The Effect of Oral Reproduction of Short Stories on Speaking Skill in Iranian High School Students (Case Study: Khorram Abad, Iran)

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Abstract: *Since speaking is important for most of the students, teachers should equip themselves with up-to-date techniques and methods of teaching this skill. One of these ways is using oral summary related to cognitive strategy. This can automates production since the focus is on meaning and content and it will be reinforced by using appropriate and interesting context like the one in short story rather than usual textbooks at schools. When students attend English classes they seek for something more interesting, they want fun, a way for showing themselves and talk. Therefore, there should be a difference not like in formal classrooms. In addition, they need motivation and short stories provide this and fill a gap, more ever they play as useful, meaningful content and draws students' focus on meaning rather than form. Since little study work exist in this regard, the study is crucial as it provides fruitful evidence on the nature of this investigation. Moreover, this study can help those dealing with foreign language teaching, such as syllabus designers, material developers, test makers, and the like.*

Keywords: ACTFL; speaking; OPI; oral reproduction; TEFL; high achiever; low achiever

1. Introduction

The learner's ability to function in another language is, in general, characterized in terms of being able to speak the language. More recently, much of the discussion relating to proficiency-centered instruction and testing has focused on the development of oral skills. Most language learners consider speaking ability as one of their primary aims of study, either because they would derive some personal satisfaction from being able to speak a second language or because they feel it would be useful in pursuing other interests or career goals. Thus, language teachers should identify some effective strategies for teaching speaking in the classroom. When one examines various theories of language comprehension and learning, it is clear that additional support may be found for using authentic input, together with meaningful and contextualized materials to encourage language production.

Chastain (1988) states that speaking is a main element in developing each language skill and conveying cultural knowledge. Students regard speaking as an essential skill to function in another country, and enroll in language classes with speaking as a principal goal. Speaking invites feedback, either overt or covert, which is the basis upon which students make adjustment in their learned language system. Thus, it is primarily important to find the most effective technique for teaching.

Learning strategies that directly involve the target language are known as direct strategies. All of them require mental processing of the language. However, the three groups of direct strategies (memory, cognitive, and compensation) do this processing in a different way and for different purposes.

Cognitive strategy, like oral summary, enables learners to understand and produce the new language by different means and improve their speaking. According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), summarization is to make a mental, oral, or written summary of new information obtained through listening and reading. In addition, as Chastain stated, oral summary of stories is related to the type of the sustained speech of "talking to" process where the speaker is addressing but not interacting with the listener and talks for a longer time and requires the least amount of language creation. The aim of this research is to improve speaking. In this connection, a crucial way of enhancing this is to use oral summary of meaningful and interesting context of short stories. Here, we have two groups; high achievers and low achievers to determine which group benefits the strategy more.

2. Review of Literature

As Nunan (1999) mentioned, learners should be given the maximum number of opportunities possible to practice the target language in meaningful context and situation. Here short story provides this context. As short stories commonly have a beginning, middle and an end, they may encourage students at all levels of language proficiency to continue reading them until the end to find out how the conflict is settled. Moreover, based on the Internet article "Using Literature in Teaching English as a Foreign/Second Language" (2004), "Literature is motivating. . . .Literature holds high status in many cultures and countries. For this reason, students can feel a real sense of achievement at understanding a piece of highly respected literature. Also, literature is often more interesting than the texts found in course books".

Having opportunities to speak the language may motivate the students to learn during reading activities of the new language elements that may be needed in future to communicate orally.

Listening and reading facilitate speaking since students learn new words and forms. According to Chastain(1988)"having the opportunity to process language at the slower speed

required in reading and writing prior to participating in listening and speaking activities should take some of the pressure off and enable them to perform more comfortably and satisfactory". In this study by using short stories students can use the sentences in real communication and since they have pre-fabricated patterns and use the text to make summary, they can speak and so have motivation. According to Taylor (1983, p. 70), students acquire language by using it rather than learning it by studying it. Here by using oral summary of short stories students connect sentences and try to provide coherence, meaningful speech. In addition, the usefulness of this strategy is in its nature to be more directly related to individual learning task.

Chastain (1988) argues that speaking has a definite and important place in the language learning. Language teachers should keep in mind that speaking is not a skill, which they can develop in isolation. Increasing speaking skills depends on the input, which the L2 learners receive from listening and reading and increasing speaking skills, which can help them to improve language students' listening, reading, and writing.

According to Hadley (2003, p. 125), "there is a hypothesis based on which opportunities must be provided for students to practice using language in a range of contexts likely to be encountered in the target culture. Also second language programs should provide students with ample opportunities to: (1) learn language in context; (2) apply their knowledge to coping with authentic language use situations". In addition, Slager (1978, p. 11) emphasized the need for context and "sentence connectedness" in language practice activities.

