Strategic Intervention for Selected Deviant English Phrases at a rural University

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Abstract

Professionalism in English phrases is an indispensable tool for the enhancement of fluency and accuracy in communication. However, English second language learners face redundancy challenges apropos an effective use of phrases. The research investigated strategic intervention for selected deviant English phrases at the University of Venda. A quantitative approach was adopted because data could be analysed mathematically and statistically. Using probability sampling, 35 Level Three English students registered in the 2022 academic year at this university were selected to participate in this research. Further, a convenience technique was employed to select the respondents who were readily approachable and had been studying English for more than twelve years. A pre-test study was conducted on the respondents who were not part of the target group to plan and modify the main research. After a treatment process was followed, the research revealed that respondents were incompetent in the use of English phrases. Nonetheless, post-test results established that respondents performed preternaturally after the utilisation of the 'language shadowing methods'. Frequent practice in the use of this technique, therefore, cannot be ignored if one wishes to improve not only the art of public oration but also the image of the person's academic literacy.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the system of conveying or exchanging information from one place, a person or group of interlocutors using skills including speaking, reading and writing. In

describing the proper use of everyday English phrases that are mostly misused and often misinterpreted, every language comprises a set of rules required to specify how words change their forms and combine into a meaningful and error-free sentence (Yeboah, 2020). Despite having studied the English language for more than twelve years in primary and secondary schools and even undertaking undergraduate courses in the language, the majority of second language (L2) learners still commit numerous errors in the construction of phrases, clauses and sentence structures (Yeboah, 2020) throughout the world. In addition, one of the most common errors committed by L2 learners in the English language is redundancy (English Basics, 2021). This deviation involves the repetition of unnecessary words, phrases, clauses or sentences by L2 learners in verbal or written communication.

Yang (2022) posits that one common error committed in the use of the English language is redundancy involving the use of an unnecessary word or phrase. Nevertheless, the deviant English language phrases including 'discuss about', 'can be able', and 'according to me' reign supreme in a day-to-day conversation. Additionally, some areas of error commitments are 'very much important' and 'to can pass'. However, in the current research, these phrases were narrowed down to 'discuss about', 'can be able' and according to me' due to their relevancy to common abuse.

English Basics (2021) claims that if English speakers indiscriminately use the phrase "discuss about", they are saying more than they need to. The word "discuss" already has the word "about" in its meaning. If one uses the phrase "discuss about," they are using more of that same word. Consequently, this will lead to redundancy. In order to avoid this, we just say 'discuss' and not 'discuss about'.In this situation, Lassen (2022) asserts that using the word '*about*' after '*discuss*' is redundant or unnecessary. Therefore, in the world of academics, the use of the English phrase 'discuss about' challenges both native and non-native English speakers' grammatical competency.

In South Africa, the use of English as a subject and as a language poses many challenges to non-native speakers (Lewis, 2020). This has been a major concern (Abdullah, Azmi, Hassan, Atek, & Jusoh (2022) because of the presence of several grammar and vocabulary rules used by non-native speakers (James, 2021). Hu, Tang, Wu and Zeng (2022:3323) postulate that "English has become the most popular and widely used language" in economics, politics, culture, and sports throughout the world. Nevertheless, its appropriate use is a skill that requires regular enhancement since it is not the 'be-all and end-all' of the language (Eunson, 2022). Pasaribu, Hutasoit and Sihombing (2022, p. 227) claim that vocabulary is one "biggest factor in acquiring the language". In this situation, "public speaking is not an inborn skill and like all skills it must be learnt through practice and training." (Dsouza, 2022, p.106).

English phrases, therefore, are one grammatical aspect that perpetuates deviant language usage in communication. These phrases involve groups of words that never include subjects and verbs. They are groups of words used as a means of uttering or conveying a particular meaning. Their examples include noun phrases, subject noun phrases, verb phrases, gerund phrases, prepositional phrases and infinitive phrases (EnglishStudyhere, 2022). Helena Daily English (2022) posits that English phrases are used in everyday communication calling for an appropriate and redundant-free sentence constructions. These constructions assist in avoiding a rejection by the academic community because the English language users can be eloquent.

