

English Words, Kannada Sentences: Exploring the Gap between English Usage and Speaking Proficiency among Kannada-Speaking Students

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Abstract—In the contemporary educational environment, English has become an important language of education, employment, technology and social communication. Among Kannada-speaking students, English words are increasingly incorporated into everyday Kannada conversations. Students commonly use English terms such as class, college, exam, subject, assignment, project, mobile, meeting, and online while communicating in Kannada. However, frequent use of English vocabulary in Kannada speech does not necessarily indicate English-speaking proficiency. Many students who use English words comfortably within Kannada sentences experience considerable difficulty when required to communicate entirely in English. This phenomenon raises important questions concerning the relationship between exposure to English, code-switching and actual communicative competence. The present study examines the gap between English-word usage and English-speaking ability among Kannada-speaking students. It explores the reasons for this gap, including limited opportunities for meaningful English interaction, fear of grammatical errors, lack of confidence, examination-oriented learning, dependence on translation and insufficient exposure to spoken English.

The study argues that merely increasing English vocabulary in everyday Kannada communication cannot automatically develop speaking proficiency. Instead, learners need regular opportunities for meaningful communication, interactive classroom practices, peer conversations, presentations, discussions and technology-supported language learning.

The paper suggests practical strategies for teachers and institutions to transform passive or fragmented English exposure into functional communicative competence.

Index Terms—English language learning, Kannada-speaking students, code-switching, English vocabulary,

speaking proficiency, communicative competence, language anxiety

I. INTRODUCTION

English occupies an important position in Indian education and public life. It is widely used in higher education, professional communication, science, technology, business and digital media. For students in Karnataka, English is often introduced as a major language of education from the school level. Despite several years of formal English education, however, many students continue to experience difficulties in speaking English confidently and fluently.

An interesting linguistic phenomenon can be observed among Kannada-speaking students. They frequently insert English words and expressions into Kannada sentences. For example, students may say, “Nale assignment submit madbeku,” “Today class ide,” “Exam preparation madbeku,” or “Project complete agilla.” Such expressions demonstrate that students are familiar with a considerable amount of English vocabulary. Nevertheless, when they are asked to speak in English for several minutes, many hesitate, switch back to Kannada, or produce short and grammatically incomplete sentences.

This situation creates an apparent paradox: students may use numerous English words in Kannada but may not be able to communicate effectively in English.

The distinction between vocabulary exposure and communicative competence is therefore important. Knowing individual English words is different from knowing how to construct meaningful sentences,

organise ideas, respond spontaneously and participate in sustained conversation.

The present article investigates this gap and discusses possible pedagogical approaches to improving students' English-speaking proficiency.

II. ENGLISH AND KANNADA IN EVERYDAY STUDENT COMMUNICATION

Languages rarely exist in complete isolation. In multilingual societies such as India, speakers frequently move between languages depending on context, topic, audience and purpose. This phenomenon is commonly discussed through concepts such as code-switching and code-mixing.

Kannada-speaking students are exposed to English through textbooks, classrooms, social media, films, television, smartphones, advertisements and digital platforms. Consequently, many English words have become familiar parts of everyday communication.

Words relating to education and technology are particularly common:

- Class, college, teacher, Exam, assignment, Project, subject, notes, attendance, mobile, online, meeting, application, message and computer

The use of such words can make communication convenient. Students may select an English word because it is shorter, familiar or commonly used in their social environment.

However, this type of vocabulary incorporation should not automatically be interpreted as English-language proficiency.

III. CODE-SWITCHING AND CODE-MIXING

Code-switching generally refers to the use of more than one language or linguistic variety within a conversation or communicative situation. Code-mixing involves the incorporation of linguistic elements from one language into another.

In the context of Kannada-English communication, students may construct a Kannada sentence while inserting English nouns, verbs or expressions.

For example:

“Assignment submit madidya?”

Here, assignment and submit are English words, while the sentence structure is largely influenced by Kannada.

Similarly:

“Tomorrow class ge barthiya?”

The speaker uses English vocabulary within a Kannada grammatical framework.

Such linguistic behaviour is not necessarily a problem. In multilingual communities, code-switching can serve important communicative and social functions. It can express identity, solidarity, convenience and familiarity.

The pedagogical concern arises when students depend on individual English words but do not develop the ability to construct and sustain communication in English.

IV. THE GAP BETWEEN ENGLISH USAGE AND ENGLISH SPEAKING

The central issue of this study is the difference between English-word familiarity and English-speaking proficiency.

