A Comparison Between the Impact of Rhetorical Argumentation and Narrating Stories as Communicative Tasks on Achieving the Mastery of Fluency and Accuracy

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Abstract

The present study is an investigation of the impact of the patterns of rhetorical argumentation, and narrating stories (together with describing past experiences) on students' fluency and accuracy in speaking. Accordingly, the merit of speaking in any language is entirely based on identifying the components of speaking to design comprehensive tasks each in its specific context (Nunan, 1984), while the criterion for evaluating speaking a second or a foreign language is divided into fluency and accuracy (Brumfit, 1984). In the same sense, fluency and accuracy are too broad to be considered as components of speaking, specifically when it comes to testing the communicative proficiency of the students. Consequently, the task of identifying precisely the components of fluency and accuracy can be traced to the organizational patterns of speaking and the implementation of the different tasks to promote speaking.

Key words: Rhetorical argumentation；Narrating Stories; Tasks; Fluency and accuracy

1. LANGUAGE LEARNING TASKS

Most researchers in the area of second language acquisition agree that the task is an activity which underlies a set of communicative purposes (Nunan, 1984; Brumfit, 1984). Meanwhile, testing the spoken language is predominantly related to the functions learners should achieve in language tasks. Hence, there are a number of conventional tasks and they differ according to the category or type of the information processed and they are: role playing, turn taking, discussion, describing pictures, and narrating stories. The difference between language learning tasks is set by Bloom (1968) in his taxonomy to belong either to top down or bottom up information processing. Tasks concerned with describing, remembering, or analyzing segments of information like in describing pictures or narrating stories are top-down information processing tasks.

On the other hand, bottom-up information processing tasks collect segments of information to form new knowledge. This is done through: planning, organizing, generalizing and evaluating. These tasks reflect discussions, turn taking and presentations.

2. RHETORICAL ARGUMENTATION

Rhetorical argumentation is a type of classroom discussion in which speakers try to negotiate the meaning to achieve a number of communicative purposes like: arguing, convincing, suggesting, illustrating, giving examples and evaluating knowledge. As a matter of fact, argumentation is used in everyday life as a critical thinking to defend a standpoint, while in academic contexts it is viewed by Freeley and Steinberg (2009, p.2) as "reason given in communicative situations by people whose purpose is the justification of acts, believes, attitudes and values." Communicators adhere to reasonable arguments in different communicative situations, while these arguments determine the negotiation of meaning of the task of rhetorical argumentation.

3. THE TASK OF NARRATING STORIES

Narrative tasks are a well-established frequently researched task type (Foster & Skehan, 1996). This task is usually involved in the creation of a story in response to a stimulus. This stimulus can be either real or imaginary. If it is real, then the stimulus is cognitive and the ideas are obtained from the mind, and if it is imaginary the stimulus is visual verbal given by the teacher as pictures or short excerpts of videos, and the events are obtained from the memory of the narrator. In the task of narrating stories, the students' focus is to recall information, to analyze them, sometimes they are required to organize them and some other times organization is not as much important as information-load- recalling. This task is cognitive in nature and it requires good memory and good vocabulary to maximize the flow of ideas and language as well.

The main rhetorical function here is narration, while so many other rhetorical functions can be implemented depending on the complexity of the task at hand. Robinson (2001) agrees that task complexity shapes the realization of the communicative events, and the cognitive demands of the task imposes on the students. For example, if low proficiency students are asked to narrate what they did last summer, the task can be quite demanding. In this simple task, the students implement different rhetorical functions: describing, illustrating, and explaining. But the task may become less demanding if some stimulus is provided to help generate the content and ideas of the story.

