


The Effect of Translating Persian Stories on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Speaking Ability			Linguistics
			Keywords: Speaking ability, Translation, Persian stories, Intermediate level.
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Abstract			
<p>The current study attempts to determine the effect of translating Persian stories on Iranian intermediate EFL Learners' speaking ability. To achieve this, sixty intermediate Iranian EFL learners were selected through a cluster random sampling procedure. Because of the institute's policy and regular teaching program, it was not possible to assign all of the participants into the two groups randomly, and thus the students were required to remain intact in their regular classes during the intervention time slots. They formed two groups, namely Control and Experimental groups. Before the study, the participants of both group had a pre-test of speaking. Then the Participants in the control group were treated with the existing method of teaching speaking (Communicative Language Teaching Approach: CLT) but the participants in the experimental group had some translation tasks in addition to being instructed through CLT that was translating Persian stories into English. The treatment lasted for five weeks, each week two sessions. After the treatment was finished, the participant in both groups of the study took the speaking ability post-test. Their post-test scores were analyzed through ANCOVA, and the result indicated that the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group after the intervention.</p>			

Introduction

Developing speaking skills is of vital importance in EFL/ESL programs. Nunan (1999) and Burkart and Sheppard (2004) argue that success in learning a language is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the (target) language. Therefore, speaking is probably a priority for most learners of English (Florez, 1999). Speaking instruction is important because it helps students acquire EFL speaking skills thus converse spontaneously and naturally with native speakers. Furthermore, if the right speaking activities are taught in the classroom, speaking can raise general learners' motivation and make the English language classroom a fun and dynamic place to be (Nunan, 1999; Celce-Murcia, 2001). In addition, speaking can support other language skills. Recent research has considered oral interaction as an important factor in the shaping of the learner's developing language (Gass & Varionis, 1994). For instance, it was proved that learning speaking can help the development of reading competence (Hilferty, 2005), the development of writing (Trachsel & Severino, 2004) as well as the development of listening skills (Regina, 1997).

Taking into account the importance of developing EFL speaking skills, it is vital to determine the speaking skills SL/ FL learners have to acquire in order to converse with native language speakers. Actually, it was assumed that the interactional nature of spoken language requires the speaker's ability to use motor-perceptive skills, which are concerned with correctly using the sounds and structures of the language, and interactional skills, which involve using the previous skills for the purposes of communication. This means that EFL students should acquire the knowledge of how native speakers use language in the context of structured interpersonal exchanges in which many factors interact (Bygate, 1987 & Brown, 2001). In addition, speaking requires that learners understand when, why, and in what ways to produce language (sociolinguistic competence) (Burns & Joyce, 1997; Harmer, 2001). A good speaker hence synthesizes this array of skills and knowledge to succeed in a given speech act.

Literature Review

From the communicative point of view, speaking has many different aspects including two major categories – accuracy, involving the correct use of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation practiced through

controlled and guided activities; and, fluency, considered to be ‘the ability to keep going when speaking spontaneously’. This is, however, rather a superficial view of this skill.

According to Bygate (1987, 3), in order to achieve a communicative goal through speaking, there are two aspects to be considered – knowledge of the language, and skill in using this knowledge. It is not enough to possess a certain amount of knowledge, but a speaker of the language should be able to use this knowledge in different situations.

We do not merely know how to assemble sentences in the abstract: we have to produce them and adopt to the circumstances. This means making decisions rapidly, implementing them smoothly, and adjusting our conversation as unexpected problems appear in our path. (Bygate 1987, p. 3)

Being able to decide what to say on the spot, saying it clearly and being flexible during a conversation as different situations come out is the ability to use the knowledge ‘in action’, which creates the second aspect of speaking -the skill, Bygate notes (p.4).

Bygate views the skill as comprising two components: production skills and interaction skills, both of which can be affected by two conditions: firstly, processing conditions, taking into consideration the fact that ‘a speech takes place under the pressure of time’; secondly, reciprocity conditions connected with a mutual relationship between the interlocutors (Bygate, 1987, 7).

Beginning with Noam Chomsky (1986) and his distinction between competence- ‘a speaker’s intuitive knowledge of the rules of his native language’, and performance - ‘what he actually produces by applying these rules’, the theory of communicative competence has gone through a serious development so far.