A student may know hundreds of English words but still struggle to speak English because speaking requires several interconnected abilities:

- Vocabulary selection
- Sentence formation
- Grammar
- Pronunciation
- Listening comprehension
- Fluency
- Confidence
- Ability to organise ideas
- Immediate response
- Knowledge of appropriate expressions

When students use English words within Kannada sentences, they do not necessarily practise all these skills.

For instance, a student may comfortably use the word presentation in Kannada but may struggle to say:

“I have to give a presentation tomorrow, so I am preparing my topic today.”

The difference illustrates that recognising or using an English word is not equivalent to possessing communicative competence in English.

V. MAJOR REASONS FOR STUDENTS' DIFFICULTY IN SPEAKING ENGLISH

5.1 Examination-Oriented Learning

One major factor is the dominance of examination-oriented learning. Students often concentrate on grammar rules, textbook questions, essays and examinations rather than real-life communication. They may successfully answer written questions but have limited experience in spontaneous conversation.

5.2 Lack of Speaking Opportunities

Speaking is a skill that develops through practice. If students rarely communicate in English outside the classroom, their confidence and fluency may remain limited.

A classroom that is dominated by teacher lectures provides fewer opportunities for students to speak.

5.3 Fear of Making Mistakes

Many learners are afraid that classmates or teachers will laugh at their pronunciation or grammatical mistakes. As a result, they remain silent.

This fear can create a cycle:

Fear → Silence → Less Practice → Low Confidence → More Fear

Breaking this cycle is essential.

5.4 Dependence on Mother-Tongue Translation

Some students first formulate an idea in Kannada and then attempt to translate it into English. This process can slow communication and lead to grammatical difficulties.

For example:

Kannada thought → Translation → English sentence

Instead, learners should gradually develop the ability to associate common situations directly with English expressions.

5.5 Limited English-Speaking Environment

Students who study English but communicate primarily in Kannada may have limited natural opportunities for English interaction.

Therefore, institutions need to create English-speaking spaces where students can communicate without fear.

5.6 Vocabulary without Context

Memorising isolated vocabulary items does not necessarily improve speaking. Words need to be

learned in meaningful phrases, sentences and communicative situations.

Instead of learning only:

- decision
- students can learn:
- make a decision
- take a decision
- I have made a decision.
- Contextual vocabulary is more useful for communication.

VI. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- The present study has the following objectives:
- To examine the frequent use of English words in Kannada communication among students.
- To explore the relationship between English-word usage and English-speaking proficiency.
- To identify the major factors responsible for students' difficulties in speaking English.
- To examine the role of code-switching in students' everyday communication.
- To suggest effective strategies for improving English-speaking skills.
- To encourage communicative approaches to English language teaching.

VII. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- The study addresses the following questions:
- Why do Kannada-speaking students frequently use English words while speaking Kannada?
- Does frequent English vocabulary usage lead to better English-speaking proficiency?
- What prevents students from speaking English confidently?
- What role does code-switching play in English language learning?
- What classroom strategies can convert English exposure into communicative competence?

VIII. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive and qualitative approach to examine the relationship between English-word usage and English-speaking proficiency among Kannada-speaking students.

The proposed participants may include undergraduate students studying in colleges where Kannada and English are commonly used for academic and social communication.

- Data can be collected through:
- classroom observation
- informal student conversations
- student questionnaires
- semi-structured interviews
- short English-speaking activities
- teacher observations
- Students can be asked to perform simple speaking tasks such as:
- self-introduction
- describing a familiar person
- narrating a recent experience
- describing a picture
- discussing a familiar topic
- participating in a group discussion

The study can compare students' everyday use of English vocabulary within Kannada conversations with their ability to communicate independently in English.

IX. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis suggests that English exposure and English proficiency are related but are not identical. Students' frequent use of English words demonstrates considerable exposure to the language. However, this exposure may remain at the lexical level rather than developing into complete communicative competence.

9.1 English Words Have Become Part of Everyday Kannada

English vocabulary has become common in student communication, especially in education, technology and popular culture. Students often use English words naturally without consciously considering them foreign vocabulary.

9.2 Vocabulary Knowledge Does Not Guarantee Fluency

Students may recognise or use many English words but struggle to combine them into grammatically appropriate sentences.

Thus:

Word knowledge ≠ Sentence formation ≠ Fluency
English-speaking proficiency requires the integration of these abilities.