The word 'discuss' is a verb derived from the noun 'discussion' involving a process of sharing ideas with someone or a group of people about a particular topic to reach an

eventual decision (Lassen, 2022). According to this author, the verb 'discuss' is used when talking about a topic in general. However, its actual meaning entails 'talking about' referring to the exchange ideas rather than looking for a direct solution. The use of 'about' as an adverb modifies the verb 'discuss' whereas when used as an adverb it means 'almost' or 'nearly'. Alternatively, the verb 'about' can be used as a preposition to bring about cohesion and adhesion between the verb and a preposition. Nonetheless, the verb 'discuss' is never used with the preposition 'about' grammatically.

Inappropriate and ungrammatical use of the phrase 'discuss about' reduces trustworthiness of the language users. In the English language, it is incorrect to say, 'discuss about'. For example, if one says, 'discuss about', it actually means saying more than that person needs to. Although 'discuss about' is a transitive verb phrase and frequently used in everyday communication, it is generally ungrammatical and usually rejected by the majority of academics including teachers and other learned personnel. The word 'discuss' already has the word 'about' in its meaning. Therefore, if the phrase 'discuss about' is used in the English language, redundancy occurs.

Correspondingly, it is inappropriate to say, 'discuss about' because the verb 'discuss' means 'regarding', 'concerning' or 'about'. In this situation, it is a prerequisite to avoid inappropriate usage the verb 'discuss' and the preposition 'about' because the two words are synonymous (Lassen, 2022) in the sense that the former contains the meaning 'talk about' in it. Further, if these two words are used together, the ungrammatical meaning produced is 'talk about about' and has a high frequency of redundancy. However, it is permissible to say, 'discuss' or have a 'discussion about' as in 'They had a discussion about my life history with my cousin'. Additionally, the phrases 'conversation about', 'confer about', 'debate about', or 'have a powwow about' are grammatically correct.

In the English language, the modal verb 'can' (EnglishClub, 2022) suggests possibility and abilities (Beare, 2020). It is used to make requests such as 'Can I come with you' and to give permission, for example 'You can come to my home'. The modal verb 'can' can be used when planning or deciding about the near future as in 'I can bring you a stapler tomorrow'. Also, it can depict permission for something to be done. On the other hand, the phrase 'be able to' is a modal verb phrase that is similar in meaning to the modal verb 'can'. However, it is not permissible to utilise both 'can' and 'be able to' because their combination adds no meaning to the sentence and consequently redundancy is created in the English language. For example, if one says, 'I *can* come with you' it means that 'you can come with the addressee'.

The modal 'can' is usually followed by an infinitive without 'to' as in 'I can chalk your words down' but not 'I can to chalk your words down' because in ungrammatical and meaningless. Additionally, Leclercq and Depraetere (2022) claim that using the modal verb 'can' does not advocate the change of its form in the English language. In this regard, the third-person singular form does not end in '-s'. For example, English language rejects *'He can cleans the table' in favour of 'He can clean the table'. The modal verb 'can' is used in question tags as in 'They can't take you to court', can they? Also, it can be used in 'She can visit you in the morning, can't she?

In the English language, there is no perfect tense of the modal verb 'can'. The auxiliary 'has/have + been able to' is used instead. For example, 'She hasn't been able to pick the phone yet'. In this regard, it can mean that the person in context might have no ability to pick up the phone at a particular moment in time, might not be knowing how to pick it up, or did not have money to use in answering the phone. Besides, in the sentences,

'Can you dance?' and 'No I can't', the presence of the modal verbs, 'can' and 'can't', indicate ability or inability to dance. Further, if the situation allows or does not someone to do something at a particular time, the sentence 'I'm sorry, Dr Segere can't see you now' can be used to signal that 'Dr Segere' has got someone else with him.

The addition of the phrase 'can able to' to the existing sentence creates a redundancy in 'I can be able to come with you tonight'. However, the modal verb 'can' is just enough to express abilities and possibilities. Furthermore, the adjective 'able' indicates ability and possibility as does the modal verb 'can'. It indicates power, skill or means of doing something. In the English language, if one says, 'I am able to write', the utterance is tantamount to saying 'I can write' which is quite grammatical and meaningful. According to EnglishClub (2022), 'can' and its past are modal verbs while 'be able to' is part of an auxiliary/main verb 'be' as in 'We are able to do it now'. In this essence, the phrase 'be able to' expresses and shares most of the root meanings that are usually associated with the 'possibility' modals including 'can' and 'could' (Leclercq & Depraetere, 2022).

