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Researching International PhD Algerian Students' Communication Challenges in Speaking When Discussing and Interacting with Their British Peers: A Researcher's Interpretive Perspective through the Use of Semi-Structured Interview

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Abstract**—**This paper addresses the issue of the speaking challenges that the Algerian PhD students experience during their studies abroad, particularly in UK territory; more specifically, this study describes how these students may deal with such challenges and whether the cultural differences is one core reason in such dilemma or not. To this end, an understanding and interpretation of what actually encompasses both linguistic interference and cultural differences are required. Throughout the paper there is an attempt to explain the theoretical basis of the interpretive research and to theoretically discuss the pivotal use of the interview, as a data collection tool, in interpretive research. Thus, the central issue of this study is to frame the theoretical perspective of the interpretive research through the discussion of PhD Algerian's communication and interaction challenges in the EFL context. This study is a corner stone for other research studies to further investigate the issue related to communication challenges because no specific findings will be pointed out in this research.

Keywords**—**EFL, communication, interaction, interpretive research.

I. Introduction

OUT from the need to communicate our knowledge to the wider world, the use of English is central; the latter is considered as the Latin language of the 21st century [1]. Thus, English has become the dominant language in many sectors; in Algeria for example, English is the foreign language used in international communications; besides, English is regarded as the medium of communication among Algerians and non-Algerians in different fields [2]. For learners who are studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL), it is crucial to experience authentic situations in which they practice English communicatively and interactively with native speakers; therefore, the speech act and the speaking skill will be discussed from the notion of cross-cultural perspective since the speech act may differ and change from culture to culture and across cultures so that these differences may result in communication challenges and difficulties [3]. Another cause which may lead to those communication challenges is linguistic interference in terms of translation and pronunciation. In other words, those communication challenges may occur due to the unawareness of the exact target word pronunciation and the interference of Algerian students' second language, which is French, with the foreign language, English; this is the case in Algeria where English is the foreign language used in international communications, French is the second language, whereas Arabic is the mother tongue [4].

Being confronted with the issue of researching international PhD Algerian students' experience in the United Kingdom, the communication challenges they face regarding cultural differences and language interference of the students' second language, French, with the target language, English, is a fertile place to begin. Moreover, the idea of investigating the potential communication challenges when interacting and discussing with native speakers has emerged from what the researcher has been experienced when studying in the UK. Thus, in this study, the researcher will also refer to her personal experience as there is a shared experience between the researcher and the researched participants. The main research question is how does the researcher describe Algerian PhD students' experience of communication challenges when interacting and discussing with their British peers in regard to linguistic and cultural issues? The main focus of the current study is to describe, interpret and investigate the experience of international Algerian PhD students living in the UK, when confronting communication challenges through interacting and discussing with native speakers from the researcher's perspective; the two subsequent aims of the study are to explore the cultural differences across native speakers of English and the Algerian students, and to describe and address the language interference those students face in terms of pronunciation and translation of the target language into the second language. Those subsequent aims can be met through reflecting upon the researcher's own experience of confronting communication challenges.

The literature revealed that the number of international PhD students from different nationalities in English-speaking countries has relatively increased [5]. In this study, there is more concern with the international Algerians as participants; the number of Algerian students has increased tremendously

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Open Science Index, Cognitive and Language Sciences Vol:13, No:9, 2019 publications.waset.org/10010771/pdf

in the recent four years due to the program of scholarship offered by the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education.

A tremendous range of studies have been previously conducted to study various aspects of communication challenges which is the same focus as this study. Specifically, new studies can be conducted in the area of communication to interpret and explore the impacts of cultural differences and language interference on communication. Alternatively, the previous prevailing issues in communication challenges can be studied in-depth. The gap in the literature can be found in relation to almost all areas of linguistic and cultural communication challenges.

As the term communication involves using language to exchange ideas and create meanings; communication can take two different forms: verbal and non-verbal [6]; in this study, the verbal communication will be the focus. However, for students to communicate in a language other than their mother tongue may cause challenges, in particular, for international students in English speaking countries [7]. Sometimes, the idea may not be well communicated due to the lack of high level of knowledge of the target culture and the second or first language interference with the target language, English [7].

