

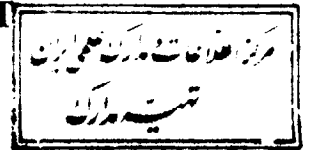
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IN THE NAME OF GOD

THE EFFECT OF FUNCTIONAL / NOTIONAL APPROACH ON
THE PROFICIENCY LEVEL OF EFL LEARNERS

AND

ITS EVALUATION THROUGH FUNCTIONAL TEST



BY

۱۳۷۷ / ۷ / ۱۹

MOHAMMAD REZA KOOROGHLI

THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

ALLAMEH TABATABAEE UNIVERSITY

TEHRAN, IRAN

JUNE, 1995

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DEDICATED:

TO MY MOTHER

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ABSTRACT

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BY

MOHAMMAD R. KOOZGHI, TEHRAN, 1995

For the last three or four decades, English language teaching (ELT) has been a potential field of inquiry for researchers the world over. They have aiming at working out a comprehensive approach to teaching English. ELT has, in consequence, gone through various stages of development. In the last decade, the quest culminated in the emergence of the Functional / Notional Approach to language teaching. The approach initiated and developed by the researchers and practitioners who were mostly concerned with teaching English as a second language (Krashen 1979; Terrell 1980; Allen 1980; Johnson and Morrow 1978). To date, nonetheless, the feasibility of adopting

the approach for teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) has not been fully scrutinized, an undertaking that the researcher has attempted to accomplish with regard to EFL in Iran. In practice, if not in theory, second language pedagogy has often proceeded on the assumption that knowledge about the second/foreign language is sufficient for effective use of the second language in actual communication situations (cf. Morrow 1977; Terrell 1977). Such an approach does not seem sufficient for preparing the learners to use the second language well in authentic situations. Wilkins (1977) points out that, "... what people want to do through language is more important than mastery of the language as an unapplied system".

Along with the same lines, attempts have been made to devise tests to measure the principles of Functional / Notional Approach (Carroll 1980; Farhady 1980; Jones 1977; Palmer and Bachman 1980; Savignon 1972). Since functional teaching tries to establish functional competence in the learner, functional testing seems to be a necessary alternative to or an appropriate suppletion for existing tests in assessing the learner's functional competence. In an attempt by the investigator to assess the learner's functional competence, a multiple-choice test was devised so as to tap the functional competence of the learners. The choices of the newly designed test were all grammatically correct with only one of them socially appropriate. On the

basis of the foregoing study, the researcher was led to question the emphasis unduly laid on the functional teaching and testing (In fact, this study focused on the following questions:

1. *Is there any difference between the effect of Functional / Notional Approach and the structural approaches to language teaching on the proficiency level of EFL learners?*

2. *Can a rather innovative language test referred to as "Functional Test" be devised so as to measure the proficiency level of EFL learners, and thus be as much reliable and valid a test instrument as an already standardized language test?*)

Accordingly, the following null hypotheses were proposed:

1. *There is no significant difference between the effect of Functional / Notional Approach and the structural approaches on the proficiency level of EFL learners.*

2. *The Functional Test is not as much reliable and valid a test instrument as an already standardized language test to measure the proficiency level of EFL learners.*

To test the first null hypothesis, a number of procedures were taken:

First, 82 male and female English major students at Allameh

Tabatabaee University, Faculty of Foreign Languages were selected from a total population of 100 students. The subjects were randomly assigned to two groups in both experiments. The incoming students who took the Fall '94 were regarded as the experimental group, and the incoming students who took the '95 Winter term were considered the control group. It was noteworthy to mention that in order to hold the teacher variable constant in this study, the investigator was also the two groups' teacher in Language Lab I for two consecutive terms.

Second, to ensure the homogeneity of the two groups in terms of their overall proficiency, the MELAB (Michigan English Language Assessment Battery) test was administered to both groups. Computing the means and variances and taking an F - test, the two groups were equated.

Third, to measure the effect of instructional materials on the overall proficiency of the subjects, the same MELAB test along with the newly designed Functional Test were administered to both groups as a posttest. The statistical procedures employed was the t - test formula. The results revealed that the subjects who were taught on the basis of the functional syllabus were better language performers, thus rejecting the first null hypothesis.

As for the second null hypothesis which was to determine whether the

newly developed Functional Test was as much reliable and valid as was the MELAB test, the following steps were taken:

First, to determine the reliability coefficients of the subtests along with the Functional Test, an internal consistency measure, namely KR-21 was used. Then, these coefficients were adjusted by means of the Spearman-Brown Prophecy Formula. As shown in chapter 4, the adjusted results are reliable.

Next, to determine the concurrent validity of the Functional Test, intercorrelation coefficients were used. The adopted formula was the Pearson Product Moment Correlation. (see chapter 4)

Considering the statistical properties of the Functional Test, it can be safely concluded that the Functional Test was as much reliable and valid as the MELAB subtests. As such, the second null hypothesis was also rejected.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

A. Functional Approach to Language Teaching

The inadequacies of structuralists and existing cognitive methodologists in dealing with communicative activities and preparing functionally competent language learners led scholars to seek alternative methods for teaching modern languages. It was soon realized that in order to develop a theory of language teaching that would overcome the shortcomings of existing theories, the many diverse parameters of language behavior including linguistic, social, psychological, situational and probably many others should be taken into consideration. It was also realized that teaching linguistic structures of language without paying attention to how those structures are actually used was not sufficient. In other words, social appropriateness of an utterance, in terms of who is talking to whom, when and under what circumstances, is just as important as its linguistic accuracy.