In the English language, the negative modal verb 'cannot' is an elucidation of 'inability to do something' and rejects to be supplemented by 'able to' as in 'He cannot be able to see you today'. 'Able to' is not a modal verb but rather a verb 'be' and an adjective, 'able' that can be followed by the infinitive with the structure Subject+be+able making an infinitive. For example, 'I was able to do it yesterday without any assistance'.

The adverb "according" refers either to matching, conforming or equivalent (Parker, 2022). It originated from the verb 'accord' transferrable into the noun 'agreement' or prepositional verb phrase 'to come to an agreement with'. This verb is traceable from the Latin word *accordare'* which means 'to be of one heart'. As a preposition, it brings cohesion and adhesion in words by signalling an association between nouns or pronouns and other word forms. It indicates direction, place and time and presents the objects of sentences. Thus, it is part of the nine parts of speech (Khan, 2020) such as verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, determiners, and interjections.

Rai, M. (2022) claims that the phrase 'according to me' sounds awkward and grammatically incorrect to emphasise one's opinion because people generally don't talk to themselves. The phrase 'according to me' either means 'in accord with', 'in accordance with', 'conforming to', 'in consonance with', 'in keeping with', 'in the manner of' or 'as reported by'. In the English language, if one is talking in 1st person/first-hand and wants to tell someone an opinion or a particular fact, it is permissible to say, 'in my opinion'. Parker (2021) contends that the phrase 'according to me' is not technically wrong but it is often used wrongly by the English language speakers. Further, Parker contends that it is quite ungrammatical to refer to oneself in speeches by using 'according to me' as a means of displaying an authoritative quality or source of information.

Several studies have been carried out to repair some selected deviant English phrase usages in verbal and written communication. For example, Abdullah et al. (2022) investigated common errors in writing the English language among non-academic staff at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), a public university in Malaysia. The study revealed that redundancy in the English language pose challenges to them. Similarly, Diab and Awada (2022) examined the effects of language learning strategies and coded corrective feedback on errors committed by teacher corrective feedback and peer corrective feedback groups. The study reveals that the peer corrective feedback group could not reduce 'unnecessary' and 'redundant' word errors at the delayed post-test, though not significantly. However, it was found that the peer corrective feedback group had trouble with redundancy errors in this regard.

Yang (2022) conducted a study on sixty non-English majors with different English proficiency to figure out the main categories of redundancy errors in English writing tasks for Chinese undergraduates and the relations between redundant constituents and learners' English proficiency. The researcher established that Chinese undergraduates commit redundancy errors in their writings regarding grammatical elements such as intonation, accent and vocabulary. Concerning the phrase 'according to me', Barton (2022) conducted a study on Indian students regarding the use of this phrase. The study discovered that the undergraduate students committed redundancy errors in the English language. In this regard, Barton estimates that although the phrase 'according to me' is not wrong, it is **unusual to use if one wishes to construct a sentence that gives own** opinion to the listeners or the readers.

The objectives of the current research were to investigate if English Honours students at the University of Venda (Univen) can use phrases including 'can be able', 'discuss about' and 'according to me' appropriately, to describe the extent of difficulties experienced in the use of English phrases and to establish the causes of difficulties experienced in this regard. Moreover, the research attempted to answer the questions, namely: What common deviant English phrases are used by Univen students? To what extent can deviant English phrases used by Univen students affect communication? What are the causes of the difficulties experienced in the use of English phrases?

LITERATURE REVIEW
The research was underpinned by Robert Lado's (1957) Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) Theory and Prof. Alexander Arguelles' (2008) Language Shadowing Method which issu broadly applied to English teaching and learning. Also, it gains a great deal of achievements as learners speak while listening (Dsouza, 2022). This method improves the language skills of English foreign language learners (Anis, 2021). According to Arguelles, using the language shadowing technique encourages L2 learners to listen carefully to the audio recordings of the target language including technology, entertainment and recorded public-speaking presentation. In this regard, Dsouza (2022) suggests that L2 learners simultaneously resonance what they hear.

The language shadowing technique is fundamentally a way of learning the target language in the same way one uses it to learn the first language. It entails the repetition of sounds exactly as one hears them and thereby becoming the **easiest manner of mastering colloquial speech,** accent and intonation. In this situation, learners are compelled to focus on the sounds of the target language and develop pronunciation and the usages involving English phrases that mimic a native speaker as well as other grammatical elements. In addition, learners are forced to comprehend the use the English language phrases.