Non-English speakers' communication challenges are considered in the hurdles of oral interaction to cultural norms [8]; in particular, the intercultural or cross-cultural communication which requires the interaction between people from two different cultures. Reference [6] mentioned that it is very crucial to understand and overcome the assumption of cultural differences which cause those communication challenges. It is suggested that during an English conversation between English speakers and non-English speakers, the former may monopolise the discussion since they are more familiar with the use and the structure of the language [8]. In this sense, another common cause of communication challenge is that the speaker and "the communicator" may not share the same value and interest [7]; besides, the language interference issue can be dealt form different perspectives, such as, target language translation and pronunciation.

The rationale for choosing the topic of researching international PhD Algerian students' experience of facing communication challenges lies in the sense that the researcher has experienced such issue in her current life as an international student; hence, her core position is all about describing their experience, and understanding and interpreting how they cope with such challenges when interacting and communicating with their British peers. To further enquire about the topic and support the previous rationale the following subsequent research questions should be investigated: what opportunities and constraints do international students, PhD Algerians, identify when interacting and discussing with their British peers? What are the most common language interference issues defined by the Algerian students which lead to communication challenges? How do these international students deal with the complexities of cross-cultural differences? How international students' attitudes towards the difference in terms of cultural background may cause communication challenges when interacting and discussing with their British peers?

II. The Nature of Interpretive Research

The meanings and realities created by each human are not expressed directly, instead interpretive researchers reflect this reality in their linguistic artefacts [9]; in other words, those interpretive researchers intend to interpret participants' experience and describe it in their writings. It is believed that the interpretivist paradigm emerged as a reaction against the "scientific" positivist paradigm; the latter is intended to achieve generalisation of the truth rather than focus on localised meanings of human experience which is the basis of the interpretivist paradigm [10]. Both the interpretative and the positivist research studies are informed by a different world view; this means that, the researcher should be engaged with the research through which he will gain worldview. Reference [11] also discuss the interpretive perspective in research by comparing it to positivist research which seeks to objectively learn about the external world and facts; whereas, interpretive research is shaped by the existing world views and experiences of the researcher, and therefore, the reality of the research is socially constructed. As a researcher, you must be deducing that researchers in this paradigm put the emphasis on the idea that people build their perceptions and understandings from their experiences, culture and context; as a common example of shaking hands may differ from one culture to another, this act may be interpreted differently depending on the social environment, the time and the location [10]. Thus, generalisability of people's behaviours and understandings is an issue which is not targeted to be achieved by interpretivist researchers since it does not tell in depth about people's action, as the latter is more contextual and particular [10].

Reference [12] tackled different general questions to frame research within a philosophical perspective including ontology and epistemology, as two common areas of philosophy related to any research; ontology raises questions regarding the nature of reality, such as, what is the nature of the world? And what is real? Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowing and the construction of knowledge, including such question: what is the relationship between the knower and the known? Starting from the following premise that interpretivism has a relativist ontology and a constructivist epistemology allows us to explore the philosophical perspective of the interpretivist research in depth. Ontological perspective can be presented as realist and relativist; the latter contrast the realist ontology, it rejects the view of the world adopted by the realist ontology which views the world as an orderly and law-bound space; instead interpretivism's relativist ontology is explained from the idea that reality is produced from individuals' experiences and consciousness; this reality is resolved by the social context and it is emerged out from people and their worlds [13]. The relativist ontology focuses on the various interpretations of the world and enquires about the out-there-ness of it [14]; on the other hand, the interpretivist epistemology is constructivist by nature. In other words, the epistemological perspectives are affected by the constructivist paradigm, which means that culture and society contribute in the generation of knowledge;

Open Science Index, Cognitive and Language Sciences Vol:13, No:9, 2019 publications.waset.org/10010771/pdf

thus, the emphasis is on individuals' construction of knowledge [13]. One key issue which dominates the epistemological perspective is that knowledge is based on induction, bottom-up process [15].

