Improving the Components of Speaking Proficiency

L'AMÉLIORATION DE LA MAÎTRISE DES COMPOSANTS DE L'EXPRESSION ORALE

Taher Bahrani[1]
Rahmatollah Soltani[2]

Abstract: One of the main concerns of language learners is how to improve their speaking proficiency in general and different components of speaking proficiency such as fluency, accuracy, accent, vocabulary, comprehension, and communication in particular. Accordingly, the present research attempts to investigate the effect of listening to different TV programs on improving different components of speaking proficiency. To achieve this purpose, a sample speaking test was given to twenty language learners as a pre-test. During the study, the participants had exposure to different programs from TV. After a period of three months, a post-test was administered. Then, the scores of each component in the pre-test were compared with that of the post-test. The result showed that the use of vocabulary as a component of speaking proficiency improves more. On the contrary, accuracy improves less than the other components.
Key words: Speaking proficiency; Improve; Vocabulary; Accuracy

Résumé: L'une des préoccupations principales des apprenants de langue est de savoir comment améliorer l'expression orale en général et maîtriser de différents composants de la compétence de l'expression orale comme la fluidité, la précision, l'accent, le vocabulaire, la compréhension et la communication en particulier. En conséquence, la présente recherche tente d'étudier l'effet d'écouter des émissions de différents programmes à la télé sur l'amélioration de la maîtrise de différents éléments de l'expression orale. Pour atteindre ce but, un test de langue a été donné à vingt apprenants de langue comme un pré-test. Au cours de l'étude, les participants ont été exposés à de différents programmes de la télévision. Après une période de trois mois, un post-test a été donné. Ensuite, les scores de chaque composant dans le pré-test ont été comparés avec ceux du post-test. Le résultat a montré que l'un des éléments de compétence orale, l'utilisation du vocabulaire, s'améliore le plus. Au contraire, la précision s'améliore moins que les autres composants.
Mots clés: Compétence de l'expression orale; Améliorer; Vocabulaire; Précision

INTRODUCTION

It does not matter if your TV set is black and white or small. TV provides easy access to different programs such as news, songs, films, soap operas, talk shows, and so on which are initially made to entertain people. However, these programs can also be used in conversation classes to improve language learning.

According to many studies which have been conducted in this regard, different news stories can be used at all levels of language classes if teachers know how to adjust the news according to the proficiency level of the language learners (Mackenzie, 1997). The recycling feature of news and the fluency of speech produced by the news casters provide a good chance for language learners to improve different aspects of their language proficiency. Different songs can also motivate language learners to learn the language better if they are used besides the lessons to be learnt (Schoepp, 2001). Moreover, Different films can improve listening comprehension and motivate language learners (Chapple and Curtis, 2000; Ryan, 1998).

---

[1] Department of English, Mahshahr Branch, Islamic Azad University, Mahshahr, Iran
E-mail: taherbahrani@yahoo.com
[2] Department of English, Mahshahr Branch, Islamic Azad University, Mahshahr, Iran

Considering all the above-mentioned pedagogical values of different TV programs, one of the problems that language learners face is how to improve their speaking proficiency in general and different components of speaking proficiency such as fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, comprehension, accent, and communication in particular. Accordingly, language teachers may use different print materials or different videos followed by a book to boost speaking proficiency in their classes. With all these efforts, language learners still fail to achieve a satisfying improvement in different components of speaking proficiency. In the same line, the present study attempts to support the pedagogical value of using different TV programs in language learning by providing sound data. In other words, it tries to examine the effect of different TV programs on improving different components of speaking proficiency. The results of this study would help both language learners and teachers to find out which component of speaking proficiency benefits more from TV programs.

1. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The use of different TV programs for language learning and the pedagogical effectiveness of different programs to enhance different language skills have been the focus of so many studies (Hafernik and Surguine, 1979; Blatchford, 1973; Yu, 1995; Bell, 2003; Brinton and Gaskill, 1978; Chapple and Cruits, 2000; Ryan, 1998; Schoepp, 2001; Poon, 1992; Baker, 1996; Cauldwell, 1996; Berber, 1997; Cabaj and Nicolic, 2000, just to name some).

