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Title:  
The Effect of Divergent Tasks on the Accuracy and Fluency of Young Iranian  
EFL Learners in Speaking  

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Abstract: The present study was an attempt to measure the impact of applying divergent tasks on young EFL learners’ fluency as well as accuracy in speaking. The study was quasi-experimental with pre-test and post-test design. In order to conduct the research project, the researcher selected 96 students from among 109 junior students of a private institution in Tabriz based on the results of their scores in their final exams for three consequence levels in this institute and subsequently divided into three groups of a control group and two experimental groups (one experimental group received a story-generated drawing task and the other experimental group received a story-generation task). The sample included female and male students with the age range of 10 to 13. To this end, target-like use of articles is used as a measure of accuracy and Kormos and Denes's (2004) model was used as a measure of fluency.

Two oral narrative tasks, one for pre-test and the other for post-test, were administered and one illustrated glossary item story book was used to elicit participants’ oral narrative for doing treatment during this study. After 10 sessions of treatment, the young learners took the posttest. The voices in pre-test and post-test were transcribed and the accuracy and fluency of each participant were measured and compared. The result of analyzed data were entered into SPSS 20. According to the results of the tests, it can be claimed that the effect of divergent tasks as independent variables on accuracy and fluency of speaking was not significant.

Key words: accuracy, creativity, divergent tasks, fluency
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List of Abbreviations

ANOVA: Analysis of Variance

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching

DT: Drawing Task

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ESL: English as a Second Language

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

ST: Story Task

TBLT: Task-based Language Teaching

TEFL: Teaching English as a Foreign Language

TLU: Target- Like Use
Chapter One

Introduction
Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Overview

The disenchantment with the structural syllabuses instigated both the language teachers and applied linguists to come up with other more potent ways of promoting language learning and teaching. One of the manifestations of this long-cherished inclination was communicative trend towards language acquisition. To that end, tasks are one of the implementation means and realizational tools of achieving fluent communication. In recent years task-based language teaching (TBLT) has gained momentum and been widely endorsed because of its influential effect on fostering language acquisition and application. The impetus to task-based tendency originally emanated from input hypothesis (Krashen, 1981), interaction hypothesis (Long, 1981), and the socio-cultural view of Vygotsky (1978). The first classroom adoption of task-based approach was realized by Prabhu's (1987) procedural syllabus. His communicational teaching project which was for the first time performed in secondary schools in India was profoundly task-based. Indeed, task-based teaching is deeply concerned with catering for the learners' cognitive and affective domains. It seeks to promote learners’ communicative, discoursal, linguistic, strategic, and socio-cultural competence through natural, authentic, genuine, and creative activities (Moskowitz, 1977). The foremost aspiration of task-based teaching is to motivate acquisition via meaning-focused and some form-focused activities (Ellis, 2004).
Task-based language teaching has recently become a widespread approach in many educational settings (e.g., Careless, 2004; Littlewood, 2007; Nunan, 2003). Littlewood (2004) states that:

The task-based approach has achieved something of status of a new orthodoxy: teachers in a wide range of settings are being told by curriculum leaders that this is how they should teach, and publishers almost everywhere are describing their new textbooks as task-based. Clearly, whatever a task-based approach means, it is a good thing (p. 319).

There has also been a steady increase in the number of studies in which tasks are the organizing unit of learning activity (e.g., Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001; Ellis, 2003). Ellis (2009) believes that TBLT has drawn extensively on research into L2 acquisition. TBLT proposes that the primary unit for both designing a language programme and for planning individual lessons should be a ‘task’. Besides all the characteristics that a task should have (i.e., meaning, gap, need for learners’ resources, etc.), it should be clearly distinguished from other types of activities such as ‘situational grammar exercises’. According to Ellis (2009) TBLT, like other kinds of language teaching, entails both design and methodology. That is, decisions need to be taken regarding which type of tasks to include in a course, what the content of the tasks will be, and, crucially, how to sequence the tasks so as to best facilitate learning. Methodological decisions concern how to structure a task-based lesson and what type of participatory structure to employ. A task based lesson according to Ellis (2009) has three phases (pre-task phase, the main task phase, and the post-task phase).

Several studies (e.g., Bygate, 1996; Lynch & McLean, 2001) indicate that when learners repeat a task their production improves in a number of ways, for example, complexity increases, propositions are expressed more clearly, and they become more fluent. It seems that carrying the performance for the second time will increase the chance of being more exact and fluent. The present research study, thus, was an attempt to
investigate the effect of divergent tasks on the accuracy and fluency of young Iranian EFL learners in speaking. The present study attempted to measure the impact of applying story-generated drawing task and story generation task as divergent tasks on elementary EFL learners’ fluency of speaking as well as accuracy of speaking.

1.2. Statement of Problem

Learning a foreign language is a process through which learners need to improve some skills and sub-skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and vocabulary in which they are supposed to express themselves orally. The use of English as a second language (ESL) or foreign language (EFL) in oral communication is undoubtedly one of the most common highly complex activities necessary to be considered when teaching the English language especially, because we "live at a time where the ability to speak English fluently has become a must, especially for those who want to advance in certain fields of human endeavor" (Al-Sibai, 2004, p.3).

