

The Impact of Teaching Compensatory Strategies on Iranian EFL Learners' Speaking Skill: The Case of Approximation, Appealing for the Help, Code-switching, and Time-gaining

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impacts of using Compensatory Strategies (CSs) on speaking skill of Iranian EFL learners. To conduct this research, 50 Iranian intermediate EFL learners were chosen among 80 students and then, they were divided into two equal groups- one experimental group and one control group. The groups then were pretested by a speaking pre-test. After that, the participants of the experimental group were taught by using the CSs including approximation, appealing for the help, code switching, and time-gaining. On the other hand, the participants of the control group received traditional activities in learning speaking such as repetition and over-learning. After the treatment, both groups took the post-test of speaking. The results of paired and independent samples t-tests indicated that the experimental group outflanked the control group on the post-test. The results revealed that there was a significant difference between the performance of the experimental group and the control group on the post-test.

1. Introduction

Speaking skill is regarded as a skill that need to be practiced and mastered In English language teaching and learning. It is considered by the learners as the measure of knowing a language and the most important skill they can learn; since they measure their success in the terms of their achievements in spoken communication (Burkart, 1998). Speaking a language is difficult for EFL learners since effective oral communication needs the capability to utilize the language appropriately in social situations as stated by Mackey (1978) "speaking is the most complex of linguistics skill, since it thinking of what is to be said while saying what has been thought (p. 263)".

The goal of learning English is essentially developing communication ability for many learners. However, many EFL learners cannot speak and communicate successfully in the target language due to the fact that they do not know how to use CSs. Teaching CSs can be an effective way to serve the learners' communication needs. Therefore, this study examines the effects of teaching CSs on Iranian EFL learners' speaking skill. CSs are generally defined as strategies used to overcome problems stemming from lack of knowledge of the second/target language.

Dörnyei (1995) outlines seven types of CSs, which include circumlocution, word coinage, foreignizing, approximation, literal translation, appealing for help and code-switching strategies. Some of these are used frequently, while others may seldom be used. An example is foreignizing, which refers to the use of a L1 word by adjusting it to L2 phonology. Probably foreign English language learners will find it hard to use their L1 character to substitute for the pronunciation of an English word, simply because their L1 and English can be very different types of language (Brown, 2000; Hashemifardnia, Namaziandost, & Sepehri, 2018; Ziafar & Namaziandost, 2019). The above-mentioned strategies are classified as achievement or compensatory "as they offer

alternative plans for speakers to carry out their original communicative goal by manipulating available language, thus compensating somehow for their linguistic deficiencies" (Dörnyei, 1995, p. 57).

The focus of this study is on the effects of time-gaining, code switching, appealing for help, and approximation strategies on speaking skill of Iranian students. The time-gaining strategy is used for keeping the channel of communication open rather than substituting for missing language. Some researchers such as Rubin (1987) and Rost (1994) draw attention to the importance of pause fillers in overcoming communication problems and mention them in their typologies of CSs. Bygate (2003) also observes that pause fillers are devices used by speakers to gain time and facilitate production of speech. On the other hand, researchers Færch and Kasper (1983) consider fillers or hesitation devices (sub-types of time-gaining strategies) as variables of speech performance, 'temporal variables', rather than CSs. Tarone (1981) also relates pause fillers to production strategies rather than CSs. She argues that production strategies deal with the efficient use of a linguistic system of a given language, and are not functionally interactional.

Circumlocution is used when 'the learner describes the characteristics or elements of the object or an action instead of using the appropriate target language switch (Dörnyei, 1995; Rooholamin, Biria & Haghverdi, 2016; Namaziandost, Razmi, Heidari, Tilwani, 2020; Neisi, Hajjalili, & Namaziandost, 2019). Approximation refers to the use of a target language vocabulary item or structure, which the learner knows is not correct, but which shares semantic features with the desired item to satisfy the speaker (e. g., "pipe" for "water pipe"). As the name speaks for itself, appealing for help refers to the learner's asking for the correct term or structure (e. g., "What is this?") (Dörnyei, 1995; Namaziandost, Sawalmeh, & Izadpanah Soltanabadi, 2020; Neisi, Nasri, Akbari, & Namziandost, 2019; Rooholamin, Biria & Haghverdi, 2017).