Radio programs as pedagogically worthy materials have been the focus of a study conducted by Hafernik and Surguine (1979). The study proved that radio programs can improve listening comprehension to a significant extent. In a descriptive study conducted by Bell (2003), the effectiveness of using TV news as one kind of TV program is emphasized. Accordingly, Bell sets some criteria for selecting and using news stories. Content and linguistic difficulties are two important criteria for selecting TV news stories. However, the study of Bell lacks to provide any empirical evidence. In another research which was conducted by Brinton and Gaskill (1978), the pedagogical value of TV and radio news to enhance listening comprehension was highlighted. Brinton and Gaskill (1978) provide empirical evidence of improving listening comprehension of EFL learners having difficulty in dealing with comprehending news utterances. They note that the recycling feature of news help language learners acquire many related words in short time. Similar studies which focused on using TV news to improve listening comprehension was also conducted by Poon (1992) and Baker (1996). Accordingly, through exposure to news stories, language learners can improve their listening skill. In the same line, the use of fast speech such as those of TV and radio news in EFL/ESL classrooms has also been studied by Cauldwell (1996) and Mackenzie (1997).

Regarding the use of different films in language learning, some studies have been conducted by some scholars (Chapple and Curtis, 2000; Ryan, 1998). In these studies, the use of films was found to be effective in developing the motivation of the language learners. However, no evidence of improvement in language skills was given by these researches.

English songs have also been the focus of some studies as a kind of material to be used in language learning. In this regard, a study with no empirical evidence was carried out by Schoepp (2001) focusing on the effects of listening to songs on promoting language learning. Schoepp states that if songs are used in coordination with a language lesson, they can be of too much value. According to Schoepp, affective reasons, cognitive reasons, and linguistic reasons are the three important factors making songs effective for enhancement of language learning.

In short, the majority of the aforementioned descriptive and experimental works have been conducted on the pedagogical value and the effect of different TV programs on promoting different language skills especially listening comprehension but none of them has specifically focused on different components of speaking proficiency. This is the main reason to carry out the present study.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Subjects

The participants of this study were initially one hundred EFL learners including both males and females out of whom twenty participants were selected to carry the research with.

2.2 Instruments and Materials

The first instrument was a sample speaking IELTS test which was used as a pre-test. The second instrument which was used as a post-test was another sample speaking proficiency test from IELTS.

In order to score the interviews and have a better quantitative data for the components of speaking proficiency, a checklist developed by Askari (2006) was used (see appendix I). The validity of the checklist had been verified by him in

a pilot study. Regarding the checklist it should be mentioned that it scores each speaking test out of 30. Moreover, it included six scales including fluency, comprehension, communication, vocabulary, accuracy, and accent. Each scale incorporates five levels (5 points). It should also be mentioned that, to develop the speaking proficiency assessment checklist, various sample checklists including Hughes (2003) were reviewed and closely evaluated by Askari (2006).

2.3 Procedure

The research was conducted based on pre-test and post-test design. The first step to take, before the participants were selected, was to verify the reliabilities of the sample IELTS speaking proficiency pre-post tests. To do so, the tests were given to a trial group of language learners in a university in Iran. Then, the reliabilities of both tests were calculated separately by means of KR-21 formula. Once the reliabilities of the tests were verified, one test was given to the one hundred initial participants. When the scores of the test were obtained twenty participants who scored near the mean score were selected as homogeneous language learners.

Regarding the speaking test, it should be mentioned that each interview was scored out of 30 according to the speaking proficiency scale which includes six scales of fluency, comprehension, communication, vocabulary, structure, and accent and each scale incorporated five levels (5 points). These scores were used later to be compared with the post-test scores.

Throughout the experiment which lasted for 3 months (4 hours a week), the researcher provided the participants with different TV programs to work on in the classroom.

During the experiment and for each interval between every two sessions, the participants were asked to watch and listen to at least 4 hours TV programs outside the classroom and write down the summary of whatever was heard which was viewed and discussed later inside the classroom. As the matter of fact, this was only done to make sure that the participants had the minimum amount of exposure to different programs from TV outside the classroom.

After 3 months of exposure, all the participants took a same sample speaking proficiency test from IELTS as a post-test to check if there was any change in different components of speaking proficiency.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the observation of the researcher, the participants of the study showed great interest watching different programs from TV during the study. The participants attended the class with low anxiety which led to the high motivation. This is considered to enhance language learning (Krashen, 1982).

The data obtained from the post-test showed some valuable findings to be considered. According to the results of the post-test compared with the pre-test, the participants improved the vocabulary and communication components more than the other components during the period of the study. Fluency was the other component which improved to some extent. However, accuracy, comprehension, and accent are the three components of speaking proficiency which remained steady with no improvement.

