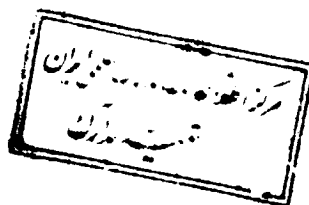


In The Name Of God

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***The Effect Of Practicing Pragmatic Tests On The
Students' Comprehension Ability (Oral & Written)***

**A Thesis Submitted In Partial Fulfillment Of The Requirements For
The Degree Of Master Of Arts (MA) In Teaching English As A
Foreign Language (TEFL)**

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We certify that this thesis, entitled, “*The Effect Of Practicing Pragmatic Tests On The Students' Comprehension Ability (Oral & Written)*” is the bona fide work of *Ebrahim Barjeste* conducted under our guidance and supervision.

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TO MY PARENTS

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Table Of Contents

	page
Acknowledgements	I
Table Of Contents	II
Abstract	IV
CHAPTER ONE:	
1.1 Introduction	2
1.2 Background	3
1.3 Statement Of The Problem	11
1.4 Significance And Justification Of The Study	12
1.5 Research Question And Hypothesis	13
1.6 Definition Of The Important Terms	14
1.7 Delimitation Of The Study	15
CHAPTER TWO:	
Review Of The Related Literature	
2.1 What Is Pragmatics?	16
2.2 What are Pragmatic Tests?	20
2.2.1 Cloze Test	22
2.2.2 Dictation	30
2.3 Listening Comprehension	34
2.3.1 Introduction	34
2.3.2 Development In Listening Comprehension	35
2.4 Reading Comprehension	43
2.4.1 What Is Reading?	43
2.4.2 Comprehension	45
2.4.3 Reading Comprehension	46
CHAPTER THREE:	
Method	52

3.1 Introduction	52
3.2 Subjects	52
3.3 Procedure	53
3.4 Teaching Material	54
3.5 Instrumentation	54
3.6 Statistical Procedure	55
CHAPTER FOUR:	
Results And Discussion	57
4.0 Introduction	57
4.1 Data Analysis	57
4.1.2 Analysis Of Variances	59
CHAPTER FIVE	65
Conclusion And Implications	65
5.1 Pedagogical Implications	66
5.2 Research Implications	66
REFERENCES	68
APPENDICES	76
Appendix 1: Proficiency Tests	
Appendix 2: Cloze Tests	
Appendix 3: Dictation Tests	
Appendix 4 : Statistical Analyses	

Abstract

As a matter of fact all the infants come to this world by a built - in predisposition to communicate orally and when they grow up , they learn to communicate by means of written discourse through studying and not only through exposure . But in the case of foreign language learning situation , the instructional focus is on the ways which can help the students to improve their ability to comprehend and process the language which they are exposed to. To this end, this investigation has been carried out to show the effects of practicing pragmatic tests as one of the possible techniques which can improve the learner's ability to comprehend oral and written language . In this study the subjects were adult intermediate students of Kish institute who were divided into four groups . The course which was intended for this study included practicing cloze and dictation passages in addition to the normal procedure for the experimental groups. The improvement made by the experimental groups during this study shows that practicing pragmatic tests can play a significant role on the learner's ability to comprehend oral and written language . The improvement made by the learners during this period of time was partly due to the normal instructional procedures of the class and partly due to their exposure to the pragmatic tests.

Chapter One

Introduction

1-1- Introduction

Almost all the infants have got the built-in predisposition to communicate by means of ear and mouth when they are only exposed to language and later on they learn to communicate by means of written discourse through studying and not only through simple exposure .

But in the case of foreign language learning situation, since the learner is not exposed to the language fully and his/ her exposure is restricted only to the classroom situation , the instructional focus of language teachers has been on the ways which can help the students to develop their listening comprehension ability at the first stage of learning and as a pre-requisite for the other skills . Therefore, in the case of written communication , reading has been one of the most important activities in any language classroom as a means of getting some insights from the others through some written texts . In these activities, perceiving the written text in order to understand the literal and inferential meaning has been of great importance both to learners and teachers. But in the case of comprehension of oral language , the process of understanding speech in foreign language has not received its own values and it has been almost neglected although it is one of the key skills in acquiring and learning a language . Hence this study is designed to investigate one of the practical ways of improving student's abilities to read and listen in order to understand the message as the first step in any communication.