2. Review of the Literature

Regarding CSs, Oxford (1990) outlined CSs as those that: enable learners to use the new language for either comprehension or production despite limitations in knowledge. CSs are intended to make up for insufficient grammar and vocabulary knowledge. This means that with this kind of strategies the learners have the chance to overcome the possible language boundaries presented while communicating using the target language ((Etemadfar, Namaziandost, & Banari, 2019; Namaziandost, Alekasir, Hassan Mohammed Sawalmeh, & Miftah, 2020).

CSs permit the students to use them as a repair tool to overcome a specific problem; they also may help a better development of the speaking skill. Brown (2007) listed some strategies including circumlocution, approximation, use of all-purpose words, non-linguistic signals, appeal for help, word coinage, literal translation, foreignizing, code switching and time gaining strategies. Some of these strategies are defined below:

1. Circumlocution, with this strategy the learners substitute the exact word that describes the object or action and rather use an example to describe the object. This strategy is very significant because it also helps learners to use new words for clarifying ideas.
2. Approximation is another strategy that was considered in this study. During approximation the lexical item is replaced by a close word or term and this would help learners to enrich language vocabulary.
3. Appeal for help takes place when learners ask the interlocutor for assistance or clarification by using words or body language.
4. Use of all-purpose words implies the overuse of a general known word to replace the missing one such as the example with the word "stuff".
5. The use of Non-linguistic signals in which the learners use body gestures or sounds to communicate or complete the message.
6. Finally, the code switching has to do with the use of the first language while speaking in the target language.

Regarding the effectiveness of CSs on learning English language enhancement, some empirical studies were conducted; most of them reported that using CSs was more helpful than the traditional strategies. Some of them are chronologically mentioned in this section.

Majd (2014) examined the impacts of circumlocution, approximation, word coinage and appeal for help on anxiety level and motivation of Iranian students. The learners of the experimental group were taught how to use CSs during communication in the foreign language. The outcomes of the research indicated that teaching CSs to EFL learners and applying them to the class activities is a practical way to improve students' communication skills, increase their motivation and decrease their anxiety level.

Similarly, Hmaid (2014) inspected the effect of teaching oral CSs on English language learners. The findings of this study revealed that explicit teaching of CSs developed English language learners' effective ability to communicate and raised their awareness of strategy use. The findings also confirmed that language learners had a positive attitude towards the teaching of CSs and found these strategies effective for boosting their conversation.

Saeidi and Ebrahimi Farshchi (2015) explored the effects of teaching CSs on students' oral production in Iranian content-based courses. There were 60 participants in this research. Communication strategy instruction involved eight lessons spread over two months (which was undertaken during 16 one-hour sessions). The findings of ANCOVA indicated the positive effects of CSs on the students' oral production of Iranian EFL learners.

3. Research Question and Null Hypothesis

The following research question was addressed to be empirically investigated:

RQ. Does teaching approximation, appealing for the help, code switching, and time-gaining have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking skill?

Based on the above-mentioned question, the following null hypothesis was tested:

HO. Teaching approximation, appealing for the help, code switching, and time-gaining do not have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking skill.

4. Method

4.1 Participants

Deciding to carry out this work, 50 Iranian intermediate EFL learners were selected among 80 students at Andisheh English Language Institute, Abadan, Khuzestan, Iran. Participants' age range was between 15 to 18. They have been studying English as a foreign language for at least five years. Their level of English language proficiency was determined on the basis of their scores on the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT). The participants were randomly divided into two groups of experimental and control. Each group had 25 participants. Only males were included in the current study. The first language of all the participants was Persian.

4.2 Instruments

The first instrument which was utilized in the present study to homogenize the participants was a proficiency test. The OQPT was administrated among 80 students to determine their English language proficiency (i.e., beginner, elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, and advanced). Based on the students' performance in this test, those whose scores were between 30 and 47 (out of 60) were considered as the intermediate learners and were selected as the target participants of the control and experimental groups.