4. THE IMPACT OF TASKS OVER FLUENCY AND ACCURACY

The debate over the suitability of language learning tasks was intriguing for researchers in the last four decades. The oral proficiency is often counted on the students' ability to produce words and phrases, by evaluating the students' fulfilment of a variety of tasks like asking and answering, making up mini dialogues and stories, and discussing topics (Bygate, 1996). The problem with language tasks is the problem of complexity. The level of fluency and accuracy can be high if students are given too much time to think about the topic, or they practiced this task before and they are well aware of its communicative purposes. As an example, Crisp and Sweiry (2006) stated that pictures are of great help if they are given to students to help them tell a story or describe something, but these pictures should be picked up very carefully. While Cameron (2001) believed that the number of pauses and hesitations in fluency decrease, when such pictures are used, since most of the cognitive language and metalanguage exist in the task. Meanwhile, Skehan and Foster (1999) emphasize that a narrative task which is based on a cartoon strip helps to ease the processing of the task and eventually leads to more fluent and accurate performance.

5. TASK FAMILIARITY AND TASK DIFFICULTY

We have seen that narration can affect the smoothness of ideas and language as well which leads to fluency and accuracy, but this is true when the students are given some kind of stimulus to use them as cognitive operations. As a matter of fact, this claim does seem to fit all the circumstances, since Robinson (1995) investigated task difficulty and its effects on language production, he claimed that the more complexity of the task, the less accurate and fluent the production is. Accordingly, the task of narrating stories from the imagination of students is a complicated task, since then, when students are provided with pictures to tell a story they involve themselves in automatic fluency specifically when they practiced the task before, and here the focus of the students is to assimilate the form and not to generate the content.

6. THE TASK OF NARRATION AND RHETORICAL ARGUMENTATION

The characteristics of the tasks narration and rhetorical argumentation determine to a large extent what kind of fluency students produce when they are learning and when they are being tested. In the task of narrating stories, for example, the two types of fluency can be experienced depending on the task itself. If teachers provide pictures they indulge the students in automatic fluency, and if no stimulus is given students are indulged in procedural fluency. While in rhetorical argumentation the only type of fluency used is procedural, since the aim of discussing topics is to negotiate the meaning and open up the lines of communication between them. Knowledge is processed in stages to achieve the communicative purposes of arguing for or against a point of view is processed as follows:

Planning: Deals with the information and the interaction routines in a given situation. Learners need to know these in their minds and should be able to operate them in different contexts. Bygate (1987) focuses on the term information routines which refer to planning skills used in communication, learners use them to predict what might be said next and plan their utterances. Management interaction skills are divided into context focused agenda management and interaction focused turn-taking.

The Selection Stage: At this stage, learners use their knowledge of lexis and syntax to negotiate the meaning of the others. Explicitness in skills is to choose the right expressions and procedural skills is to ensure that understanding is done through a number of conventions like repetition, emphasis, requests, description or clarification.

The Production Stage: Is to activate the grammatical, contextual, discourse and pragmatic rules to form new

knowledge with the help of two important strategies: facilitation and compensation strategies.

Facilitation strategies are used to make communication easier, like avoiding difficult structures, using ellipses, and formulaic expressions. They are also used to make speaking easier for speakers themselves. Compensation strategies are all about making speakers more fluent through reduction, repetition rephrasing and self-correction.

Actually, it is always believed that pauses might breakdown the flow of language and ideas as well, but in rhetorical argumentation these pauses contribute to give the students a specific amount of time to think about what to say next, to come out with new arguments, and to speak with peers like in everyday life. The task of rhetorical argumentation is not only suitable for learning and teaching, but it transcends these boundaries to reach the testing of language production.

7. METHODOLOGY

7.1 Purposes

This research seeks to investigate the relationship between the implementation of different tasks in the classroom, with the components fluency and accuracy. Since language is learnt in different contexts, task variation is compulsory to make learning sound real, but if we assume the various kinds of tasks, teachers are confronted with another problematic issue which was raised by many researchers in the domain of second language teaching and learning like: Robinson (2001) Fulcher (2003) when they discussed the issue of task difficulty and its consequences on both learning and teaching.

7.2 Research Questions and Hypotheses

What is the effect of task difficulty on fluency and accuracy in communicative competence?