Brown (1994) refers to several theories of communicative competence as they developed through periods of time, of which the most notable ones include the studies by Hymes (1972), Savignon (1983), Cummins (1979, 1980), or Canale and Swain (1980). Nevertheless, as Brown suggests, the newest views are probably best captured by Lyle F. Bachman (1990) in his schematization of what Bachman calls ‘language competence’. (Brown 1994, 227-229)

For the purpose of the thesis, I drew upon Lyle F. Bachman’s *Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing* (1990). As a useful source of information for helping with the interpretation of Bachman’s framework of communicative competence, I made use of Douglas H. Brown’s *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* (1994).

According to Bachman (1990, p. 84), communicative competence, ‘communicative language ability’ (CLA), comprises two basic features – firstly, knowledge, competence in the language, and, secondly, the capacity for implementing or using the competence. Bachman proposes three components that in his view ‘communicative language ability’ framework includes, they are: language competence, strategic competence, and psychological mechanisms.

While language competence is a set of specific knowledge components that are utilized in communication via language, strategic competence is the term that Bachman uses to characterize the mental capacity for implementing the components of language competence in contextualized communicative language

use; the third component, psychophysiological mechanisms present the neurological and psychological processes involved in the actual execution of language as a physical phenomenon. (Bachman, 1990, p. 84)

Bachman divides language competence into two categories: organizational and pragmatic competence.

Organizational competence, further splitting into grammatical and textual competence, presents those abilities involved in controlling the formal structure of language for producing or recognizing grammatically correct sentences, comprehending their propositional content, and ordering them to form texts. (Bachman, 1990, p. 87)

Grammatical competence includes the knowledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax, and phonology and graphology all of which govern, according to Bachman, the choice of words to express specific significations, their forms, arrangements in utterance, to express propositions, and their physical realization. Textual competence, on the other hand, includes the knowledge of the conventions for joining utterances together to form a text structured according to rules of cohesion and rhetorical organization, Bachman says. (Bachman, 1990, pp. 87-88)

According to Brown (1990, p. 229), what Bachman proposes here is a group of rules and systems that 'dictate' what a communication can do with the forms of language, whether they are sentence-level rules (grammar) or rules which control how, for example, spoken 'string' of sentences together (discourse).

Both competences than, in relation to oral production, provide devices for creating cohesive relationships in oral discourse and organizing such discourse in ways that are 'maximally efficient in achieving the communicative goals of the interlocutors', Bachman concludes (p.89).

The second category of language competence that Bachman distinguishes, pragmatic competence, also splits into two further competences– illocutionary competence, and sociolinguistic competence. Both competences concern 'the relationship between utterances and the acts of functions that speakers . . . intend to perform through these utterances' (p.89).

While illocutionary competence deals with the knowledge of pragmatic conventions for performing acceptable language functions (ideational, heuristic, manipulative, imaginative), sociolinguistic competence refers to the knowledge of the sociolinguistic conventions for performing these language functions in a given context with regard to the sensitivity to dialect or variety , register, naturalness, and cultural references and figures of speech. (Bachman, 1994, pp. 92-98)

Brown interprets illocutionary competence as functional aspects 'pertaining to sending and receiving intended meanings' while sociolinguistic aspects of pragmatic competence relate to 'such considerations as politeness, formality, metaphor, register, and culturally related aspects of language' (p.229).

The study aims to answer the following major research question:

Research Question: Does translating Persian stories have any effect on Iranian intermediate EFL Learners' speaking ability?

Methodology

This section discusses the methodology used for the purpose of research. The overall design of data collection, instrumentation that was used, the procedure adopted for sampling, the strategies of analysis and interpretation is clarified in this section. The study used quantitative method of educational research to answer the main research question.

Research Design

In an attempt to uncover the possible effects of paragraph writing on learners' reading, an *empirical* study was conducted. This study used a Quasi-experimental design. A quasi-experimental design is one that looks a bit like an experimental design but lacks the key ingredient- random assignment.

Quasi-experimental research is a type of design in quantitative research without random assignment. Many second language studies involve a comparison between two or more groups. Control group does not receive the treatment or receives alternative treatment (in this case it was taught by only one teacher). The control group would typically take the same pretest and posttest as would the experimental groups, but would not have the same treatment in between tests. Then participants are given a pretest to ensure comparability of the participant groups prior to their treatment, and a posttest to measure the effects of treatment.