The second instrument which was used in this study was a researcher-made speaking pre-test. The pre-test included several questions and answers items concerned with the learners' text book. (i.e., Family and Friends 2). The participants were wanted to talk about the topics of the units about 2 to 3 minutes and their speech was recorded for the second rater. To ascertain the validity of the speaking test (which was held in the form of interview), several steps were taken. First, the topic (for speaking) was selected from the topics covered in the book participants were studying as part of their regular institute course. Second, the topics/questions were given to three experienced teachers to check its suitability for use with the targeted participants. Besides, the reliability of speaking test was confirmed by conduct of inter-rater reliability. The reliability of the pre-test was calculated through inter-rater reliability by means of Pearson correlation analysis as ($r = .811$).

The third instrument was the post-test of speaking- the post-test was similar to the pre-test in form but different on topics. The topics of this test were selected from the mentioned textbook. The difficulty level of the topics was the same in the pre and post-tests. The reliability of the post-test was computed through inter-rater reliability by means of Pearson correlation analysis ($r = .844$). The pre and post-tests were validated by four experienced English teachers.

The fourth instrument was the speaking checklist (Hughes, 2003). It was used to aid the raters score the participants' speech. The raters scored the participants' speech based on the mentioned speaking checklist.

4.3 Procedure

To carry out this study, First OQPT was administered in order to manifest the participants' homogeneity in terms of English language proficiency. Fifty participants out of 80 were chosen for the target population of the present study. The participants were then randomly assigned to two equal groups of experimental and control. Afterwards, the groups were pretested by a

speaking pre-test. Then, the participants of the experimental group received the treatment. Considering the treatment, some conversations of Family and Friends 2 were taught to the students. Before teaching each conversation, the researcher warmed up the students with some questions related to the topic. Then, the audio file of the conversation was played for the students several times. After that, some students were randomly required to read the conversation and then the students were wanted to practice the conversation in pairs. After practicing well, the researcher wanted each pair to perform the conversation in front of the whole class. While performing the conversation, the students were instructed the CSs including approximation, appealing for the help, code switching, and time-gaining whenever they encountered a problem. The researcher taught the experimental group how to appeal for the help if they could not remember the target vocabulary items. For example, if students could not remember the exact word like "Smartphone", they were required to use questions like "What do you call it in English?", "What does it mean in English?", "What's that/ this?", "What are those/ these?", "How do you say it in English?", etc."

The experimental group was also instructed on how to make up for their deficiencies in conversation by using approximate words. For example, when they forget the target word, they could use an approximate vocabulary like using "boat" instead of "ship" or "pipe" for "water pipe".

Moreover, the experimental group received instruction on how to compensate their failures in conversation by using time-gaining strategy. The researcher taught the participants to use fillers or hesitation devices- using filling words or gambits to fill pauses and to gain time to think. For example, using fillers and hesitation devices such as well, now let's see, as a matter of fact, uh, um, er, let me see, oh really? and hmm.

On the other hand, the students of the control group were taught through the traditional speaking activities including repetition, over-learning, question and answer, topic discussion, and role playing.

The instruction took ten sessions of 45 minutes. In the first and the second sessions, the OQPT and pre-test were administered respectively. During seven sessions, the strategies mentioned were trained. In each week, two sessions were held and, in each session, 20 minutes were allocated to teaching CSs. Finally, in the tenth session, the two groups took the post-test of speaking. Their speaking performances (speaking for 2 or 3 minutes on different topics) were recorded and scored by two raters through Hughe's (2003) speaking checklist.

4.4 Data Analysis

After gathering the needed data through the aforesaid procedures, the data were analyzed and interpreted according to the objectives of the study. The data were analyzed with the help of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software. Paired samples and independent samples t-tests were applied to measure the effectiveness of the treatment on improving the participants' speaking skill.

5. Results

In order to analyze the gathered data, the SPSS software, version 22 software was used. First, Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test was used in order to check the normality of the data. The results showed that the statistics of scores were normal, therefore, the parametric statistics like independent samples t-test and paired samples t-test were used to get the final results.

Table 1: *Group Statistics (Pre-test of Both Groups)*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	25	14.1600	9.35984	1.87197
Control	25	14.2161	10.98978	2.24328

In Table 1, the descriptive statistics of both groups is presented. The means of both groups are almost equal. The experimental group's mean score is 14.16 and the control group's mean score is 14.21. This means that both groups were somehow similar at the beginning of the treatment.

