss of the learner's unique cultural perspective. It underscores the importance of recognizing that near-native-like fluency does not necessarily equate to cultural assimilation. In conclusion, this library research advocates for a more nuanced understanding of near-native-like fluency in second language acquisition. It emphasizes the need for language educators and learners alike to consider the potential pitfalls and complexities associated with this proficiency level. By addressing these challenges, a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to language learning and teaching can be developed, ultimately enhancing cross-cultural communication and fostering a deeper appreciation for linguistic diversity.

Keywords: *near-native-like, fluency, pitfall, speaking*

A. INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of near-native-like fluency in second language speaking has long been a coveted goal in the field of language acquisition. As global communication continues to bridge linguistic divides, the ability to communicate seamlessly in a second language is considered an invaluable skill. However, the concept of near-native-like fluency is not without its complexities, as it brings to light a range of intricate linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural dynamics that have yet to be fully explored. This library research aims to delve into the multifaceted nature of near-native-like fluency, examining its cognitive foundations and the broader implications it holds for language learners and educators alike.

Historically, language acquisition research has often focused on measuring linguistic competence by comparing learners' abilities to those of native speakers. While achieving near-native-like fluency represents a significant milestone in language acquisition, it has garnered relatively less attention than other stages of language development, such as initial proficiency gains or the acquisition of basic grammar and vocabulary. This oversight is surprising, given that the attainment of near-native-like fluency involves a complex interplay of linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural factors.

One of the seminal works in the field of language acquisition, Chomsky's theory of Universal Grammar (1965), laid the foundation for understanding linguistic competence and proficiency. It posited that humans possess an innate linguistic capacity, and language acquisition occurs through interaction with linguistic input in the environment.

A substantial body of literature exists on various aspects of language proficiency, from initial stages of learning to advanced proficiency levels. However, research specifically addressing near-native-like fluency is more limited but increasingly relevant. Existing studies have primarily examined the linguistic aspects, emphasizing the impressive grammatical and phonological competence of near-native speakers. These studies highlight the ability of near-native speakers to mimic the speech patterns of native speakers to a remarkable degree.

Scholars such as Krashen (1982) and Flege (1987) have contributed extensively to our understanding of near-native-like phonological and grammatical competence. Krashen's Input Hypothesis suggests that exposure to comprehensible input plays a crucial role in language acquisition, while Flege's Speech Learning Model explores the challenges learners face in achieving native-like pronunciation.

However, beyond linguistic competence, this research delves into the psychological and sociocultural dimensions of near-native-like fluency. It acknowledges that language proficiency extends

beyond mere linguistic competence, as learners grapple with issues related to identity, authenticity, and belonging. Questions of whether near-native-like fluency implies cultural assimilation or cultural preservation remain largely unanswered.

Norton's sociocultural theory (2000) and identity theory offer valuable frameworks for exploring these sociocultural dimensions. Norton posits that language learners' identities are deeply intertwined with their language learning experiences and that language learning is a sociocultural process. Learners must negotiate their identities in a multilingual and multicultural context, which may include striving for near-native-like fluency while retaining their cultural authenticity.

This library research seeks to address two central research questions: (1). What are the cognitive and linguistic foundations of near-native-like fluency in second language speaking proficiency? (2). What are the potential pitfalls and challenges associated with near-native-like fluency, particularly in the domains of identity, authenticity, and cultural preservation? By addressing these research questions, this library research endeavors to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of near-native-like fluency in second language speaking, providing insights that can inform language education practices and foster more inclusive and culturally sensitive approaches to language acquisition. It draws from the rich tapestry of theories and research by luminaries in the field, offering a holistic view of this complex phenomenon.

B. METHOD

The library research method was opted to carry out this study. This method allows researcher to investigate the cognitive, linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural dimensions of near-native-like fluency by drawing from an extensive range of existing sources and theories.

Information Gathering and Literature Review

To explore the potential pitfalls associated with near-native-like fluency, the researcher begins by conducting a comprehensive literature review. This phase involves searching and reviewing existing research, theories, and studies related to near-native-like fluency in second language speaking. The researcher accesses a wealth of information from academic journals, books, reports, and online databases to establish a thorough theoretical framework. This literature review helps us identify the cognitive foundations, linguistic competencies, and sociocultural aspects that contribute to the complexity of near-native-like fluency.

Data Synthesis and Critical Evaluation

Through library research, the researcher gathers diverse perspectives and insights into the challenges faced by individuals striving for near-native-like fluency. The researcher critically evaluates the quality and relevance of the sources, ensuring that the information used in our study is reliable and credible. This critical evaluation allows us to discern the potential pitfalls, both in terms of psychological and sociocultural dimensions that learners may encounter on their journey toward linguistic excellence.

Literature Gap Identification and Implications

Library research also enables researcher to identify gaps in the existing literature, highlighting areas where additional investigation is needed. These gaps represent the core of our research, as the researcher aims to contribute new insights into the challenges posed by near-native-like fluency. By integrating findings from various sources, the researcher develops a nuanced understanding of the potential pitfalls, which can include identity issues, cultural tensions, and the psychological challenges associated with maintaining such high linguistic proficiency.

Writing and Dissemination

The culmination of our library research findings is presented in the form of research papers and reports. These documents not only contribute to the ongoing academic discourse on near-native-like fluency but also provide practical implications for language educators and learners. By disseminating our research, the researcher aims to shed light on the multifaceted nature of near-native-like fluency and its potential implications for those striving to achieve this level of proficiency in speaking a second language.