Interpretative research is critically reflective and contextual; in other words, it tackles and understands the problem within its context in order to deeply interpret and describe the phenomenon. Inquiring and interpreting an issue in depth means to allow yourself to look at the phenomenon being studied as a process [12]. Before conducting an interpretative research, it is very important to ask the question: what to interpret? As a valuable answer to this question is human experience; this is the case in this research study where the researcher has the same world view where the phenomenon occurred. Interpretive research questions whether the social world is made up of facts external to the researcher and the researched; it rather ignores the view that there is an objective external reality because it is based on discovering and exploring how individuals understand the world on an internal subjective basis; interpretive researchers ensure that the social reality cannot be explained without grasping the way peoples' subjective interpretations of reality affects the representation of social reality [16].

It seeks to understand the meanings that are constructed by those whom they study; from the interpretivist perspective, the nature of reality is constructed within its social context; in this research, the issue of exploring the communication challenges should be understood within its social and cultural contexts by providing explanations about the nature of knowledge and the link between the researcher and the participants, the international Algerian PhD students. Thus, the knowledge is constructed from the experiences of the international Algerian PhD students about whom the research is focused to understand the cultural challenges and the linguistic interference they face when discussing and interacting with their peers. The data collected from the participants under the interpretive research will be subjective, so the findings cannot be generalised.

As mentioned previously, this research study is framed within the interpretive paradigm since it intends to understand humans' behaviours and experiences. It is an appropriate paradigm for this proposed study because it helps in collecting data in an interactive way in order to understand completely the meanings of human behaviours and practices, and to capture and interpret people's thinking from the researcher's point of view [17]. Because the purpose of the interpretive research in this study is to investigate participants' experience regarding the communication challenges within a specific perspective, the following approach is suitable to this research study to facilitate the examination, the exploration and the interpretation of key issues: communication challenges regarding cultural differences and language interference. Accordingly, it demands to describe the situations in which participants experience the previous issues.

Interpretive inquiry is a type of research investigation which may include both qualitative and quantitative approaches [12]; yet in this current study, the investigation will be carried out and the data will be collected through qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a recent phenomenon which has been adopted by many social scientists and researchers. To this end, interpretive research typically employs the use of qualitative data because it seeks to obtain knowledge of the world which arises from understanding then reflecting on a particular incident and on what happens, not just having experience of it. Qualitative research has intended to focus on human interpretation in which it puts the emphasis on participants' and researchers' interpretation and understanding of a particular issue [15]. Reference [18] mentioned that interpretive research exploits qualitative methods in order to enable the researcher to engage intensively with the deep experience of the participants; thus, the interpretive researcher reflects their biases, subjectivities and their personal background that frame their interpretations throughout the study; this means, interpretive researchers attempt to gain deep and subjective understanding of people's lives. So, if a researcher is conducting an ethnographic study, he is in the middle lane of the interpretative research [19]. Ethnography is intended to study one particular group, a cultural group, in a natural and real setting for long period of time where the lived experience is encountered [20]. Thus, this study can be further discussed in detail through an ethnographic perspective. The function found in qualitative research is to produce explanations that are inductive, in which inductive logic refers to generation and justification of general explanations; most of the qualitative researches are inductive by nature in which they move from the specific to the general by generating theories and explanations [21]. To adequately meet the general focus and the specific aims of the study, qualitative interpretive approach is used to search and deliver the view points of the participants or, in particular, the people with whom the researcher has contact [22]. The rationale for conducting the current study through an interpretive approach is explained by addressing the current issue from the interpretive researcher lens; furthermore, she will gain deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and gives rich interpretation of the current research issue. The study is conducted through an interpretive plan, thus, the data will be collected in a qualitative procedure through an interpretive and descriptive lens. The nature of this interpretivist study will be discovered further through a qualitative method, which is the semi-structured interview.

III. The Semi-Structured Interview and Its Use in Interpretivist Research

The interview as a research method is a kind of discussion with someone to get information, opinions and attitudes; this contact between the interviewee and the interviewer may take different forms such as, face-to-face or telephone contact [19]. To understand and explore people's own experience, interpretive researchers use interviews to enquire and investigate about the participants' real-life, choices and intentions, as well, the interviewee should explain themselves and their desires to the interviewer. Semi-structured interview is a kind that lies between the structured and unstructured

