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Effects of teaching of Modern American Drama as a Method for Speaking Fluency in BA EFL students

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Abstract

Using of the modern American dramas (The Death of Salesman by Arthur Miller) in ELT classes can lead to students' active participation in speaking and this can improve their fluency and accuracy of speaking. This study was designed in the form of pre-experimental research and data of this research have been gathered from 25 students of English language and literature of Payam Noor University of Jieroft Branch, I.R.Iran. There are some aspects of speaking fluency for this research. They are vocabulary and expression, structures, speaking smoothly, developing interactions and intonation. The aim of the study is to find out the effect of using of the American Modern Drama (The Death of Salesman by Arthur Miller) on the students' speaking fluency and to know the methods used by those students while using of the modern American drama. The data were the speaking transcripts which were analyzed to see the progress after four-time treatment was given. The result shows that the speaking fluency of the students promoted in some areas as shown by the perfection on their vocabulary and comprehensibility.

Key words: TEFL, Speaking, Fluency, Modern American Drama

1. Introduction

According to Susüzer (2006), the language that causes communication between human beings is a sophisticated and very advanced system that enables emotions, thoughts and desires to transfer to the others by making use of the common elements and rules in terms of voice and meaning. The features of the language can be listed as (Susüzer 2006; Selçuk University 2009): 1- The first and main function of the language is its being an understanding means. 2- One of the most important features of the language is its being natural. 3- Each language has some rules peculiar to itself. 4- Language is a living organism that lives in its own rules has some features such as being born-growth- maturation. 5- Language is a common property of a nation. 6- Language is a social being. Speaking skill should be given special importance within the four language skills as it is an important aspect of communication. Therefore, the English education given should be in favor of developing the students' speaking skills, considering all of the process; including the materials used as well as the classroom context.

According to Önder (2004), total physical response activities in learning-teaching process gives more effective and permanent products. Therefore, drama is a teaching method that gives the students total physical response learning opportunity and atmosphere by taking their emotions and imaginations into consideration. Any attempt to develop new areas of teaching is not easy, but trying to create ownership and initiative among teacher education students is a still greater aspiration that is infrequently realized. The use of drama plays for interdisciplinary learning in teacher education is less familiar and documented. Therefore, the outcomes, patterns and recommended future research of this study research can serve as foundations for future study (Yin 2002). In teaching English as a foreign language (TFL), grammar and teacher centered techniques and method are used and communicative method is abandoned.

One of the most demanding difficulties in learning a second language is finding ways to progress one's oral fluency. This is most commonly true in countries like Iran where the learners share a common mother tongue and have very little or no contact to the second language outside the classroom. Identifying and analyzing working mechanisms that influence fluency then should be considered important for our understanding of the complication of speaking.

2. Review of Literature

Quite a few empirical investigations (Selinker 1972; Varadi 1973; Tarone 1977) have been carried out to study the effectiveness of teaching of fluency and communicative strategies. Although these studies have been done in different languages by variety of people, they were aimed at the confirmation of successfulness or unsuccessfulness of teachability of communicative strategies (Dornyei 1995). Also, Savignon (1972) reported on a pioneering language teaching experiment concerning a communicative method, included student training in communicative strategies (or, as she termed them coping strategies). According to Gatbonton and Segalowitz (1988), Maurice (1983), Schneider (1993) as quoted by Kellem (2009), from this literature comes seven principles to consider when designing and doing fluency building activities:

1. Incorporating repetition
2. Increasing the amount of speaking time
3. Allowing time to prepare before speaking
4. Using familiar and motivating topics
5. Ensuring appropriate language level
6. Setting time limits
7. Teaching formulaic sequences