9.3 Students Often Understand More Than They Speak

Another important observation is the difference between receptive and productive skills.

A student may understand a teacher's English explanation but hesitate when asked to respond in English.

This suggests that students need more opportunities to transform passive knowledge into active language use.

9.4 Confidence Is as Important as Grammar

Some students possess sufficient vocabulary and basic grammatical knowledge but remain reluctant to speak because they fear making mistakes.

Therefore, improving speaking ability requires not only linguistic instruction but also the development of confidence and a supportive classroom environment.

X. PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING SPEAKING SKILLS

10.1 English Conversation Period

Teachers can introduce a regular 15–20 minute English conversation session.

Students can discuss simple topics such as:

- My family
- My village
- My college
- My favourite book
- Social media
- Technology
- My future plans
- Current issues

The objective should be communication rather than grammatical perfection.

10.2 Pair Work

Pair activities provide more speaking opportunities than teacher-centred instruction.

- Students can ask and answer questions such as:
- What did you do yesterday?
- What is your favourite subject?

- Why do you like it?

10.3 Group Discussion

Group discussions encourage students to express opinions and respond to others.

Topics can gradually move from familiar subjects to academic and social issues.

10.4 Role Play

Role play can recreate real-life situations:

- At a railway station
- At a bank
- At a hospital
- In an interview
- In a classroom
- At a hotel
- During a job interview

Such activities help students understand the practical value of English.

10.5 English Speaking Clubs

Colleges can establish English-speaking clubs where students can participate in:

- debates
- storytelling
- speeches
- quizzes
- presentations
- interviews
- vocabulary games

The emphasis should be on participation rather than punishment for errors.

10.6 Use of Technology

Digital tools can provide additional opportunities for English practice. Students can use AI-based conversational tools, pronunciation applications, podcasts, videos and online speaking activities to practise outside the classroom.

However, technology should supplement—not replace—human interaction.

XI. FROM CODE-SWITCHING TO COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

The objective should not be to completely eliminate Kannada-English code-switching. Code-switching is a natural feature of multilingual communication.

Instead, teachers should help students expand their linguistic repertoire.

A useful progression can be:

Kannada + English words → Simple English phrases
→ Simple English sentences → Short conversations
→ Extended conversations → Fluent communication

For example:

Stage 1:

“Assignment submit madbeku.”

Stage 2:

“I have to submit the assignment.”

Stage 3:

“I have to submit the assignment tomorrow.”

Stage 4:

“I have to submit the assignment tomorrow, so I am completing it today.”

This gradual process can help students transform familiar English vocabulary into functional English communication.

XII. ROLE OF TEACHERS

English teachers have a crucial role in creating an environment in which students feel comfortable speaking.

Teachers should:

- encourage students to speak without excessive interruption;
- correct major errors sensitively;
- introduce useful conversational expressions;
- provide regular speaking activities;
- encourage peer interaction;

use English for classroom instructions when appropriate;

connect English learning with real-life situations;

appreciate students' attempts to communicate.

The teacher should function not only as an instructor but also as a facilitator of communication.

XIII. ROLE OF STUDENTS

Students should understand that speaking proficiency develops through regular practice rather than memorisation alone.

- They can develop their speaking ability by:
- speaking English for a few minutes every day;
- reading aloud;
- listening to English conversations;

- recording their own speech;
- learning phrases rather than isolated words;
- participating in discussions;
- watching English videos with attention to expressions;
- practising with classmates;
- using English in everyday situations.
- Even 10–15 minutes of daily speaking practice can gradually improve confidence and fluency.

XIV. CONCLUSION

The increasing presence of English words in Kannada conversations among students reflects the growing influence and accessibility of English in contemporary society. However, the frequent use of English vocabulary does not necessarily translate into English-speaking proficiency.

The central challenge is therefore not simply to increase students' English vocabulary but to enable them to use that vocabulary independently and meaningfully in English communication.

Students need opportunities to move from isolated English words to phrases, sentences, conversations and sustained communication. Fear of mistakes, limited practice, examination-oriented learning, translation dependence and inadequate speaking environments must be addressed.

Rather than treating Kannada-English code-switching as a negative phenomenon, teachers can use students' existing English vocabulary as a starting point for developing communicative competence.

Ultimately, the goal of English language education should not be merely that students know English words, but that they can use English confidently, meaningfully and effectively.

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