The focus of teaching speaking, of course, is to improve the oral production of the students. Therefore, language teaching activities in the classroom should aim at maximizing individual language use (Haozhang, 1997). In the past, oral communication instruction was neglected because of the misconception that oral communication competence develops naturally over time and that the cognitive skills involved in writing automatically transfer to analogous oral communication skills (Chaney, 1998). However, Ur (1996) considered speaking as the most important skill among four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) because people who know a language are referred to as speakers of that language. This indicates that using a language is more important than just knowing about it because "there is no point knowing a lot about language if you can’t use it" (Scrivener, 2005, p.146). According to Zhang (2009), speaking remains the most difficult skill to master for the majority of English learners, and they are still incompetent
in communicating orally in English. According to Ur (1996), there are many factors that cause difficulty in speaking, and these difficulties are:

1. Inhibition: Students are worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism, or simply shy.

2. Nothing to say: Students have no motive to express themselves.

3. Low or uneven participation: Only one participant can talk at a time because of large classes and the tendency of some learners to dominate, while others speak very little or not at all.

4. Mother-tongue use: Learners who share the same mother tongue tend to use it because it is easier and because learners feel less exposed if they are speaking their mother tongue.

Apart from problems that mentioned by Ur (1996), one of the problems that English learners are facing is their weakness in producing accurate speech. "Across the various languages and subsystems of grammar, perhaps the most widely practiced traditional approach to grammatical instruction has been portrayed as the three Ps- present, practice, produce" (Larsen-Freeman, 2009, p.523). Long and Doughty, criticizing the three Ps model, state that the traditional approach has some disadvantages. One of the most trenchant criticisms of this approach is that students fail to apply their knowledge of grammar when they are communicating. Students know the grammar- at least, they know the rules explicitly- but they fail to apply them in communication. This problem has been discussed by others as the "non-interface" problem, in that there is no apparent connection between explicit knowledge of the rules and implicit control of the system, and the "learnability problem following from the observation that grammar is not learned in a linear and atomistic fashion" (Long & Doughty, 2009, p. 523). In this approach students are unable to use the grammar rules in speech. They do not understand how grammar rules
work in a sentence. According to Richard and Renandya (2002), learning to speak a foreign language demands more than recognition of its grammatical and semantic rules. "Language is best learned when the learners’ attention is focused on understanding, saying and doing something with language, and not when their attention is focused explicitly on linguistic features" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p.27). It is worthy to mention that researchers recognize that learners can improve their speaking ability by developing learning strategies that enable them to become independent learners (Nakatani, 2010).

Another problem according to Stelma and Onat-Stelma (2010, p. 195), is that teaching English as a Foreign Language to young learners “may be associated with a different set of challenges than those described in the more general education literature” such as finding the balance between encouragement, autonomy, and challenge on the one hand and providing support and care on the other. Across the early years, children achieve enhancing control over their thoughts and alertness. These developing abilities allow them to meet and conquer new growing challenges, from coping with others to learning new academic skills. Despite their growing abilities, it is sometimes difficult for children to regulate their thoughts in ways that allow them to succeed at new tasks. During these times, teachers' new methods can help children learn to regulate their own thoughts (Zeller, 2009). Young children are natural language acquirers; they are self-motivated to pick up language without conscious learning, unlike adults. They have the ability to imitate the rules for themselves and the role of a good teacher is to increase this kind of acquisition (Dunn, 2014). Students learn best when they are in control of their learning. Students practice heavily on learning and a teacher’s saying or doing cannot change that. Real learning requires doing, not listening, or observing only (Johnson, 2013).

The other problem is related to the articles used by learners in the classroom. Articles in English are very important, as we use them all the time. A common question from
students and teachers of English as a second language is “When should I use the articles a, an, and the?” The truth is that the answer is extremely complex; it constantly gives children a headache (Gunn, 2007).

Differences in marking definiteness among various languages have been considered one of the most confusing areas for speakers of different languages (Mizuno, 1985). Afzali (2012), as a teacher teaching EFL to Persian speakers has frequently noticed that the students face problems when it comes to marking a definite or indefinite noun in English. Definiteness in written Persian is generally recognized by the absence of indefinite markers and indefiniteness in written Persian is marked either by the numeral one (which is 'yek' before the noun phrase; i.e. pre-positioned) or by using the suffix 'i' after that (i.e. post-positioned).

Articles in English are presented by adding *a, an or the* at the beginning of the word or nothing before the words. But in Persian it is different as it was said and is not similar to English. So, for foreign language speakers, and for Iranians, it seems difficult to learn articles due to the difference mentioned (Afzali, 2012).