Table 2: Independent Samples T-test (Pre-test of Both Groups)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Experi Pre	Equal variances assumed	.003	.959	-.225	47	.543	-.65667	2.91206	-6.51498	5.20165
	Equal variances not assumed			-.225	45.187	.543	-.65667	2.92174	-6.54069	5.22735

In Table 2, an independent samples t-test was used to show the scores of both groups on the pre-test. Since the Sig (.543) is greater than 0.05, the difference between the groups is not significant at ($p < 0.05$). In fact, they performed the same on the pre-test.

Table 3: Group Statistics (Post-test of Both Groups)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	25	18.4300	12.46889	2.49378
Control	25	15.1583	13.53732	2.76329

Table 3 reveals the descriptive statistics of both groups on the post-test. The experimental group's mean score is 18.43 and the control group's mean score is 15.15. This means that the experimental group performed better on the post-test.

Table 4: Independent Samples T-test (the Post-test of Both Groups)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
ExpriP ost	Equal variances assumed	.156	.695	2.659	47	.000	9.88167	3.71584	2.40637	17.35696
	Equal variances not assumed			2.655	46.293	.000	9.88167	3.72219	2.39056	17.37277

Table 4 indicates that the difference between both groups is significant at ($p < 0.05$). In fact, the experimental group had better performance on the post-test and the treatment improved speaking skill of this group.

Table 5: Paired Samples T-test (Pre and Post-tests of Both Groups)

	Paired Differences					t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 ExperiPre - ExpriPost	-14.08000	15.86905	3.17381	-20.63042	-7.52958	-4.436	24	.000
Pair 2 ControlPre - ControlPost	-3.60000	16.44435	3.28887	-10.38789	3.18789	-1.095	24	.111

In the above table, paired samples t-test is used to compare the pre and post-tests of each group. Since Sig (.000) is less than 0.05, the difference between the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group is significant. Since Sig (.111) is greater than 0.05, the difference between the pre-test and post-test of the control group is not significant.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

According to the obtained results of the current study, the experimental group had higher speaking scores than the control group on the post-test. Based on the results, both experimental and control groups had almost the same speaking performance on the pre-test but they did differently on the post-test. In fact, the experimental group who was trained through CSs outperformed the control group on the post-test. The findings confirmed the positive effects of using CSs on Iranian EFL learners' speaking skill. Therefore, the null hypothesis of the study "Teaching approximation, appealing for the help, code switching, and time-gaining do not have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking skill" is rejected.

The results of this study are supported Saeidi and Ebrahimi Farshchi (2015) who inspected the effects of teaching CSs on students' oral production in Iranian content-based courses. The results of their research indicated the positive impact of using communication strategies on the learners' amount of oral production in Iranian content-based courses. This research illustrated that CSs instruction was a helpful instrument to aid EFL learners bridge their communication gaps. Through learning CSs, students got more confident in their ability to continue their conversations, even in contexts where they did not completely comprehend the whole language, or when the interlocutor, they were speaking with did not understand them.

The results of this study are in line with Hmaid (2014) who inspected the impact of teaching oral CSs on English language learners. The results of this study showed that explicit teaching of CSs improved English language learners' effective ability to communicate and raised their awareness of strategy use. The findings also displayed that language learners had a positive attitude towards using of CSs and found these strategies helpful for enhancing their conversation. Moreover, the findings of this study are supported by Cohen, Weaver and Li (1998) also confirmed that training learners in the use of oral CSs is feasible. The findings indicated that the test scores of the learners who had received strategy training increased somewhat in the post-tests.

The present study was an attempt to examine the effect of using approximation, appealing for the help, code switching, and time-gaining strategies on speaking skill of Iranian EFL learners. After the implementation of the mentioned strategies, the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group on the post-test. Overall, such findings yielded an evidence of the positive impact of the communicative approach strategies on EFL learners' ability to comprehend and speak English language more fluently. Therefore, the current research suggests the beneficial implementation of the CSs in English language teaching and learning process.

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