Shadowing refers to an eccentric language learning method requiring independent learning by learners using repetition and imitation to enhance competence in the language grammar including intonation and pronunciation (Fitriyah, 2022). Nevertheless, language shadowing technique becomes a challenging exercise for L2 learners because of the innumerable rules to be observed. Verbling (2020) postulates that there are five basic steps that are indispensable in the use of language shadowing approach. These steps include 1) listen to the text once to get a general idea of what is happening in the text, 2) keep listening to the text until it is fully understood, 3) listening to the text and simultaneously reading it and looking up for unfamiliar words in which the listener is not confident. Much concentration must be based on grammar and vocabulary, 4) listen to the

transcript quickly and at the same tempo as the recording and 5) after the learner realises that similar language structure, accent and intonation have been memorised, one can proceed to the next learning text.

KendallHurley (2022) adds that walking outside swiftly and repeating aloud in a loud and articulate manner are prerequisite steps in the improvement of focus and memory of the English language structures. Thus, both Verbling (2020) and KendallHurley (2022) claim that maintaining a good posture increases the oxygen in-flow beneficial for brain functioning. Anis (2021) conducted a study consisting of six meetings with the Second-grade students of SMP N 26 Makassar regarding the 'effect of language shadowing techniques on speaking skills.

The research instrument was a speaking test at the Department of English Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Muhammadiyah University of Makassar. Using pre-experimental research, the study discovered that the students in context, improved after using language shadowing techniques because in the pre-test they scored 56.7% while in the post-test they manged to register 76.4% with the improvement of 34.7%. Therefore, the researcher concluded that teaching English using language shadowing techniques can "improve students' speaking ability." (Anis, 2021: viii).

METHOD
Research design
The research adopted a descriptive quantitative design as it saves time since there is no coding of vast quantities of responses. A quasi-experiment involving pre-test and post-test designs was used. In this study, the research aims to discover the number of responses regarding how the large sample size thought, acted or felt the way they did. A quantifiable data from this design uses mathematics and statistics to explore uncommon areas concerning the use of English phrases.

The researchers used variables' percentages to obtain credible, reliable and valid data because it is a rationale "behind evidence-based outcomes" (Abuhamda, Bsharat & Ismail, 2021:71). Empirical data were collected (Gao, 2022) according to the researcher's delivery of the questionnaire, learners' reactions when responding to the questionnaire, and the environment within which they responded to the questionnaire. In this research, both the learners and the researcher participated meaningfully and comprehensively (Monem, & Cramer, 2022) in the activities that enhance educational outcomes.

Sample and Sampling Criteria
In this research, 35 Third Level English respondents registered in the 2022 academic year were selected over the others because they had been attending English for the past three years or more at Univen. A convenient sampling strategy (Lines, Burdick, Dewez, Aldridge, Neal-Williams, Walker, Akhlaghi, Paul & Taylor, 2022) was utilised to sample the respondents who were voluntarily approachable. The respondents belonged to the researchers' standards for investigation such as satisfactory background for gaining new knowledge. Additionally, the researcher employed a probability random sampling procedure to select the respondents because the respondents who do not fit directly into the main categories were given equal opportunity to render responses that could be recorded and analysed accordingly.

Data collection

The questionnaire involves questions that were used to obtain mathematical and statistical information from the respondents. A list of closed-ended, similar and restricted questions ensuring a fair analysis of data was used along with their answers to be chosen, printed or typed in a sequence for acquiring informed choices from a set of pre-defined responses. Additionally, a list set of answers were utilised to collect data from the respondents. The respondents were not compelled to respond to the questionnaire. In this research, all the respondents participated carefully, honestly, willingly (Foreshew, & Al-Jawad, 2022) and spontaneously to the written questionnaire.

A pre-test was conducted on 15 participants who were not part of the target group because the researcher belied that they shared common characteristics with the entire community. On the other hand, a post-test was done on 35 selected respondents. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire. Additionally, video recordings were used in the collection and analysis of data. Pre-test, treatment and post-test processes were utilised in the manipulation of data.