Are the tasks rhetorical argumentation and narrating stories important tasks in the process of speaking fluently and accurately?

Besides, the above purposes, the following two points are the strong interests in the experiment:

a) If students are taught how to organize information rhetorically, then they will master fluency and accuracy.

b) If argumentation is taught all together with fluency and accuracy, speaking would be very easy.

7.3 Sampling

The subjects in this research are 65 second year students enrolled in the department of English at the University of Constantine1. The subjects belong to two different groups, 35 students represent the experimental group and 30 students represent the control group. The subjects studied English for two years through which they were exposed to different subjects including Grammar, Written Expression, and Oral Expression. Thus, we expect them to possess average communicative competence to be tested in the experiment.

7.4 Procedures

In the first part of the experiment, students divide themselves into groups of three in both the experimental group and the control group. The students of the experimental group discussed topics with an argumentative nature, while students of the control group dealt with the task of narrating stories, book reviews, and summarizing short stories. We want to see how students advocate the tasks, to compare the effects of task difficulty and task familiarity on fluency and accuracy.

In the second part of the experiment, we record students during speaking in the examination context. We seized the opportunity of the second semester examinations to record the students while speaking to made things formal, and to avoid students' luck of motivation during participation. None of the groups in this research were given time for preparation before the examination, the control group set themselves again for the task of narrating stories and the experimental group set themselves for the task of rhetorical argumentation. The data obtained were analyzed in terms of the number of pauses and hesitations make, and the number of mistakes of inaccuracy committed in syntax, phonology and grammar. After that, we opted for the Pearson's correlation coefficient as part of the statistical measures to calculate the *T*-Test, the standard deviation and the level A- and together with the level of significance to prove the validity or invalidity of the second hypothesis. Besides, at the end of the experiment we compare the communicative strategies used by students in both groups to unveil the mistakes when they attempt to keep the communication going and reduce pauses and hesitations.

8. ANALYSIS

The adaptations made in this research in terms of the rhetorical functions in both tasks, are mainly part of the communicative competence strategies, which Dornyei and Kormos (1998) referred to as other communicative performances in the classroom and they include:

Negotiating the meaning (Arguing and discussing), asking for repetition, asking for clarification, expressing non understanding, asking for confirmation, guessing and achieving communicative goals. In addition, according to the requirements of our task we added the communicative goal of narrating, which comprises describing past experiences and describing people and places.

Table 1
Rhetorical Functions Implementation in the Tasks

Rhetorical Functions	Control group Means %	Experimental group Means %
Explanation	38.7	32.2
Exposition	12.05	00
Argumentation	6	40.9
- Persuasion	00	20.3
- Justification	6.9	17.6
Exemplification	13.7	9.55
Clarification	3.4	00
Narration	45.9	14.2
Describing past experiences	20.9	07.6
Describing people and places	4.3	0.2

The focus of the table above is to demonstrate the communicative strategies used by the students during their presentations in a form of communicative events or rhetorical functions. There are fundamental rhetorical functions and subsidiary rhetorical functions. The main rhetorical functions are argumentation and narration. Of course, the percentage of these two is high, since each rhetorical function is the main communicative purpose of the task. Therefore, the percentage of the use of argumentation is 40.9%, while the percentage of narration is 45.9% as a total measure of these two rhetorical functions.

On the other hand, some rhetorical functions are correlated, and they were used in both tasks to achieve the same communicative purposes like explanation, and the percentage of this rhetorical function vary slightly from 38.7% in the control group, to 32.2% in the experimental group. The rate of the other rhetorical functions varies from one group to another, according to the need and use of each rhetorical function. For example, clarification and exposition were not used in the experimental group, while persuasion has been avoided completely by the students of the control group as it was not needed at all.