Accordingly, the results of the present research are in line with that of Blatchford (1973). According to Blachford, listening to news as a kind of TV program can help language learners improve their vocabulary acquisition to a significant extent. This is mainly because of the recycling feature of TV news. The results of the study also highlight the pedagogical value of using different TV programs for language learning.

Following is the statistical analysis of the data obtained from the pre-test and the post-test of all the participants.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistic Related to the 20 Participants' Pre-Test Results (out of 5)

Speakıng Components	Accuracy	Fluency	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Accent	Communication
Mean Score in the Pre-Test	2.5	2	2	2.5	2	2.5

Table 2: Descriptive Statistic Related to the 20 Participants' Post-Test Results (out of 5)

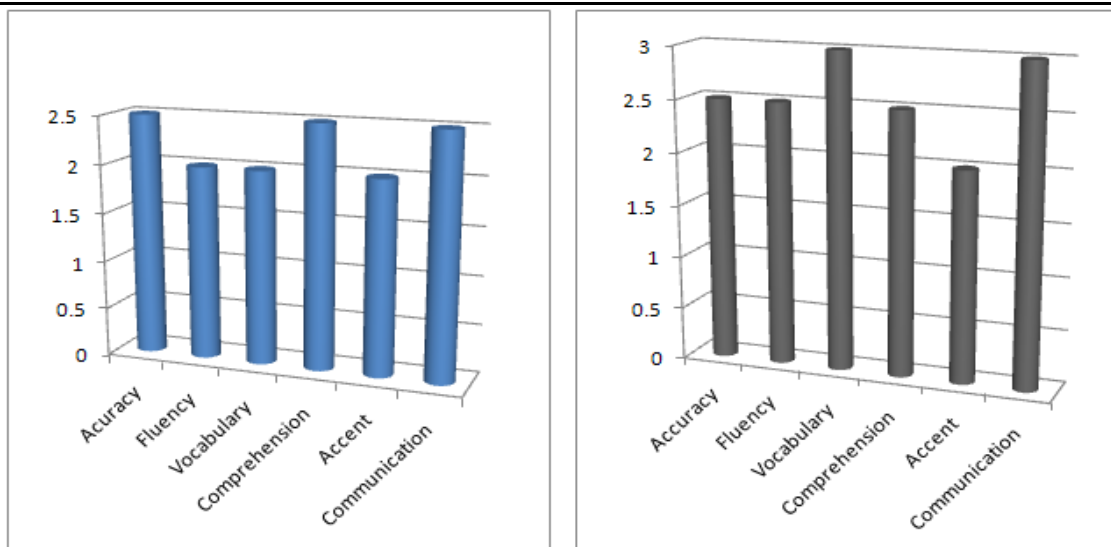| Speakıng Components	Accuracy	Fluency	Vocabulary	Comprehension	Accent	Communication
Mean Score in the Post-Test	2.5	2.5	3	2.5	2	3

Figure 1: Comparison between the Mean Score of Each Component in the Pre-Post Tests

CONCLUSION

The present research was conducted to provide empirical evidence of the effectiveness of using different TV programs in language classes. So many studies had already emphasized the pedagogical values of different TV programs for language learning. However, the present research tried to shed more light to the existing value of TV programs. Accordingly, it was showed that the use of various TV programs in general can facilitate vocabulary acquisition to a significant extent. The main reason could be the recycling feature of some TV programs. In some TV programs such as news, the vocabulary is repeated over and over which has been proved to improve vocabulary acquisition (Blachford, 1973). However, further studies can be conducted focusing on a specific type of TV program which can best help language learners improve their speaking proficiency and its components.

REFERENCES

Askari, E. (2006). *A Comparative Study on Objective Vs. Subjective Scoring for Testing Oral Language Proficiency of University EFL Students* (Unpublished thesis). TEFL, Ahvaz, Olum Tahghighat University.

Baker, N. (1996). Using the TV News in the EFL Classroom. *Zielsprache, 26*(2), 30-33.

Bell, D. M. (2003). TV News in the EFL/ESL Classroom: Criteria for Selection. *TESL-EJ, 7*(3), 1-17. Available at: http://www-writing.berkeley.edu/TESL-EJ/ej27/a2.html. Accessed, February 22, 2007.

Berber, S. A. (1997). Proficiency and Comprehension of Television News in a Foreign Language. *Revista de Documentacao de Estudos em Linguistica Teorica e Aplicada (D.E.L.T.A.), 13*(2), 177-190.