In order to remove some of these impediments on the learners’ way foreign language teachers and researchers seek for the best strategies. Various tasks have been used in language classrooms to engage leaners in authentic oral communication. Methods of communicative and task-based language teaching often employ tasks that require students to use their imagination and to generate ideas. These tasks might provide creative learners with more chance to practice and produce more comprehension output, which could lead to greater success in second language acquisition (Swain, 1985). This might be even more so in a foreign language environment, in which output is mainly produced in the classroom. By using tasks, teachers could help the students attend to both meaning and form, but the critical point is how the teacher makes efficiently a link between these two aspects. The
present study was an attempt to create such a link and to help students to improve their accuracy and fluency of speech via doing divergent task types. A number of studies have addressed the impact of various task types on features of oral speech. Yet, to the researcher's knowledge, it is not much known about the relationship of task types and accuracy and fluency of speech produced by young EFL learners

1.3. Purpose of the Study

A review of related research studies has revealed minimal examination of the above-mentioned technique on Iranian EFL learners’ fluency and accuracy of speaking especially with young learners. Therefore, the aim of this study was to find out the effect of using divergent tasks on fluency and accuracy of Iranian EFL young learners’ speaking. Divergent teaching methods can also be useful as it concentrates on several solutions for the problem and evokes the creativity of students themselves to learn speaking. This study is an attempt to create a situation in which to help students to improve their accuracy and fluency in speaking via doing divergent tasks and the reason for choosing elementary as the intended level to be studied is the general belief that oral fluency should start at the early stages of language acquisition. As Derwing, Munro, and Thompson (2007, p. 2) put forth, "fluency problems can also be exasperating for L2 speakers; it is thus important for L2 learners to develop oral fluency skills early in L2 acquisition".

1.4. Research Questions

The present study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: Do divergent tasks affect the fluency of EFL learners in speaking? If yes which types of divergent tasks (story-generated drawing task or story generation task) are more beneficial?
RQ2: Do divergent tasks affect the accuracy of EFL learners in speaking? If yes which types of divergent tasks (story-generated drawing task or story generation task) are more beneficial?

1.5. Research Hypotheses

Accordingly, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

H01. Divergent tasks do not affect the fluency of EFL learners in speaking.
H02. Divergent tasks do not affect the accuracy of EFL learners in speaking.

1.6. Significance of the Study

Developing a language ability is a difficult and time-consuming process through which learners should build up communication skills such as speaking. However, spoken language is used less confidently by EFL learners’ in language schools especially when the students are required to narrate an event or a situation in their daily lives, and if they could speak they usually speak ungrammatically and misused the articles in their conversations this has become a challenge for most teachers.

The best teachers are those who equip their students to think for themselves. Birjandi and Bagherkazemi (2010) believe that teachers’ critical thinking is highly intertwined with teachers’ pedagogical success. As teachers’ success is, in some ways, related to students’ engagement, teachers’ critical thinking which is interconnected with educational achievement may affect students’ engagement subsequently.

In order to tackle these difficulties there should be a vast body of research studies seeking for any possible way to apply in classes. These kinds of studies seem to be very essential because the findings could be applied to practical sides of English language teaching and material development and there can be implications for teachers and task designers and publishers. These implications may apply beyond Iran to other EFL contexts,
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چکیده: هدف پژوهش حاضر بررسی تأثیر بکارگیری تکالیف و اگرا بر دقت و تسلط زبان آموزان نوجوان ایرانی در گفتار میباشد. این تحقیق از نوع شناسی پیش آزمایش است. به منظور اجرای این پژوهش از بین دانش آموز در یک موسسه خصوصی در تیریز 96 نفر برابر با اساس نتایج حاصل از نمرات آنها در امتحانات نهایی خود در سه ترم متواتر به عوامل نمونه انتخاب شده و در ادامه با 2 گروه آزمایش و 1 گروه کنترل توانسته بندی شوند. تکالیف و اگرا در گروه آزمایشی 1 دانست نوپیس و در گروه آزمایشی 2 دانست نوپیس همراه با کمیشند نشان داده شد که در نهایت آنها در این پژوهش به منظور تعیین استفاده شده در زبان مثبت و مدل کورمور و دزد (2004) به ترتیب به عنوان معیارهای برای انتخاب گیری دقت و تسلط مورد استفاده قرار گرفتند.

برای انجام پروشیه مورد نظر در تکلیف به صورت نقل شفاهی، یکی برای پیش آزمون و دیگری برای پس آزمون در نظر گرفته شد و یک کتاب استاندارد در خصوص همراه با ایهام نامه برای نقل دانست شفاهی شرکت کننده‌اند. در طول مدت مطالعه مورد استفاده قرار گرفت. پس از اجرای طرح، با استفاده از نرم‌افزار SPSS 20 گردیده‌های نتیجه‌گیری در نتایج چسبانده قرار گرفته و نتایج به کارگیری شد. نتایج تحلیل داده‌های وارد بر دقت و تسلط دانش آموزان در گفتار معنی‌داری نبودند.

کلید واژه‌ها: تکالیف و اگرا، تسلط، خلاقیت، دقت
پایان نامه برای دریافت درجه ی کارشناسی ارشد در رشته ی ادبیات و زبان های خارجی گرایش آموزش زبان انگلیسی

عنوان:
تأثیر تکالیف واگرا بر دقت و تسلط زبان آموزان نوجوان ایرانی در گفتار

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