Open Science Index, Cognitive and Language Sciences Vol:13, No:9, 2019 publications.waset.org/10010771/pdf

types; the semi-structured interview does not allow choosing from a set of answers, rather it is based on open-ended format of questions which paves the way for the participants to express and talk about their beliefs, ideas and experiences. This kind of interview enables the researcher to interpret the participants' experiences and flexibly reorder the flow of the interview questions. Interpretive researchers intend to allow a comfortable atmosphere for the participants to bring their own experience to the study; but people are different, and therefore, the interview questions may vary across participants [23]. Semi-structured interview is the most common type used among students in their research; for example, if you intend to do an ethnographic study, it is crucial to get involved in your research environment to have a closer and deep understanding of the participants experience [19]. Understanding people's experiences based on subjective interpretations of other researchers cannot provide an in-depth grasp of the issue; then, interviewing them is helpful for the researchers to start interpreting what cultural and social experiences and interaction the participants share with them; researchers allow themselves time to review their interpretations, even with the participants. Thus, this interpretation does not constitute an absolute knowledge, instead it is subjective; based on different levels of subjectivity, the researchers provide thick description of the social phenomena and participants experiences [10].

The reliance on the interview as a method to conduct a research and collect data to carry out a study has been increased; yet, the challenges and critiques over this method can be exceeded as well [15]. Despite of the critiques which can be used to robust the qualitative interviewing rather than underplay its value, the interview may remain a good tool to explore people's lives and experiences. This demands from the researcher to interpret the data he has collected so far; thus, this interview may be rejected since it may fall into researcher's subjectivity which is resulted from the researcher's own interpretation [15]. Since semi-structured interview requires from the interviewer to have a pre-set and order of questions, he should be ready to prepare and add a number of follow-up questions. One common pros of the semi-structured interview is that it permits the participants to take part in the research by talking freely, broaden their answers and even engage to modify and alter the themes of the interview the same as the interviewee who plays a great role in contributing to the collection of data [24]. Semi-structured interview gives the researcher time to check the interviewees' responses; the researcher can also find out and use unpredicted information as it is disclosed; in other words, this type of interview is flexible in its structure to allow the researcher to have ideas which are not predicted [25]. However, in the semi-structured and unstructured interview, the participants may go in-depth and afford too much information which is not appropriate and usable [26]. It is mentioned as well that this method is time consuming and may lead to difficulties in organising data [25].

Based on the previous studies, semi-structured interview is all about getting involved in a conversation with the participants to discover what their feelings and views are about an experience [27]. When conducting an interview, the interpretive researcher affords complete freedom to the participants to suggest and request; it means, the researcher does not have a tight control over the participants [23]. In other words, the semi-structured interview is flexible, and thus, it is the most common type used by interpretive researchers [28]. The interview schedule is a list of issues the interviewer intends to cover; it is important for the researcher to set a reminder to have an organised interview. This interview schedule will be constructed based on the topic including the following themes: communication difficulties, cultural differences and language interference. Participants in this study are international PhD Algerian students whose first language is Arabic, second language is French, and foreign language is English. Two semi-structured interviews are intended to be conducted with two international Algerian students; those participants are purposefully selected since their experience is the source of data collection. The choice of the location of conducting the interview is crucial because it should be a place where the interviewee feels at ease; thus, the current interview will take place within a flexible setting depending on the participant's preference. The researcher sets up the interview with a brief introduction in which she explains the aim of the study and the procedure through which the interview is constructed. Accordingly, if the participants agree to take part in the current study, the researcher will conduct an interview with them, which should take no more than 40 minutes to complete. The researcher also has to remind the participants that she would take notes and audiotape the conversation to accurately record information. After signing the consent, the interview will take place; the interviewees are free to withdraw from the study anytime they feel uncomfortable. The two participants will be asked the same questions about their experience of facing communication challenges when discussing and interacting with their British peers, with follow up questions, prompts, and different ordering questions depending on their responses. During the interview, the researcher has to be very keen about any verbal or non-verbal cues from the interviewees.

IV. A Discussion of the Researcher's Role in This Research

Some researchers consider reflexivity as a key characteristic to determine people's awareness; in other words, people are conscious of their consciousness for being conscious; even in everyday life people may do reflexivity, which means, how they comment on other selves; however, reflexivity in conducting a research could mean more than being shrewd, it should assist the researcher to have major insights into own and social experience [29]. Reference [30] considered reflexivity as an issue where the researchers should explicitly engage in self-aware meta-analysis.