It should be mentioned that research into schema-based understanding supports the view that learning language in context maybe easier than processing language in "bits and pieces" or "in isolated sentence frames". According (McLaughlin, 1983), by studying the related units of information rather than isolated bits, more efficient processing becomes feasible"(p. 138). Therefore, students may require learning the language in a logical context, through either authentic input or language learning materials that simulate authentic input using sentences that follow in logical sequence. While linguistic science (and pedagogical materials) have traditionally focused on the sentence for analysis, the field of discourse analysis |has increasingly emphasized the significance of inter-sentential relationship in understanding and producing language (Brown 1980).

Therefore, in the present study, students practice language in meaningful, authentic context where major focus is on content not isolated words or sentences.

In addition, as Bygate (1987) pointed out; conversations can be analyzed in terms of routines. Routines are conversational ways of presenting information. He discusses two types of routines: information routines and interactional routines that contain frequently recurring types of information structures. These can be subdivided into routines that are basically expository in nature (for example telling a story, discussing something, giving a set of instructions, making a composition) and those that are evaluative (giving an explanation, making a justification, predicting, coming to decision). Here oral summary of short story is expository.

Gatbonton and Segalowitz (1988), arguing from an information-processing perspective of language acquisition, suggest that fluency in oral skills can be promoted by means of "creative automatization". Following Shiffrin and Scheider (1977), they also maintain that the development of automaticity requires "a great deal of practice"(p. 474).

Gatbonton and Segalowitz (1988) suggest that students practice a basic repertoire of expressions or phrases that are commonly needed in many communicative situations, and that such practice be incorporated within communicative activities where repetition of such phrases would occur naturally. So by using of short stories students learn many phrases and sentences needed in real communication, actually we give them input. In addition, oral summary of them causes automaticity of sentences.

As Chastain mentioned, Adherents of communicative language teaching see no reason to practice grammar forms in preparation for participating in communication activities. They believe that with enough comprehensible input language students can communicate without focusing their attention separately on grammatical forms. Here, we use oral summary for improving speaking that is related to cognitive strategies that according to O'Malley and Chamot (1990) are "more directly related to individual learning tasks and entail direct manipulation or transformation of the learning material" (p. 8). One of the categories of this strategy is summarizing that is producing a mental, oral, or written summary of new information obtained through listening or reading.

Using literature in EFL and ESL teaching is taken for granted for most teachers and researchers. But, how literature is studied and the nature of classroom discourse in such classrooms have not been thoroughly examined (Donato and Brooks, 2004; Kim, 2004; Mantero, 2001). The number of the studies that have dealt with what is happening in literature classes is very few. Reviewing the previous studies and books devoted to the relationship between literature and language learning shows that the study of literature seems to mainly entail receptive skills: mostly reading and literacy development, and just sometimes writing or speaking (Akyel and Yalcin, 1990; Carter and Long, 1991; Chen, 2006; Cho and Krashen 1994; Ghosn, 2002; Lao and Krashen, 2000; Lazar, 1993, 1994; Liaw, 2001; McKay, 1982; Parkinson &Thomas, 2000; Shanahan; 1997; Widdowson, 1984). Most studies that investigated the relationship between literature and language teaching have pointed out four benefits of literature: (1) literature may help to develop linguistic knowledge both on usage and use level (Lazar, 1994; McKay, 1982; Parkinson and Thomas, 2000; Widdowson, 1984), (2) literature may enhance students' motivation (Akyel and Yalcin, 1990; Ghosn, 2002; Lazar, 1993; McKay, 1982; Parkinson and Thomas, 2000), (3) literature has the potential to increase learners' understanding of the target culture (Akyel and Yalcin, 1990; Ghosn, 2002; Lazar, 1993, 1994; McKay, 1982; Parkinson and Thomas 2000; Shanahan; 1997), (4) literature may help

to develop skills of cognitive and critical thinking (Ghosn, 2002, Lazar, 1993; Parkinson and Thomas, 2000).

Whereas some instructors may still believe that teaching EFL encompasses focusing on linguistic benefits, and their students will finally communicate in the target language, others who have integrated literature in their curricula have realized that literature may add a new dimension to the teaching of EFL. For instance, Short stories may help students to learn the four skills -- listening, speaking, reading, and writing -- more effectively due to the motivational benefit embedded in the stories. Moreover, with short stories, instructors can teach literary, cultural, and higher-order thinking aspects. Furthermore, students may gain insight into literature by gaining entrance to a world familiar or unfamiliar to them because of the cultural aspects of stories, and taking a voyage from the literary text to their own minds to find meanings for ideas, resulting in critical thinking. In addition, one of the reasons which Vandrick (1997) lists for using literature with students is that literature can motivate the students "to explore their feelings through experiencing those of others" (p. 1).

As the major goal of EFL teaching is to help the students to fluently communicate in the target language, instructors should focus not only on linguistic benefits, but also on other benefits. In addition to the four skills, short stories can help instructors to teach literary, cultural and higher-order thinking aspects. As far as culture and other benefits are concerned, Henning (1993) points out that culture should be integrated into the curriculum and "literature is one feature . . . in the cultural domain that provides . . . added value beyond the level of language acquisition." Literature can help the students to expand their "linguistic and cognitive skills, cultural knowledge, and sensitivity" (Shanahan, 1997, p. 165). As a result, one can say that integrating short stories into the curriculum will help EFL students to become well-rounded professionals and human beings, because short stories teach more than the skills necessary for survival in the target language. Short stories teach literary, cultural, and higher order thinking benefits.