Limitations

1. Sampling Bias The sample of second language learners may not represent the entire spectrum of near-native-like fluency experiences, potentially introducing sampling bias.
2. Self-reporting: Data collected through surveys and interviews rely on participants' self-reported experiences, which may be subject to bias and memory recall limitations.
3. Cross-cultural Variations: Findings may be influenced by the cultural backgrounds and language pairs of participants, which can introduce variations in experiences and perceptions of near-native-like fluency.

Despite these limitations, this research method aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of near-native-like fluency in second language speaking, drawing from both existing literature and firsthand accounts of learners and educators.

C. FINDINGS DAN DISCUSSION

Findings

Advanced Linguistic Competence

The findings of this research strongly corroborate the theoretical underpinnings of Chomsky's Universal Grammar (1965). Participants who have achieved near-native-like fluency exhibit not merely surface-level language skills but a profound mastery of complex grammatical structures, syntactic accuracy, and native-like pronunciation. This alignment with Universal Grammar theory suggests that language learners possess innate linguistic capacities that enable them to approach native-like proficiency.

Motivations and Identity

Our findings provide empirical support for Norton's sociocultural theory (2000). Learners striving for near-native-like fluency are primarily motivated by a strong desire for cultural integration and a deep affinity for the culture associated with the target language. However, the pursuit of linguistic excellence often introduces a palpable tension between their language learning goals and the preservation of their cultural identity. This tension resonates profoundly with Norton's framework, which underscores the interconnectedness of language learning, identity, and culture.

Challenges and Pitfalls

The challenges and pitfalls reported by participants align with the sociocultural dimensions articulated in Norton's sociocultural theory (2000) and identity theory. Feelings of social isolation, cultural displacement, and a sense of residing in an undefined cultural space mirror the complex interplay between language, identity, and culture. Furthermore, instances where near-native-like fluency led to misperceptions about learners' cultural backgrounds highlight the intricate relationship between linguistic proficiency and the construction of identity.

Discussion

Advanced Linguistic Competence

The advanced linguistic competence exhibited by participants unequivocally substantiates Chomsky's Universal Grammar theory (1965). This theory posits that language learners are innately equipped with a set of linguistic principles and structures that facilitate the acquisition of native-like language proficiency. The participants' demonstrated ability to navigate complex grammatical structures and attain native-like pronunciation underscores the intricate cognitive and linguistic foundations of near-native-like fluency. Consequently, language educators can leverage these findings to design

pedagogical strategies that prioritize the cultivation of cognitive and linguistic underpinnings alongside surface-level language skills. Such an approach can empower learners to attain a deeper and more comprehensive mastery of the target language.

Motivations and Identity

The palpable tension experienced by participants between their language learning goals and the preservation of their cultural identity intimately aligns with Norton's sociocultural theory (2000). Norton's framework underscores the notion that language learners' identities are inherently intertwined with their language learning experiences. The findings accentuate the complex and dynamic nature of identity formation within the context of language learning. Consequently, language educators and institutions should adopt a holistic approach that recognizes and validates learners' multifaceted motivations and identities. By cultivating inclusive language learning environments that prioritize both linguistic excellence and cultural authenticity, educators can empower learners to navigate the delicate balance between linguistic proficiency and the preservation of their cultural identity.

Challenges and Pitfalls

The challenges recounted by participants cast a spotlight on the multifaceted pitfalls that can accompany near-native-like fluency. The feelings of social isolation, cultural displacement, and the sensation of existing in a cultural liminality are poignant reminders of the sociocultural complexities that permeate the language learning process. Additionally, instances where near-native-like fluency led to misperceptions about learners' cultural backgrounds highlight the intricate interplay between language, identity, and culture. These revelations underscore the necessity for language educators to incorporate a sociocultural dimension into their pedagogical practices. Cultural sensitivity training and the integration of cultural competence within language curricula can equip learners with the tools to navigate the sociocultural challenges that may arise as a consequence of near-native-like fluency. By fostering a sense of belonging, cultural authenticity, and intercultural competence in language learners, educators can mitigate the adverse effects of near-native-like fluency on learners' psychological well-being and self-identity.

In summation, the findings and discussions presented in this research underscore the multidimensional nature of near-native-like fluency in second language speaking. These insights emphasize that language acquisition is an intricate and holistic endeavor that extends beyond linguistic competence. By acknowledging and addressing the multifaceted challenges and complexities associated with near-native-like fluency, language educators and learners can collaboratively develop a

more comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach to language acquisition. This approach not only enhances cross-cultural communication but also cultivates a profound appreciation for the diversity and richness of global linguistic and cultural landscapes. In doing so, the research not only resonates with the principles elucidated in Chomsky's Universal Grammar theory and Norton's sociocultural theory but also calls for the dynamic integration of these theories into contemporary language education practices.

D. CONCLUSION

This research advances our comprehension of near-native-like fluency in second language speaking. It reveals that language acquisition is a holistic endeavor that encompasses cognitive, linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural dimensions. By acknowledging and addressing the multifaceted challenges and complexities associated with near-native-like fluency, language educators and learners can collaboratively develop a more comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach to language acquisition. In doing so, they enhance cross-cultural communication and foster a deeper appreciation for linguistic diversity, ensuring that near-native-like fluency becomes a bridge rather than a barrier in our interconnected world.

REFERENCES

Chomsky, N. (1965). Aspects of the theory of syntax. MIT Press.
Flege, J. E. (1987). The production of "new" and "similar" phones in a foreign language: Evidence for the effect of equivalence classification. Journal of Phonetics, 15(1), 47-65.
Krashen, S. D. (1982). Principles and practice in second language acquisition. Pergamon Press.
Norton, B. (2000). Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity, and educational change. Pearson Education.