Blatchford, C. (1973). Newspapers: Vehicles for Teaching ESOL with Cultural Focus. *TESOL Quarterly, 7*, 145-153.

Brinton, D., & Gaskill, W. (1978). Using News Broadcast in EFL/ESL Classroom. *TESOL Quarterly, 12*(2), 403-415.

Cabaj, H., & Nicolic, V. (2000). *Am I Teaching Well? Self- Evaluation Strategies for Effective Teachers.* Pippin Publishing Corporation.

Cauldwell, R. M. (1996). Direct Encounters with Fast Speech on CD-Audio to Teach Listening. *System, 24*(4), 521-528.

Chapple, L., & Curtis, A. (2000). Content based Instruction in Hong Kong: Students Responses to Films. *System, 28*, 419-433.

Hafernik, J.J., & Surguine, H. (1979). Using Radio Commercials as Supplementary Materials in ESL Listening Classes. *TESOL quarterly, 13*(3), 341-347.

Hughes, A. (2003). *Testing for Language Teachers* (2nd Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition.* Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Mackenzie, A. S. (1997). Using CNN News Video in the EFL Classroom. *The Internet TESL Journal, 3*(2). Available at: http://www.aitwech.ac.jp/~iteslj/,.Accessed February 21, 2006.

Poon, A. (1992). Action Research: A study on Using TV News to Improve Listening Proficiency. *Research Report, 14,* 1-70.

Ryan, S. (1998). Using Films to Develop Learner Motivation. *The internet TESL journal, 13*(11). Available at: http://iteslj.org/articles/Rayan-Film.html. Access: February 3, 2006.

Schoepp, K. (2001). Reasons for Using Songs in ESL/EFL Classroom. *The internet TESL journal, 7*(2). Available at: http://iteslj.org/articles/Schoepp-Songs.html. Access: February 12, 2007.

Yu, Y. (1995). Using a Radio Station on Campus for English Learning: Recent Developments in China. *System, 23*(1), 69-76.

Appendix I

A Sample Checklist for Measuring Communicative Abilities:

Scale I- Fluency:
- [ ] 5- Speaks fluently.
- [ ] 4- Speaks with near-native like fluency, pauses and hesitations do not interfere with comprehension
- [ ] 3- Speaks with occasional hesitations.
- [ ] 2- Speaks hesitantly and slowly because of rephrasing and searching for words.
- [ ] 1- Speaks in single word and short patterns, unable to make connected sentences.

Scale II- Comprehension:
- [ ] 5- Understands academic discourse without difficulty.
- [ ] 4- Understands most spoken language except for very colloquial speech.
- [ ] 3- Understands academic discourse with repetitions, rephrasing, and clarification.
- [ ] 2- Understands simple sentences, words; requires repetitions, slower than normal speech.
- [ ] 1-Understands very little or no English.

Scale III- Communication:
- [ ] 5- Communicates competently in social academic settings.
- [ ] 4- Speaks fluently in a social academic settings, errors do not interfere with meaning.
- [ ] 3- Initiates and sustains conversation, exhibits self confidence in social situations.
- [ ] 2- Begins to communicate for personal and survival needs.
- [ ] 1- Almost unable to communicate.

Scale IV- Vocabulary:
- [ ] 5- Uses extensive vocabulary in any domain appropriately.
- [ ] 4- Uses varied vocabulary to discuss general topics and in special interests.
- [ ] 3- Uses academic vocabulary, some word usage inappropriate, slightly damages the message.
- [ ] 2- Uses limited vocabulary, constant use of one word.
- [ ] 1- Inadequate basic vocabulary.

Scale V- Accuracy:
- [ ] 5- Masters a variety of grammatical structures, almost no error.
- [ ] 4- Occasional grammatical errors but no problem with understanding.
- [ ] 3- Uses some complex sentences but lacks control over irregular forms.
- [ ] 2- Uses predominantly present tense verbs, constant errors interfere with understanding.
- [ ] 1- Severe errors make understanding completely impossible.

Scale VI- Accent:
- [ ] 5- Acceptable pronunciation, with few traces of foreign accent.
- [ ] 4- Speaks with few phonemic errors, but almost intelligible pronunciation.
- [ ] 3- Occasional errors necessitate attentive listening.
- [ ] 2- Constant phonemic errors make understanding extremely hard.
- [ ] 1- Severe problems make understanding almost impossible.