Data analysis

Scientific management of the data (Guo & Jiang 2022) assisted in the analysis of data. For example, the researcher applied treatment processes of data such as access, collection, use, processing, storage, sharing, distribution, transfer, disclosure, security, destruction, and disposal of any personal, sensitive, or confidential information. The researcher compared pre-test and post-test results wherein the latter partially validate the research hypotheses. Additionally, a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 was used in the interpretation of the findings as learners thought individually and mapped their understanding of the social order (Babbie, Wagner III & Zaino, 2022).

Data were interpreted using reduction, presentation, depiction and verification of the findings. Also, they were sorted, selected and classified to eliminate non-alignment to the study focus. Relevant data was interpreted and presented concerning the study objectives. In this research, a conclusion was drawn according to the depiction of the findings, data verification and specification and validation of the results. The researcher discovered that the results from the pre-test results were unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, after the 'language shadowing method' was utilised, the respondents performed remarkably because proficiency in the use of English phrases has been improved in the classroom environment. In this situation, the respondents learnt language structures such as using emulation processes of recorded materials enhancing intonation, accent and language structures as well as their functions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Ability

As shoen in Figure 1, 31 respondents amounting to 89% were competent in the avoidance of redundancy error. They selected the correct answer 'can' which is equivalent to 'are able to' although it was a bit challenging for them. The respondents had a full understanding of the phrase 'can be able to' which is a true representation of redundancy errors because both 'can' and 'be able to' represent ability. The finding is in line with Leclercq and Depraetere (2022) who claim that 'be able to' expresses and shares most of the root meanings that are usually associated with the 'possibility' modals such as 'can'. However, it is in contrast with Anis (2021) who suggests that language shadowing becomes a challenging exercise for L2 learners. The respondents were competent in

recognising the correct use of the English phrase 'can be able. Therefore, the respondents were less challenged using the phrase 'can be able to' because the 'language shadowing method' has been applied successfully.
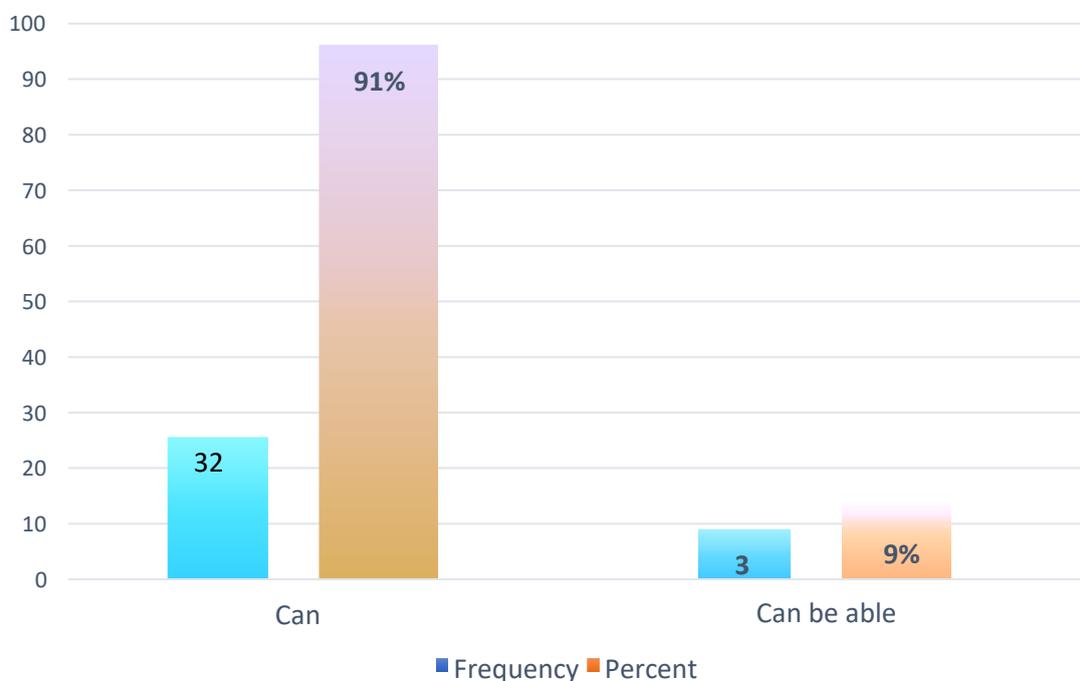

Figure 1. English phrase expressing ability

Nonetheless, 4 respondents amounting to 11% were incompetent in the use of English phrases expressing ability 'can' and 'are able to' as they selected the redundant answer 'can be able to' instead. The respondents were confused by the most common ungrammatical and r English phrase 'can be able to' even after the Language Shadowing Method has been primarily utilised. The respondents thought that the modal verb 'can' is distinct from the phrase 'able to' whereas they both express an ability to do something. The finding is in line with Anis' (2021) suggestion that language shadowing becomes a challenging exercise for L2 learners in teaching and learning. The causes of redundancy error might have been caused by Lado's (1957) overgeneralisation and simplification.