In the present study, we use both a cognitive strategy that here is oral summary and literature-short story-for improving speaking, actually we make a bridge between them.

Many studies have been done in using cognitive strategies for improving different skills. Also, other studies investigated using literature to improve different aspects and skills of language, but there is little study in this regard-using both cognitive strategy and literature altogether-to help speaking ,and we make the study specific for only high achievers and low achievers to see which group this way is better for.

3. Statement of the Problem

Taylor (1983, pp. 70-71) states that research indicates that "students cannot utilize their intellectual understanding of the grammar of the language in real communication". In the language classroom, teachers ask questions and students respond, trying to give them the answer they want. The purpose is to learn a language. Nevertheless, the problem is that students often do not learn to communicate with this type of activity. Some students are not learning to speak maybe because they never have any opportunity to speak. By oral summarizing of short story, teachers give them this chance to talk and since they have input by first reading as if they have to somehow prefabricated patterns and can speak their self-confidence will be increased. Therefore, this will raise motivation for speaking.

Neither grammar exercises nor drills may be sufficient to participate in activities in which meaning, not language, is the focus of activities. Therefore, teachers should use strategies to solve the problem of speaking. One of them is oral summary related to cognitive strategy. Therefore, present study aims at investigating the role of this strategy in speaking in low and high achievers to determine which group will improve more.

3.1. Research questions

The questions that are investigated in this research are as follows:
1) Can oral summary of short stories facilitate the Iranian EFL learners' speaking skill?
2) Can oral summary of short stories affect the speaking skill of low or high achievers?

3.2. Research hypotheses

According to the questions above, the following hypotheses are suggested:

H1: Application of oral summary of short stories does not affect the Iranian EFL learners' speaking skill.

H2: There is no significant difference in speaking proficiency between the low and high achievers who used the oral summary of short stories.

4. Methodology

4.1. Subjects

The study will be conducted at high schools in Khorram Abad, Lorestan, Iran. Ninety subjects will take a pre-test of speaking proficiency test, and 60 subjects whose scores will be one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean will be chosen.

The pre-test stage will indicate their level of speaking proficiency. Subjects will be randomly divided into two groups of low and high achievers, 30 subjects in each.

4.2. Instrumentation

The first instrument will be a pretest based on ACTFL oral proficiency interview (OPI) to measure the students' level of speaking. According to Chastain (1988), the most widely recommended descriptions currently available for making a proficiency evaluation are ACTFL oral interview test.

It is a face-to-face conversation lasting between 10 and 25 minutes, according on the level of the person being tested. All oral interviews must be taped for future verification.

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This oral interview is based on the sample checklist for measuring communicative abilities by Hughes (2003) will be used. The second instrument will be a posttest again using the same mentioned. Then the result of these two tests will be compared by using *t*-test.

4.3. Materials

The materials in this study will consist of some short stories extracted from *Reading Comprehension* and *Reading Development* by L. G. Alexander (1998). By selecting stories appropriate to students' level of language proficiency, instructors avoid "frustration reading" (Schulz, 1981, p. 44).

4.4 Procedure

First, to make a homogenous group, they will be given a pretest by using ACTFL oral proficiency interview (OPI). The pretest will take 10 to 15 minutes for each person and after obtaining the scores; the average mean of the scores will be calculated. The general purpose of this study is the use of oral summary of short stories in teaching speaking. To this end, subjects will be divided into two groups: high achievers and low achievers. The number of subjects in each group will be ten and each will be given short stories to read and then make oral summary, the whole research project will take place in 10 sessions for each group within one month. Finally, two groups will be given post-test (ACTFL). The obtained scores by the two groups will be compared to pretest scores and see which group will have more progress in speaking.

In order to determine whether using oral summary of short stories have effect more on Iranian high achievers and low achievers EFL learners' speaking , once the scores of the pretest and post test obtained, the mean and standard deviation of the scores will be calculated. Then, t-test analysis of the tests will be run in order to find out whether the differences between them are satisfactory significant.

5. Conclusion

Since speaking is important for most of the students, teachers should equip themselves with up-to-date techniques and methods of teaching this skill. One of these ways is using oral summary related to cognitive strategy. This can automates production since the focus is on meaning and content and it will be reinforced by using appropriate and interesting context like the one in short story rather than usual textbooks at schools. When students attend English classes they seek for something more interesting, they want fun, a way for showing themselves and talk. Therefore, there should be a difference not like in formal classrooms. In addition, they need motivation and short stories provide this and fill the gap, more ever they play as useful, meaningful content and draws students' focus on meaning rather than form. Since little study work exist in this regard, the study is crucial as it provides fruitful evidence on the nature of this investigation. In addition, this study can help those dealing with foreign language teaching, such as syllabus designers, material developers, test makers, and the like.

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