Participants

Because of the institute's policy and regular teaching program, it was not possible to randomize all of the participants into the two groups and thus the students wererequired to remain intact in their regular classes during the intervention time slots. In the current study students remained intheir intact class, allocated into experimental and control groups, and received differentinstructional interventions at the same time in the same class.

The study was performed in Padideh Language Institute at Tonekabon, Mazandaran, Iran. The participants were 60 Iranian pupils (20 males and 40 females), enrolled in two conversation classes. The experimental class was taught by two teachers while the control group was handled by one teacher as usual. For this study, the researcher used a convenience sample that consisted of two classes taking part in the quasi-experimental design.

As far as the pupils' background and language abilities are concerned, all of the pupils were native Iranian speakers. The pupils in both classes were described by the teachers as having intermediate proficiency in English based on their level of placement in institute's classes. Overall, the general impression after the first set of observations conducted before the research, was that the participants of both groups represented quite similar level of proficiency in English as a foreign language.

As for the teacher's backgrounds and methodology, the teacher have a general teaching education degree at the University, which lasted for 5 years. The researcher himself instructed both the experimental group and the control group. The experimental group was taught certain English structures through form-focused instruction while the control group's participants received no form-focused feedback on the certain structures under the study.

Instrumentation

Speaking test

The speaking test was used as a pre- test and -post-test to measure students' English speaking performance. The test contains three tasks: talking about picture differences, reading a text aloud, and expressing one's opinion about a particular topic. The scoring rubric of the test provided a measure of quality of performance on the basis of five criteria: pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, fluency and interactive communication on a five-rating scale ranging from 90- 100 meaning "excellent" to 0-49 meaning "fail".

Validity of a test is an important feature for a research instrument (Wiersma, 2000). An instrument is said to have validity if it measures exactly what it is supposed to measure. All the items in the speaking test were reviewed by the researchers as self-validation. Then the items were given to three experts to ensure the content validity of the test. The experts were asked to validate and evaluate the test by completing a checklist for validating the English speaking test. The results of the experts' evaluation of the test and the scoring rubric showed that all of the criteria used to assess the test on the five-scale indicating positive opinions of the experts.

Reliability of speaking test in this study was estimated by test-retest method. It involved administering the same test twice to a group of students within the span of a few days (10 days) and calculating a correlation coefficient between the two sets of scores. The assumption was that the testees would get the same scores on the first and the second administrations of the same test. This statistical method was adopted in order to obtain the reliability of the speaking test. The estimated reliability of the speaking test in the current study was 0.85 measured through Cronbach's Alpha. Another essential component to test reliability is that of inter-rater reliability. As it relates to the current study, inter-rater reliability is the degree of agreement between two scorers. If the level of reliability between the two scorers reaches the level of significance, this may indicate that the two scorers are fair in their scoring. In the current study, the correlation coefficients obtained for the two scorers are 0.910 and 0.914, respectively, indicating quite high inter-rater reliabilities. Therefore, this test is reliable and valid for experimentation and could be considered as a research tool for measuring the sample's speaking test. A scoring rubric was used along with the scoring sheet for the purpose of grading. The grading of the speaking skills was based upon five criteria: (1) pronunciation (20%), (2) grammatical accuracy (3) vocabulary (20%), (4) fluency (20%), and (5) interactive communication (20%).

Procedures

The present study took place in three general phases, namely *Before* the instruction phase, *During* the instruction phase, and *After* the instruction phase. In the first phase, after laying the ground for the study, participants in both experimental and control groups were pretested on the speaking test and in different sections. In the second phase, speaking instruction for both groups was carried out by different methodology. That is, the experimental group was taught through translating Persian stories approach. However, the control group followed the instruction through regular speaking activities but lacked only translating Persian stories. And the final stage dealt with post-testing participants on the same measures that were used in the first phase. The control group was taught by the researcher during the same period. The same content was taught by the teacher which included the Conversations in the textbook.

Data Analysis Procedure

To examine whether significant differences existed between the two groups of participants prior and after the instruction, descriptive statistical procedures, and ANCOVA were applied to ascertain the extent to which translating Persian stories influenced the learners' speaking ability.