The literature on drama play in teaching reveals that using drama plays to engage students in exploring content related topics, and in this case real-life problem solving, is a powerful means of learning (Baji-Gál, Elek, & Nagyné 2001). According to Baji-Gál, Elek, and Nagyné (2001), although children are born with the ability to think and solve problems, it is dependent on the teacher to present the students the chances to experience situations where they can practice and learn problem solving firsthand. Moreover, while using drama play as the means of experiencing problem solving, students gain deeper content knowledge through the creative procedure they use to develop and enact the stories. The evaluation aspect of speaking skill is another important point to consider. In Iran, the university education programs have been rearranged by using constructivist approach as a base. Rasinski & Young (2009) have reported that speaking fluency instruction is a neglected goal in the classroom. Rasinski et al. (2005) stated that the neglect of fluency instruction is especially true for middle and high school grades. The relationship between drama and foreign language teaching naturally flourishes by virtue of all its benefits we can observe in foreign language instruction. Hamilton and McLeod describe this relationship as follows: "It is hard to imagine anything else that offers to language teachers such as wide variety of types of talks, for example monologues, paired speaking, role-plays, group discussions, reporting, talking in response to other stimuli, problem-solving, developing scenarios, acting out, etc. from explaining, complaining, praising, disagreeing to exhorting, apologizing and requesting – there is no language function that drama is not capable of easily encompassing". (Hamilton and McLeod 1993,5) Drama can be easily, and most of all effectively, exploited in cross-curricular teaching when studying and exploring topics related to the foreign culture or other university subjects.

According to San (1990), drama can be defined as a person's making sense and portraying an experience, an event, an idea, sometimes an abstract concept or a behavior and his review previous cognitive patterns in game processes and in a group-working by making use of some theatre or drama techniques such as drama, improvisation, role-playing. According to Onder (2004), being animated of natural and social events by making use of some concepts such as action, speaking and imitation is called as learning method via drama. Maley and Duff also mention another motivating factor of drama, which is its flexibility and unpredictability. "If drama is motivating, and we believe it is, the reason may be that it draws on the entire human resources of the class and that technique, in its own way, yields a different, unique, result every time it is practiced." (Maley and Duff 2001, 13) Drama presents a perfect method of work if teachers want to put the meaning for students into an ample context. Unlike in guided practice, students are involved in real communication while they "activate language to communicate real meaning, rather than just practicing language" (Harmer 2007, 270) and thus develop their communicative ability in a natural way, using gesture, making pauses and interruptions, showing emotions, and creating relationships. Moreover, making students focused on the process of the creation of the drama rather than the final language result presents them with natural and purposeful need for speaking, which describe Maley and Duff by stating that "the problem of not wanting to speak or, more often, not knowing what to say is practically resolved because the activity makes it necessary to talk". (Maley and Duff 2001, 13-14) According to these educators "drama techniques have the singular merit of directly engaging students' feelings and, as a result, often making them aware of the need to be able to express them appropriately". (Maley and Duff 2001, 11) In the 1980s and 1990s in England and many other countries there was a fairly pronounced division between writers and practitioners who supported different methods to teaching drama.

3. Drama

Harmer suggests that "a rich classroom environment should not only expose students to language, but also give them opportunities to activate their language knowledge and to study language and the way it works". (Harmer 2007, 48) As Maley and Duff claim: "Much has changed in language teaching, but it is still true that the conviction that Vocabulary + Essential Structures =Language lies as the base of nearly every foreign language syllabus". (Maley and Duff 2001, 7) This situation requires the students to motivate, direct to foreign language learning and to participate in this process actively. Using drama in the language class provides students with the best opportunities for active and involved participation and as Hamilton and McLeod state: "The use of drama techniques fits naturally into the theoretical context of recent studies into the nature of language learning." (Hamilton and McLeod1993, 2) Play is established on language, which is the first and most important device humans create in order to convey their thoughts. This is obtained due to drama engaging students in true real life situations. As Wessels declares: "Since the use of drama involves the formation of relationships and breaking down of barriers between teacher and students, less confident teachers are understandably reluctant to use it."(Wessels 2007, 14) "Drama in education uses the same tools employed by actors in the theatre. But while in the theatre everything is contrived for the benefit of the audience, in classroom drama everything is contrived for the benefit of the learners." (Wessels, 8) Dramatic activities according to Maley and Duff (2001) as quoted by Zyoud "are activities which give the students an opportunity to use his own personality in creating the material in which part of the language class is to be based".