The Main Verb 'talk'

Figure 2 shows that the majority (30 respondents amounting to 86%) were knowledgeable in the use of English phrases/phrasal verbs comprising the main verb 'discuss' and the preposition 'about'. They had a thorough knowledge of the use of the ungrammatical English phrase, namely, 'discuss about' constituting a redundant error because the main verb 'discuss' means to 'talk about'. Therefore, the ungrammatical phrasal verb 'discuss about' is a clear example of tautology. The finding supports Dsouza's (2022) claim that language shadowing has proved a great achievement in listening and speaking skills regarding the teaching of English phrases to L2 learners.
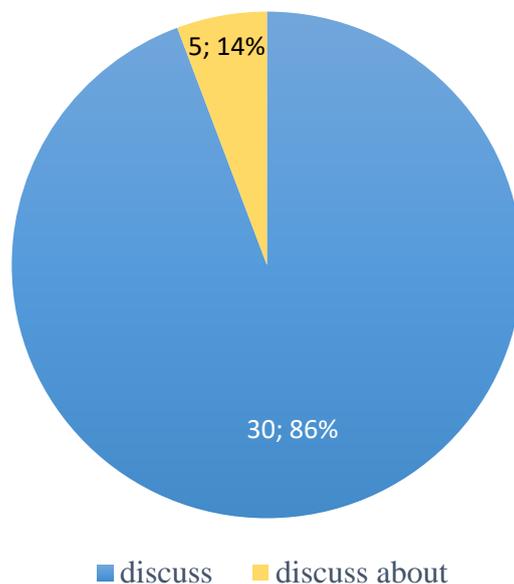
Figure 2. English phrase expressing the main verb 'talk'

On the other hand, the minority (5 respondents amounting to 14%) were unable to select the proper answer 'discuss' that was supposed to have been used 'as is'. These respondents proved to have a lack of informed knowledge regarding the repetition of similar words in meaning. The finding is in line with Yang (2022) who suggests that students commit redundancy errors in the writings of the English language phases. These respondents might have confused the English phrase 'discuss about' with collocation rules (Zagórska, 2022). This rule states that collocation entails the predictable combination of words *where* a word or phrase is used with another one in the English language appropriately. Inadequate learning and ignorance of rule restrictions might have been the cause of this redundancy error as suggested by Lado's (1957) in his CAH theory.

Self-Reference
Figure 3 shows that 29 respondents amounting to 84% percent were competent because they could select the grammatically appropriate answer 'in my opinion' and rejected the ungrammatically incorrect answer 'according to me'. They have been aware that when the English phrase 'according to me' is used a person is often talking in the first person and therefore quite ungrammatical. Further, they knew that in the English language a person cannot report something that someone has said personally. The finding is congruent with Rai's (2022) claim that the phrase 'according to me' is grammatically incorrect in a manner of emphasizing one's opinion. In addition, the finding is congruent with Parker (2021) who contends that the phrase 'according to me' is often used incorrectly, when one refers to oneself.

However, it is a point of concern that the phrase ungrammatical English phrase 'according to me' has been used inappropriately by the 6 respondents amounting to 17% percent as they accepted it and rejected a grammatically correct 'in my opinion'. The finding is congruent with Abdullah's et al. (2022) suggestion that redundancy poses