The researcher's role as being interpretive in this study lies in the sense that she should reflect upon the details and every aspect of the research including the experiences and the behaviours of the participants, her personal experience as an interviewer, and her experience when facing the same

Open Science Index, Cognitive and Language Sciences Vol:13, No:9, 2019 publications.waset.org/10010771/pdf

communication challenges as the participants. Acknowledging being a researcher who shares the same experience with the participants, she was eager to enquire about the participants' experiences. The researcher will present the information she will obtain from the participants since they will be studied in the context of where they live the experience as they cannot disassociate from their natural lives. By reflecting upon her interpretations and her previous experience of facing communication challenges when she first came to England, reflexivity may allow her to better explore and understand the participants' experience through asking various questions: is the topic clearly explained to the participants? Do the interview themes test what should be tested? Do the participants speak freely, and are they any issues which confront them? Why the researcher interprets and draws such deduction after the interview? Having outlined the interview questions, she has to think carefully and appropriately about the interview perspectives that inform best and reflect the participants' understanding; the researcher started the enquiry recognising that the research study is intended to subjects and restricted to humans. The qualitative research in general is intended to give more consideration to the critical reflection of the researcher's experience as being an insider-researcher [31]. The researcher records all her experiences and explores how her experience might have been involved in the research, as a source of data, and how it might be different from that of the participants; yet reflecting and interpreting personal experience can be problematic for both the researcher and the researched participants.

V. Conclusion

Throughout the conclusion, the reflection process will be presented which allows the researcher to reflect critically on her experience and re-plans another conclusion that reflects on what she has learned about the interpretive approach in general and the place of the semi-structured interview in particular. The stage of reflecting on any research study is a crucial part. Although, the researcher fulfilled that the interpretive approach and the data-collection method adopted in this study was significantly appropriate, she has to reflect precisely on her own personal experience in conducting semi-structured interview within the interpretive research. As an interpretive researcher, her own personal experience does not ensure that the cultural differences and second language interference are the actual situation of any person who confronts the communication challenges; what might be challenging and negative for the researcher, might be good for the other; besides, among the most common dilemmas that confronted the researcher and may confront any other interpretive researcher is that the interpretations are not true, in other words, truth or knowledge is relative in interpretive research [32]. Each researcher has his own interpretation depending on his view and the way he approaches the study; thus, there is no wrong interpretation over another one, the only thing is the ability of the researcher to explain and support his research and the interpretations. The data collected through interpretive research plan could be biased and subjective; for this reason, the interpretative approach does not allow generalisation of the findings.

To this end, it is crucial to remind ourselves that interpretive research presents substitutional accounts and understanding of the others' experience to open up to the world where we live [33]. The researcher shares the same view with [34] who argued that interpretive approach is more suitable for public policy and social world than the empiricist approach; thus, the main question to be raised is, how can we consider the interpretive approach as an effective one? As an interpretive researcher, she considers it as efficient approach to explore social issues. As the current interpretive research is guided by the research questions and aims, she has been able to construct a semi-structured interview and to produce a schedule which follows this framework to facilitate the process of interviewing. The interview should be organised beforehand; in other words, the interviewer and the interviewee should agree upon the time and the setting where the interview will be conducted [35]. This is what makes it flexible to create a comfortable atmosphere for the participants to feel relaxed enough to really interact and tell the interviewer the intended responses; as well, the place of the interview should offer privacy, it should be informal and uncluttered. In particular, the interview should be conducted in the middle of the field work duration because the researcher, as an interviewer, has had certain issues which she wants to focus on in the study through asking open-ended questions. Given the need to address the current research problem, the interpretive approach will be appropriate to understand and investigate the participants' experience. Based on the researcher's opinion, the interpretive approach is crucial in exploring background issues of a given study, and therefore, it will be a preliminary approach that will guide her future research activity. Besides, when her future research intentions are targeted to understand and interpret the participants' experience and behaviours, the interpretive approach will be suitable. Any research approach will vary according to the aim of the study; thus, if the purpose is to generate theories and explanations of a phenomenon, the inductive reasoning will be considered as part of qualitative interpretive approach.

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