Table 2
Pre-Test Accuracy and Fluency Means of the Experimental Group

Accuracy components	Vocabulary	Grammar	Syntax	Total
Means	2.30	2.54	2.50	7.34

Fluency components	Speed of delivery	Proceduralization of information	Topic familiarity	Total
Means	2.41	2.21	2.20	6.82

To start with, the issue of accuracy among the students is more problematic at the level of vocabulary. The lowest value of the medium in the above table is the component vocabulary, the mean is 2.30 with a divergence of -0.20 from the medium which is in this case 2.50 and it reflects the medium of all the accuracy aspects. Generally speaking, the grammar and syntax go hand in hand, the more mistakes committed at the grammatical level, the more they affect the structure of sentences. Accordingly, the means of grammar reached 2.54 and the mean of syntax reached 2.50 with varying divergences from the means of +0.40 and 0.00, respectively.

Hence, the majority of the students in the experimental group (22 students in total) are not fluent and they made a lot of pauses which prevent either the flow of ideas or language. Consequently, they obtained low scores and this led to a low mean in the component speed of delivery which is only 2.40 with a divergence of -1. More importantly, the performance of the students in the components proceduralization of information and topic familiarity is not convincing. First, they found it difficult to construct a clear relation between the information they are presenting in terms of cause and effect, arguing, comparison and contrast and this is partly due to lack of planning, and they achieved a low mean of 2.21 with a divergence of -1.9. Second, despite being free in terms of the topic they discussed, they did not show interesting ideas, and even the language was superficial and merely academic.

The following table demonstrates the means achieved by the control group:

Table 3
Pre-Test Accuracy and Fluency Means of the Control Group

Accuracy components	Vocabulary	Grammar	Syntax	Total
Means	2.39	2.45	2.42	7.34

Fluency components	Speed of delivery	Proceduralization of information	Topic familiarity	Total
Means	2.44	2.28	2.32	6.82

The students in the control group achieved better in vocabulary, since the mean is 3.39, while still the results are not convincing. The effects of the aspect grammar was direct and subjective over the component syntax, hence the mean of the scores of grammar is 2.45 while the mean of the scores of syntax is 2.42, and the divergence of both grammar and syntax is -0.50 and -0.80, respectively.

The table shows that the students in the control group obtained slightly better results in the components of fluency specifically proceduralization of information, and topic familiarity. As a matter of fact, in proceduralization of information the mean of the students' scores is 2.28 with a divergence of -2.20. Besides, the students achieved better in this task, and they handled task familiarity with ease, the mean of the scores is 2.32. Concerning speed of delivery, the mean is also higher than expected and it reached 2.44 with only a divergence of -0.60 from the medium. All the previous results are summarized in this table which will refer to it as a substantial source for the statistical measures of the Pearson's correlation coefficient:

Table 4
Mean of Fluency, Accuracy and Task Achievements

Group	Fluency and accuracy X	Means $\underline{X}$	Task achievements Y	Means $\underline{Y}$
Experimental Group	248.5	7.1	242	6.9
Control group	207.75	6.7	205	6.8

To make the calculations very clear, the items fluency and accuracy are referred to as X and the means as $\underline{X}$. The task achievements are referred to as Y and the means as $\underline{Y}$. The correlation between the variables X and Y were calculated according to Pearson's correlation coefficient. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) is one of the statistical values that indicate the strength and the direction of the relationship between the variables. It can be as high as (+1) when the relationship is positive, and this implies that if the value of one variable increases, so does the other one and vice versa. When the relationship is negative (r) can have a value as high as (-1), and this means that when one variable increases the other

decreases and vice versa. To sum up, the nearer is (r) to (1) the stronger is the relationship between the variables (Brown, 2003). The calculation of the coefficient led to a number of statistical measures through which we identify the following calculations:

-Means x, Standard deviation and T-test

We start first with calculating the coefficient correlation "r":

The standard deviation is calculated as follows:

The T-ration formula is calculated as follows:

$$SD_A = \sqrt{\frac{162.9}{35}} = 2.15 \qquad SD_B = \sqrt{\frac{153.59}{30}} = 2.09$$

T=0.55

Statistically speaking, to prove the validity or invalidity of the first hypothesis:

H_1: if students are taught how to organize information rhetorically, then they will master fluency and accuracy.