4. Fluency

Fluency means you speak English automatically when your speech is natural and effortless. You speak fluent English when the words come out of your mouth, without translation and without pause. Hartmann & Stork (1976) states that a person is considered to be a fluent speaker of a language when he is able to use its structures accurately whilst concentrating on the content rather than form, using the units and patterns automatically at normal conversational speed when they are required. Koponen & Riegenbach (2000, 6) define fluency as a performance based phenomenon which is related to the flow, continuity, automaticity or smoothness of the speech. Fillmore's (1979, p.93) establishes four abilities that might be embodied under the term fluency, the first is the ability to talk at length with few pauses.

In one of the first studies investigating fluency, Fillmore (1979) quoted by Kormos and Denes (2009), conceptualized fluency in four different ways. First, he defined fluency as the ability to talk at length with few pauses and to be able to fill the time with talk. Second, a fluent speaker is not only capable of talking without hesitations but of expressing his/her message in a coherent, reasoned and "semantically densed" manner. Third, a person is considered to be fluent if he/ she knows what to say in a wide of range of contexts. Finally, Fillmore (1979) argued that fluent speakers are creative and imaginative in their language use and a maximally fluent speaker has all of the above mentioned abilities. Although there is not a single agreed-upon definition in the literature, fluency is often understood to refer to the flow and smoothness of delivery (Chambers, 1997; Koponen & Riegenbach, 2000). Beyond this core idea are some distinctions about fluency that are sometimes made. Lennon (1990), for example, distinguished between broad and narrow fluency. Another distinction is made by Segalowitz (2000), who differentiated between cognitive fluency and performance fluency. The former concerns "the efficiency of the operation of the cognitive mechanisms underlying performance," whereas the latter refers to "the observable speech, fluidity, and accuracy of the original performance" (202).

5. Method

The writers chose pre-experimental research method by using group pre-test and post-test design because the writer wanted to investigate the effectiveness drama in teaching speaking fluency with comparing before and after using treatment. The data gathered to examine this case focus on the impact of drama play as an interdisciplinary instructional strategy. At this point, the authors examined the results and the case to determine evidence of a grounded model or theory having emerged. Participants of this study were 25 university students majoring in English Language and Literature (ELL) in Payamnoor University, Jieroft, Iran. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 23. All the participants were informed about the general objectives of the introducing of the first act of an American Modern Drama (The Death of Salesman by Arthur Miller).Knowing that being able to produce both spoken English fluently and accurately are important for English students; we decided to focus on students who have low proficiency in English. Speaking class was considered an appropriate class to conduct the study as we could categorize students into different levels based on their performance. Retelling helps teachers identify the level of students' comprehension of what they listen to or read. Stoicovy (2004) also points out that based on several studies, retelling has positive influence in language learning as it promotes students' ability in rearranging information from the text that they have read. In addition retelling is a common way that many people use as part of their communication. To

overcome the difficulty in using the target language, telling stories is one of the recommended techniques which can help language learners in improving his knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and pronunciation. Based on the arguments for the positive influence of retelling in language learning, it was decided to see the influence of retelling of modern American drama on students' fluency by conducting this study.

6. Instruments

The main instrument used in this study was the IELTS speaking specimen (2005) which was officially provided by the IELTS Center and adopted by the researchers to be administered in the speaking interview sessions. The Alpha Chronbach Coefficient of reliability for the administration of this test in the present research was found to be 0.84. The rating criteria for scoring the participants' performance were also provided by the same source. The two tests were oral (retelling of some parts of the first act of the play) and measured speaking performance of the language learners. That is, the speaking performance of the participants and the CSs used in their speaking was evaluated by two different raters. The coefficient correlation between the ratings of the two raters in both tests exceeded. Moreover, to avoid complexities of the study, we decided to choose just three of these tasks known as: (a) group discussion (b) reciting the text of American play (Death of Salesman) and (c) exchanging of the American slangs and idioms from the text of the play.

The spoken corpus consisting of 310 minutes (5.1 hours) of the interviewees' recorded speech was then explored in search of the instance of FSs as specified in Table 1.