Results

Introduction

The present study made an attempt to investigate the effectiveness of translating Persian stories on Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability. In so doing, two intact classes consisting of 60 EFL learners were selected and were named as the experimental and the control groups. While the experimental group was trained through translating Persian stories to speaking instruction, the control group was taught by usual speaking instruction approach. The results of test scores were compared for the pretest and posttest of both groups to ascertain whether there has been any significant difference between the groups in terms of their speaking.

Therefore, in this regard, one general research question has been set forward to be answered by the current research:

Research Question: Does translating Persian stories have any effect on Iranian intermediate EFL Learners' speaking ability?

Descriptive Analysis of the Data

This section of the data analysis has to do with the interpretation of the descriptive analysis of the data. The results of the groups' descriptive statistics are summarized and tabulated in tables 1 and 2.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	30	5	14	11.75	1.17
Posttest	30	6	16	13	1.05
Valid N	30				

According to the above table, it is revealed that the pretest mean value of the control group for speaking test was 11.75 with the standard deviation of 1.17. With regard to its performance on the posttest, the control group showed some degree of improvement on the speaking test [Mean= 13, SD= 1.05].

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
pretest	30	8	15	12	2.03
posttest	30	12	18	15.50	1.18
Valid N	30				

Table 2 indicates the result of the descriptive statistics of the experimental group on the speaking measures before and after the treatment. Prior to the instruction, the experimental group had a mean value of 12

with the standard deviation of 2.03. However, it is revealed that its performance on the speaking test improved after the treatment. It can be inferred that the speaking instruction through using Persian translation of stories was effective in enhancing learners' speaking ability [Mean= 15.50, SD = 1.18].

Inferential Analysis of the Data

A one-way between-groups analysis of covariance was conducted to investigate the possible effect of Co-teaching on Iranian EFL learners' linguistic competence. Participants' scores on the pre-intervention administration of speaking test were used as the covariate in this analysis. The main ANCOVA results are presented in the Table 3, labeled Test of Between-Subjects Effects.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	323.757 ^a	2	161.878	166.024	.000	.853
Intercept	48.247	1	48.247	49.483	.000	.465
covariate	143.490	1	143.490	147.164	.000	.721
Groups	144.852	1	144.852	127	.000	.736
Error	55.577	57	.975			
Total	11046.000	60				
Corrected Total	379.333	59				
a. R Squared = .853 (Adjusted R Squared = .848)						

The findings of the Table 3 indicates that after adjusting for pre-intervention scores, there was a significant difference between the two intervention groups on post-intervention scores, $F(1, 57) = 127$, $Sig = .000$, partial eta squared= .73. Hence, the ANCOVA has revealed statistically significant difference between the two groups on the speaking performance when the potential differences at pre-test were taken into account.

In conclusion, it can be concluded that the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group in the posttest which shows that the teaching speaking through translation of Persian stories was of the high effectiveness for teaching speaking skill to Iranian EFL learners.

Conclusion and Discussion

The findings of the study suggest that teaching speaking through translation task is more effective than the existing method of teaching the speaking ability of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. Although no study before targeted the translation of Persian stories into English and its relationship to speaking ability, a number of studies focused on the explicit versus implicit kind of teaching speaking. For example studies conducted by Mahvelati and Mukundan(2012) and Szudarski(2012) were about the explicit versus implicit methods of teaching speaking.

Based on the findings related to hypothesis of this study, there was statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in terms of their speaking ability. The findings show that

the experimental group largely benefited from translation task. These findings are supported by the results reported by other studies.

The main aim of this study is to present and defend an innovative and practical method of teaching speaking. It also aims to present strengths and weaknesses in applying such a method. Speaking instruction should be given more attention in our EFL classes. More time and efforts should be exerted to develop this main skill and its sub-skills.

The results of the study suggest that the use of translating Persian short stories into English can lead to better speaking performance and thus teachers are required to apply the translation task even at their low level classes in EFL situations. The present program can be adopted for teaching speaking to students at other proficiency levels. Text-book writers should include certain short stories in their books, they are also required to include different translation task for the purpose of teaching speaking.

While the present study provided support to the effectiveness of translating Persian short stories in developing Iranian EFL students' on speaking ability of Iranian intermediate EFL learners, further research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of similar study in developing students' listening, writing and reading skills. Other studies are needed to investigate the effectiveness of applying a similar program over a longer period of time on students' skills especially on pronunciation and fluency.

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