challenges to the students as it did to the writing of the English language among non-academic staff at a public university in Malaysia. The students in context might have thought the 'according to me' is correct because it refers to the person who is frightened by the Covid-19 pandemic. To these respondents, the objective personal pronoun 'me' might have prompted the participants to select the answer 'according to me' instead of 'in my opinion'. This pronoun is commonly used when the noun it replaces becomes an object of a sentence. In this regard, Lado's (1957) simplification, false concepts hypothesised and inadequate learning might be a rationale behind the development of this kind of common redundancy error.
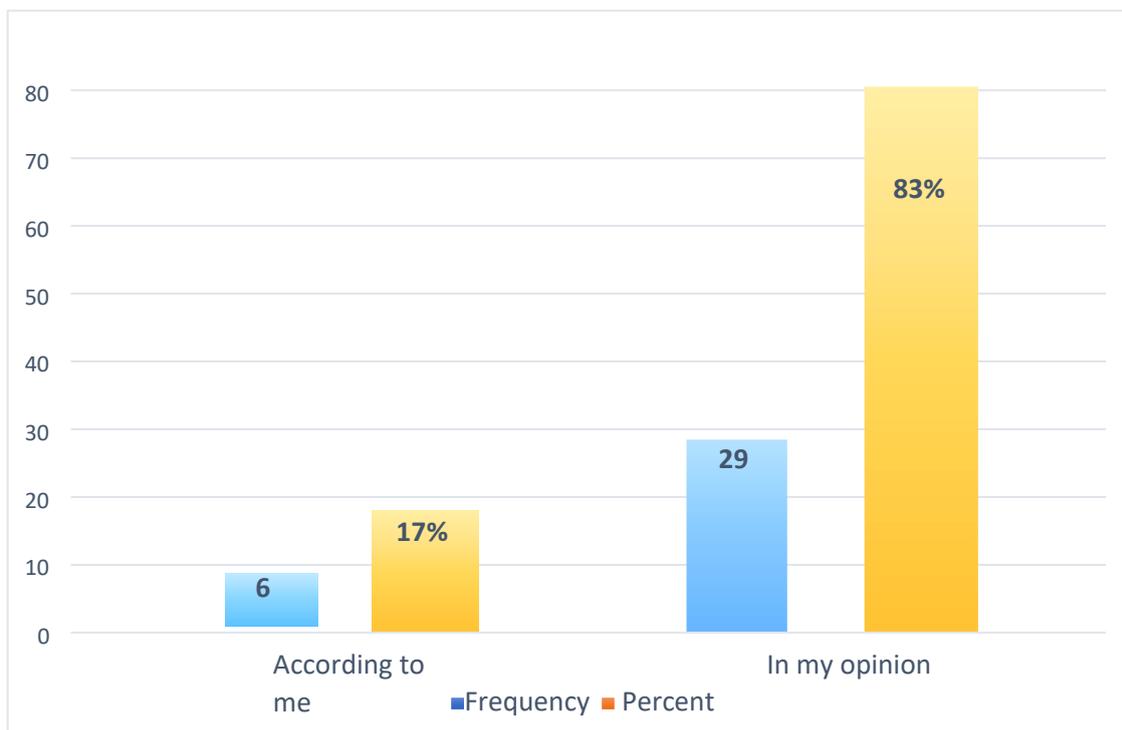

Figure 3. English phrase expressing self-reference

The three Figures (English phrase expressing ability, English phrase expressing the main verb 'talk', and English phrase expressing self-reference) indicate the inevitability of using the English language shadowing technique. Although the latter two English phrase themes have registered just below 90% due to the complexity of their usage, it is exciting to note that the former (ability) managed to score above 90 % of learners' competence. This is a good indication of a language shadowing technique relevant for the learning of English phrases. Therefore, the most common redundancy in the use of English phrases can be minimised and finally alleviated if language shadowing method is used effectively.

CONCLUSION

Using a quantitative approach to maintain a strategic intervention for selected deviant English phrases usage, it has been proved that redundancy errors can be easily alleviated if language shadowing is used. As the research investigated selected 35 Level Three English respondents registered in the 2022 academic year at the University of Venda, it

is evident that the use of the language shadowing method is invaluable in the learning and teaching of English phrases. The common deviant English phrases regarding 'ability', main verb 'talk' and 'self-reference' have been used as a representative of grammatical errors committed by L2 learners. Although the research showed some discrepancies in the obtained percentages, yet it has been proved beyond reasonable doubt that the language shadowing technique is a requirement for learning intonation, pronunciation, and other grammatical features. In this regard, the current research contributes to the scientific body of knowledge because the findings can be utilised with ease by everyone throughout the world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Level Three English students must timeously familiarise themselves with the English phrases by reading, building vocabulary and holding daily conversations. They must listen to the recordings of the native speakers' use of the language. Rehearsal of some grammatical features fosters competence in public speaking. Also, English language lecturers are encouraged to include English phrases in their curricula because effective communication is guaranteed in day-to-day conversation.

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