Table 1 The results regarding the effect of drama method on the total achievement level

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest	25	22,52	16,00			
Posttest	25	89,40	8,36			

Table 2 The levels of pretest-posttest total achievement level of experimental-control groups on subjects at knowledge, comprehension and application categories

Subjects	Achievement Level	Pretest/ Lasttest	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
American Idioms slangs	Knowledge	Pretest	25	7,52	2,40	24	-	,000
		Lasttest	25	34,40	2,00			
	comprehension	Pretest	25	1,92	2,61		-	,000
		Lasttest	25	34,64	4,11			
	Application	Pretest	25	,40	1,00		-	,000
		Lasttest	25	16,96	5,16			
Long sentences	Knowledge	Pretest	25	6,00	2,00		-	,000
		Lasttest	25	30,88	3,56			
	comprehension	Pretest	25	1,92	2,03		-	,000
		Lasttest	25	36,56	3,76			
	Application	Pretest	25	1,44	1,78		-	,000
		Lasttest	25	10,72	5,22			

Table 3 The results on the effect of drama method on permanence of acquisitions

Subjects	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
American Idioms	25	82,88	11,13	48	4,73	,000
slangs	25	70,16	7,52			

7. Discussion and conclusion

Before the students were given pre-test, the writer asked them about teaching learning process by brainstorming. After gave brainstorming, the writer gave the solution for them how could speaking fluency. The writer explained that there were seven ways to increase their speaking. These were incorporate repetition, increase speaking time, prepare before speaking, use familiar and motivating topics, ensure appropriate level, impose time limits, and teach formulaic sequences. Drama could move our students actively to speak fluently because they could practiced together in group, knew some expression, American idioms and slangs (**such as: You didn't smash the car, did you? I'm tired to the death./ I couldn't make it./ The car kept going off on to the shoulder, y'know? /I'm—I can't seem to—keep my mind to it. / But you didn't rest your mind. Your mind is over- active, and the mind is what counts, dear / I'll be up right away. The boys in?**) that were used in the play at the moment to speak, could more details how to speak well in pronunciation, knew some vocabularies, etc. After the data was analyzed it showed that the highest score was 95 and the lowest score was 65. Factors that made students got the lowest score were lack of vocabularies and expression, speaking with some hesitation, and there were no preparing before speaking. The data analysis, it was found that before the treatment was given, the mean score of pre-test was 71.15. Then, after the treatment was given, the mean score of post-test was 79.03. The result of the interval score 7.88. It means that the use of drama effective to increase their speaking fluency. Before the writer introduced drama as a technique to increase their speaking fluency, the writer gave explain about how to build speaking fluency in activities. There were seven ways to build speaking fluency learning process. The purposes of drama were not only increase their speaking fluency, but also building the characteristics students became active, cooperative self confident, trustworthiness, hard working to practice in group, respect, and responsibility in teaching English learning process.

According to this study the participants of the study showed great interest using modern American dramatic texts because of modern idioms, slangs and short sentences for better communication during the study. The improvement of students' English speaking fluency through drama could be indicated from the following: the first improvement was participation is event. All the students got the same chance to practice English speaking fluency through drama. Based on the result of speaking fluency tested between pre-test and post-test, it could be proved that there was an improvement of the students' speaking fluency. It means that teaching speaking fluency by using drama as a technique really effective to increase the students' speaking fluency.

Retelling is considered a technique which can be applied to improve students' speaking fluency. In accordance with the previous conclusions, some points can be suggested for the improvement of speaking fluency quality of English students. First, speaking lecturers are expected to implement the retelling technique more often than usual in order to develop students' speaking fluency. Second, the students themselves need to actively collect lines of plays to retell in or out-side the class. It can be said that this situation has a positive effect on permanence of the lessons learnt. This conclusion is supported by other research findings about the effect of drama method on different levels and subjects. Effective instruction derived from the careful analysis of this area, efficient language input and speech, promotion activities, which will enable chances to speak English fluently and appropriately.

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