Az-Zahra University

Faculty of Persian Literature, Foreign Languages and History

Thesis Title

The Relationship Between Task Type and Oral Communication Strategies Used By Iranian EFL Learners

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By

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Sep,2009

IN The Name Of The Almighty

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Abstract

For communication to succeed, speakers and listeners need to work together and coordinate their individual actions and beliefs in order to build a mutual agreement on the content of their messages and it needs communication strategies (Tarone, 1981:288).

This study is an attempt to investigate communication strategies used by Iranian EFL learners during performing information gap, opinion gap and reasoning gap tasks and to study whether these tasks affect the use of communication strategies or not. Moreover the effect of language proficiency on selecting the communication strategies is being investigated. Participants of this study were 60 female EFL learners who took part in the tasks. The whole process of performing the tasks was tape recorded, then transcribed and the communication strategies were extracted from the text.The method of scoring was based on the frequency counts of communication strategies. Therefore chi-square was utilized.The results revealed that there is a statistically significant relationship between the kind of the task and communication strategies used by Iranian EFL learners. Also the results revealed that the high proficient learners have used more strategies than low proficient learners and high proficient learners used more complicated strategies (i.e. paraphrase) than low proficient learners.

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List of Abbreviations:

CSs

Communication strategies

EFL

English as a foreign language

ESL

English as a second language

TOEFL

Test of English as a Foreign Language

Chapter One
Introduction

CHAPTER ONE

1-1. Introduction

When it comes to knowing about a language, ordinary people often tend to regard it as equal to speaking the language. “Are you able to get your message across in a foreign language?” “Will you be able to handle colloquialisms?” “How proficient a speaker are you?” You may have heard such typical questions from parents, friends, co-workers, and those who are interested in learning how to speak a second language. Speaking a second language as fluently and accurately as possible has become a dream for a lot of EFL students to come true. Luoma (2004) states that: “The ability to speak in a foreign language is at the very heart of what it means to be able to use a foreign language” (Cited in Wongsawang, 2006, p.44)

With the emergence of communicative language teaching in general, and some alternative approaches to language learning and teaching in particular, it seems that the focus of language learning process has shifted from audiolingualism to more communicative approaches. Though there are places where still audiolingualism is being practiced, most language institutes around the globe have turned their attention to more recent approaches to language learning and teaching and have adopted more communicative approaches to language learning and teaching. One approach that has accepted a lot of attention over the past twenty five years is a task-based approach to language teaching and learning. Nunan(1989) maintains that task-based language teaching (TBLT) is actually developed out of

communicative language teaching (CLT) and even considers it a strong version of communicative language teaching. Richards & Rodgers (2001) believe that in a task based approach the primary focus is away from language forms to negotiated meaning. Ellis (2003) also states that a task based approach engages learners in real life, authentic, communicative activities so that the meaningful negotiation is prompted very rapidly.

The present research project has made every possible effort to expose a group of language learners to a series of task-based activities such as information gap, opinion gap and reasoning gap activities to see whether these activities affect the oral communication strategies which EFL learners use during performing the activities.

The present study provides different definitions of task, its classification, definition of communication, and communication strategies. Theories of language and language learning and teaching researches underlying TBLT will also be discussed in detail in chapter two.

A comparison is also made between high intermediate and low intermediate EFL learners in using the oral communication strategies during performing of each task (Information gap, Opinion gap, Reasoning gap) to see whether high intermediate EFL learners differ significantly from the low intermediate ones in using these strategies or not.

1-2. Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

As an English language teacher who has been teaching English for 6 years I have noticed that little attention has been paid to communication strategies (CSs) by

teachers and curriculum developers. It might be because little work has been done in the field of oral communication strategies and most of the teachers are not trained well-enough to implement oral communication strategies in the classroom. They either lack the skills or knowledge necessary to carry out these strategies in the classroom.

Teachers with limited language proficiency will experience great difficulties in carrying out oral communication strategies. Designing specific tasks is also another problem to be dealt with. Designing certain tasks with a communicative purpose in mind requires great skill and awareness on the part of the teacher. Critical features of a task must be born in mind when designing tasks. Task based instruction is a perspective within a CLT framework which views learning process as a set of communicative tasks which are directly linked to the curricular goals. Bachman (1990) states that there seems to be some types of task tests that are particularly susceptible to the effects of test taker's CSs, in that they can successfully complete such tasks by utilizing their CSs to compensate for deficiencies.

In recent years CLT has been the principal focus of language teachers. In CLT communication plays a central role which is the primary aim of each language learner. Furthermore, tasks are proposed within the framework of CLT. In CLT the communication and its strategies which are used to compensate deficiencies in communication are of utmost importance, consequently here emerges a need to examine the relationship between the tasks and communication strategies.

The present study aims at examining CSs during performing tasks (information gap, opinion gap, reasoning gap) in particular and communication in general. On the

other hand language proficiency level has always been a determining factor in the use of language hence, this study will also try to compare the CSs used by high and low proficient EFL Iranian learners in order to be able to find out the CSs used by participants with different levels of language proficiency.

1-3. Significance of the Study

With the advent of modern approaches to language teaching and learning, like communicative approach, the attention of those involved in this field has been turned from purely grammatical and structural features of language towards more communicative ones, developing new types of techniques for teaching foreign languages.

Brown (2001) found the following:

The "task based instruction" is not a new method. Rather, it puts task at the center of one's methodological focus. It views the learning process as a set of communicative tasks that are directly linked to the curricular goals they serve, the purposes of which extend beyond the practice of language for its own sake. (p. 50).

Willis (1998) believes that 'task' is taken as goal oriented activity which has a clear purpose and which involves achieving an outcome creating a final product that can be appreciated. Techniques, principles and process/product-based approaches application of task based learning and their contribution to foreign language learning and acquisition have been among the hottest topics in the field of foreign language teaching since early nineties (Mc donough, 1995; Klapper, 2003).