1-2- Background

A. Teaching or testing?

Language teaching and testing are considered two indispensable parts of education which are so interrelated that it seems actually impossible to separate them from each other. A very brief review of the history of these two disciplines will reveal that the advancements in language teaching methods (which is in turn affected by other disciplines like linguistics & psychology) have had significant impacts on testing methods of the time.

Practically speaking, measurement and consequencing evaluations will encourage the students and will motivate them in learning and also those decisions which are made on the basis of the learners' performance on the tests and can help the teacher to provide a kind of positive classroom experience for the students (Farhady, et.al.1994).

Davies (1990) considers language testing as a central phenomenon to language teaching and mentions that it is normal for teaching to be directed towards assessment, labeled examination:

"if provides goals for language teaching, and it monitors, for both teachers and learners, success in reaching those goals. Its influence on teaching (the notorious backwash or washback effect)...(P.1) "

Considering all these points and due to the fact that language testing has got multidisciplinary characters and it follows teaching approaches , Spolsky has tried to classify language testing methods into three different trends:

" it is useful , though an overgeneralization , to divide language testing into three major trends, which I label the prescientific , the psychometric - structuralist and the integrative - sociolinguistic trends. The trends follow in order but overlap in time and approach . The third picks up many elements of the first and the second and the third co-exist and compete. But the crude classifications will provide a framework for discussion and some notions of progress in the field (Spolsky, 1978).

B. Pre- scientific era

This trend in testing was highly affected by its counterpart trend in language teaching (Grammar translation method). It was believed that if a teacher knew how to teach a language he would know how to test it as well (intuitive stage) . Since the history of GTM dates back to the years of after Renaissance until the 18th century , language testing was non- scientific and traditional.

But what were the aims of language teaching at that time ? Motton

refers to some of them and writes:

"one of its aims was to teach grammar of the language by which was meant inflectional paradigms ... and certain rules of combining words into phrases and sentences ... the second aim was to teach the students to read the foreign language."

So explanation of grammar rules, word - for - word translation, memorizing lists of words are all those activities which were practiced in the class to achieve the GTM goals.

Considering all these aims and activities as the bases for language learning, testing could not deviate from these principles and bases. So what were the practiced different forms of tests at that time?

Taking all these aims into account, testing instruments were mainly translation, traditional dictation and free composition (Briere, 1972) and as Farhady (1994) mentions:

" Traditional tests also include a great deal of writing (composition) and reading comprehension. These item types are very similar to what is used in first language testing."

Although some of these techniques are still in practice, they lost their popularity when science entered to the game. Human beings tended to be more exact and objective in every measuring and decision making.

Spolsky (1979) writes; lack of reliability and validity are characteristics of this testing period (pre - scientific).

And with the emergence of structural linguistics and behavioristic psychology, the foundation of traditional testing went under question and many people claimed that lack of objectivity and consistency in the scoring method were the most serious deficiencies of the tests, i.e it was impossible to determine the statistical characteristics of these tests empirically and it simply means that these tests were totally subjective and impractical.

C. psychometric - Structuralist era

With the emergence of the second world war, gradual changes took place in the ways the people looked into learning a foreign language (and language testing) and also wartime language programmes in the united states and elsewhere and the growth of international agencies gave new importance (and funds) to language teaching projects (Baker, 1989).

The roots of this new approach can be traced back into two separate trends; one in linguistic and the other in psychology. But what happened in linguistics?

At that time a language description was broadly based on the work of American "Structuralist" linguists. Simply they believed in breaking the language system down into small bits, and then describing the ways in

which these elements are put back together (Baker, 1989):

Sentence				
Syntax :	Subject	Verb	phrase	
Lexis:	we	went	shopping	
Morphology:	we	go+ED	shop	ING
Phonology:	w i	w e n t	I	J

According to these structural linguists, grammar was a set of formal patterns in which the words of a language are arranged in order to convey meanings (Harsh, 1975).

As Diller (1971) and Rivers (1983) discuss, American structural linguistics is based on these principles:

- a. Language is speech, not writing*
- b. Language is set of patterns*
- c. Teach the language, not about the language*
- d. A language is what a native speaker says, not what someone thinks they ought to say*
- e. Languages are different*

Along with these improvements, behaviorism (a school in psychology enlightened the ways these languages were learned (habit formation).

Based on these grounds, practitioners in language teaching tried to devise a method which takes all these principles into consideration.

Audiolingual Method (ALM) put the highest emphasis on the oral skills.