We compare the difference between the critical value T= 0.55 and the value r =0.70. Since that r = (0.70 0.55) and the significance of the relationship between the variables should be as equal as 1. There is a strong correlation between the variables, when we say that 70% of the factors which contributed in this correlation did not happen by chance. On the other hand, only 30% of the factors occurred by chance, or it is the effect of unwanted variables like: lack of motivation, anxiety, and topic unfamiliarity. Consequently, the first hypothesis is validated.

Table 5
Accuracy Mistakes and Fluency Pauses of Both Groups

Group	Accuracy mistakes	Fluency pauses	XY	X^2	Y^2	$A(X-\underline{X})^2$	$B(X-\underline{X})^2$
Experimental	533/ mean 15.22	1907/mean 54.48	30627	9195	117565	1076,52	6093,37
Control	500/ mean 16.33	1617/ mean 53.9	28274	9300	88969	1144,04	3563,5

Moving towards validating or invalidating the second hypothesis, we are required to run some more statistical calculations. This time, the focus of these calculations is to prove the correlation between fluency and accuracy

in both the experimental group and the control group. Hence, we calculated the number of accurate mistakes committed by the students in grammar, syntax, phonology, and they are all classified under the column named

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Accuracy

accuracy mistakes in the table. Whereas, the other column which is named fluency pauses comprises all hesitations phenomena including pauses, filled and unfilled ones, false starts and hesitations. While the other columns in the above table are very statistical calculations which help count the values of the Pearson's correlation coefficient r, standard deviation and t-test. The correlation here is made between the elements accuracy X and Fluency Y:

$$r = \frac{n\,(\sum xy) - (\sum x)\,(\sum y)}{\sqrt{[n\sum x^2 - (x)^2][n\sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2]}}$$

$$r = \frac{30 * (28274) - (500)(1617)}{\sqrt{[35 * 9300 - (250000)][35 * 88969 - (2614689)]}}$$

$$r = \frac{25109}{61396.45} \qquad r = 0.40$$

Now, we need to calculate the T-ration of the means obtained in fluency and accuracy.

$$T_1 = \frac{X - X}{\sqrt{\frac{(SD1)2}{Na} + \frac{(SD2)2}{Nb}}} \qquad T_2 = \frac{54.48 - 53.9}{\sqrt{\frac{(13.9)2}{30} + \frac{(10.89)2}{30}}}$$

$$T_1 = \frac{15.22 - 16.33}{\sqrt{\frac{(5.45)2}{35} + \frac{(6.17)2}{35}}} \qquad T_2 = \frac{0.58}{3.22}$$

$$T_{1=} 0.52 \qquad\qquad T_2 = 0.18$$

In addition, the degree of freedom of the two groups is counted by subtracting 2 out of the total number of students $df = 65 - 2 = 63$

Hence, to get the Alpha level A:

$$A = \frac{63}{100} = 0.63$$

Since the alpha level is 0.63 and the results of the t-ratio in both accuracy and fluency are 0.52 and 0.18 respectively, and the rates 0.18 and 0.52 are not more than the level alpha 0.63 the correlation between the variables rhetorical argumentation and fluency is very weak. Even the rate of the Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) is 0.36 and it is weak when 64% of the factors occurred haphazardly. In this case, the second hypothesis is rejected by saying that the means obtained by the experimental group in fluency and accuracy are not significantly higher than that obtained in the control group.

9. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The results of the post-test were unpredictable, first the second hypothesis is rejected and there is a weak correlation between fluency, accuracy and the task of rhetorical argumentation. Statistically speaking, the control group achieved better results than the experimental group in fluency, this is due to the number of pauses and length of pauses. In the post-test the experimental group

needed more time for the task rhetorical argumentation, we believe also that the difficulty of the task contributed in increasing the number of pauses for ($\sum$: 54.48) against ($\sum$: 53.9) while the experimental group got a slightly better mean for accuracy. Generally speaking, the time spent in pausing during speaking is between 0.25 millisecond to 4 seconds. As it has been mentioned before, the 66% of the hesitation phenomena for the experimental group are pauses, most of them are long pauses stretching from 1.5 to 4 seconds the rest are fillers, and false starts. Meanwhile, the control group hesitation phenomenon rates are 47% pauses 39% are repetitions, and the 14% false starts. The length of the pauses is enclosed between 0.75 milliseconds and 3 seconds the pauses are longer and less frequent for the experimental group. Even more importantly, the standard deviation of both groups shows how difficult the task of rhetorical argumentation is, and they show the relationship between planning, producing pauses and making mistakes.

Second, the analysis shows that the students of the control group are more accurate when it comes to grammar and spelling mistakes. The mean of the mistakes committed in the experimental group 15.22 while the mean of the control group reached 16.33, and the number of the mistakes is inconsistent in both groups, it matches the task and its communicative purposes. The experimental group committed grammatical mistakes in nature while the control group committed pronunciation and tense agreement mistakes.

Third, the amount of time spent by students in planning was mainly divided into two categories. The first category is called pre-task planning, and this is the most crucial time of the task, the measurement of this time starts when the students are given the task till when they stop speaking. In this time, students are busy brainstorming and generating as much ideas as possible very quickly, and this time lasts from 30 to 60 for the control group, and 30 to 100 seconds for the experimental group not exceeding 2 minutes, but the students are free either to take the most of it, or leave it. Students of the experimental group used planning time more than students in the control group in both categories. the requirements of the task do not conform to the amount of time given for planning.

On the other hand, the task subjected to the control group was not highly demanding, and it does not require too much planning. The students are required to achieve two communicative purposes narrating stories and recalling past experiences. The task was not cognitively demanding, the students possess schema knowledge about the topic they will start narrating the stories as they know them, they are not even asked to organize the content. This led to accuracy complexity since most of the students used lexical variety, and the flow of idea, the fact is that, in narrating stories, students already possess stimulus (schema knowledge) all they have to do is to

start speaking automatically, they even borrowed some difficult words from French (LMD instead of BMD, and rattrapage instead of resit examination) to use in their stories, they were completely engaged in automatic fluency.

CONCLUSION

Generally speaking, since the students in the experimental group were confronted with a difficult task which was all about achieving some communicative purposes like: convincing, arguing, judging, and commenting. In addition, the students in the experimental group were obliged to embed other rhetorical functions like: explaining, exemplifying and illustrating. Unexpectedly, the difficulty of the task of rhetorical argumentation affected fluency more than accuracy. Swain (2001) discussed the impact of task difficulty over the learners' proficiency achievements, Swain distinguished between one-way, two-way, and multi-way classification of language tasks and he argued that multi-tasks are more difficult when teachers use them to provide score meaning in more complex contexts which assimilate real life situations. The difficulty here is determined by a whole range of task features or conditions that must be manipulated in the task, to compare their impact upon discourse variation and language variation.

In this article, we divided speaking into two main components: accuracy and fluency. Accuracy is related to grammar, syntax, and phonology as they are parts of the tiny segments of the whole communicative system which is all about rules, or applying rules effectively to produce correct grammatical, syntactic and phonological sentences. While fluency is divided into three main components which are: hesitation phenomenon, speed of delivery, and planning time. Hesitation phenomenon comprises a number of fluency indices like pauses, hesitations, filled pauses and false starts. All these indices are determined by the extent to which students devote a substantial amount of their speaking time to generate ideas and plan what to say next. But speaking quickly does not entail fluency all the time, the speaker may repeat the same idea during speaking in many forms; some pauses are created for the

purpose of advocating some time to think about the topic and to plan what to say next.

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