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THE IMPACT OF TEACHING SLANGS STYLE ON IRANIAN EFL LEARNER'S SPEAKING ABILITY

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigated the relationship between teaching slang as independent variable and improvement of speaking ability as dependant variable among Iranian learners in Sari. After homogenizing 80 students by administering PET, 40 qualified learners as intermediate learners randomly were aligned into experimental and control group. Before conducting treatment process, all 40 learners received pre-test including 5 questions and 5 making sentence which were made by the researcher in the shape of oral interview to assess how much they use slang expressions while speaking about an ordinary topic. Once the procedural process to experimental group via 8 sessions of teaching slang finished, both groups took part in an interview as post-test to estimate any possible difference from pre to post-test. By analyzing differences through employing Paired T-test and Independent T-test which the former was selected to clear any improvement from pre to post-test in experimental group and the latter was picked in order to figure out how students of both groups function in their post-tests, both null hypotheses rejected. Findings indicated that teaching slang has put a positive effect on speaking ability of learners because comparison of student's performance from pre-test to post-test differs significantly.

Key Words: Slang, Speaking Ability, Idiom, EFL Learner

INTRODUCTION

This part as a preface to two variables of present study, tried to open the specified domain of work and it started with discussing speaking and slang importance in TEFL. Nowadays, along with the strengthening position of English as a language for international communication, the teaching of speaking skill has become increasingly important in the English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) context. The teaching of speaking skill is also important due to the large number of students who want to study English in order to be able to use English for communicative purposes. This is apparent in Richards and Renandiyas (2002) publication where they stated, a large percentage of the world's language learners study English in order to develop proficiency in speaking (p. 201). Moreover, students of second/foreign language education programs are considered successful if they can communicate effectively in the language (Riggenback and Lazaraton, 1991).

By spreading English language as an international one used throughout the world, more applicants every year set out learning English but very soon they find themselves amidst ocean of unwritten words that seems impossible to understand. The reason is this; English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs cannot adequately prepare them for the dizzying array of slang, idioms and colloquialisms that color everyday speech. As Mark Algren (2011), Language Center at the University of says, Students can feel lost in conversations. The language they have learned in a classroom setting is not how people talk. According to the Random House Unabridged Dictionary, slang is very informal usage in vocabulary and idiom that is characteristically more metaphorical, playful, elliptical, vivid and ephemeral than ordinary language. For example, following are all slang terms for 'excellent': phat; obese; shiznit and coolio.

Having introduced independent and dependent variables of topic which survey has established on, the researcher meant to discuss the theoretical framework behind the slang and speaking development in EFL, accompanying the purpose by which study has formed itself, the problem presentation that the

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researcher sensed exist among EFL learners in Sari followed by research questions and hypothesizes. What has been stated below, clarify them extensively.

Statement of the Problem

Along the history of foreign language teaching and learning, speaking has always been considered as the most essential skill to be mastered for several reasons. First, approaches and methods for teaching speaking have long been major focuses of language teaching researches and conferences. Second, a huge number of conversation and other speaking course books, audios and videos are continuously published. In addition, many language learners see speaking ability as the measure of knowing a language. They define fluency as the ability to converse with others, much more than the ability to read, write, or comprehend oral language. They regard speaking as the most important skill they can acquire. Speaking as so much part of daily life that we tend to take it for granted. However, learning speaking, whether in a first or other language, involves developing subtle and detailed knowledge about why, how, and when to communicate, and complex skills for producing and managing interaction. We speak in order to carry out various social activities and attune our language and the meaning we wish to exchange to our specific purposes for speaking in that context.

Survival speech which a foreigner comes across in his first encounter of target language means far more his knowledge and understanding as if they are from strange planet. What a foreigner hears everywhere is called slang, an informal shape of speaking among a community, which continually change. Due to EFL learners who have rare opportunity to communicate with natives even it seems more complicated to understand those nonstandard words used by English speakers and consequently can weaken power and efficiency of learner's speaking ability in where they are claimed to talk fluently and normally apart from bookish tone of speaking which is prevalent in most EFL learner. Encountering this problem in the best way, need learners to cooperate in group in and out of class so that presented slangs instill in their mind for everyday use of target language. According to Chastain (1988) speaking is the performance of the speaker's competence, but performance does not follow competence automatically. Teaching slangs, idioms and lexical collocations to students may not make them to afford presented materials properly unless they apply it continuously with each other and consider those words as something that is ubiquitous every time, everywhere and they oblige themselves to use it while speaking. Chastain (1988) stated that language must first be in the head, but practice makes it perfect to enable learners either understand and speak normally.

Since slang sphere is changing and extending continually, therefore connecting it to each fourfold skill requires intricate and scrutinized work. Few studies have been published on the present topic. In Iran Elahe Movahediyani Attar and Hamid Allami (2013) conducted a same test on 40 intermediate students who were aligned into experimental and control group. For pretests, collocation test and collocation interview were run. Then, *Collocation in Use* was taught to the experimental group as a treatment. After collocation instruction, another collocation test and interview were conducted on both experimental and control group. The result of paired sample *t*-test showed that the participant's speaking ability in the experimental group significantly improved in posttest.

The analyzed data also revealed that after the collocation instruction in experimental group the participant's performance in interview increased too.

Scarcity of related surveys done on the published topic, the researcher conducted a pilot study to specify required results in upcoming work. 10 learners studying English in Shokouh institute in Sari scored as intermediate level learners who were picked out to get treatment of teaching slangs to verify its effect on speaking power of students. Members of experimental and control group took part in pre-test and post-test, which was shaped in oral interview form.

They were asked 10 questions and were supposed to answer with specified slang. Results disappointedly showed weak relationship between two variables in where 7 out of 10 learners got score lower than 5 out of 10 that encouraged the researcher to adopt larger sample to replicate survey figuring out different results of pilot study.

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Research Questions

Compatible with statement of problem revealed earlier, two following questions arose to be answered at the end of the survey:

RQ1: Does instruction of slang affect EFL learner's speaking ability?

RQ2: Is there any difference between the results of post-tests of control and experimental group?

Research Hypotheses

Based on aforementioned questions, these hypotheses were constructed so that the researcher can validate his survey.

H1: Instruction of slang style does not affect EFL learner's speaking ability.

H2: There is no difference between the results of post-tests of control and experimental group.

Review of Literature

Learning a second language involves the manipulation of four main skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing, which lead to effective communication. In one hand, Speaking is a key to communication. But considering what good speakers do, what speaking tasks can be used in class, and what specific needs learners report, teachers can help learners improve their speaking and overall oral competency (Florez, 1999). On the other hand, slang is the use of informal words and expressions that are not considered standard in the speaker's language or dialect but are considered acceptable in certain social settings. Slang expressions may act as euphemisms and may be used as the means of identifying with one's peers.

Speaking is at the heart of second language learning but has been somewhat ignored in teaching and testing for a number of logistical reasons. There are many occasions where we need to talk or express ourselves in English. They may be Group discussion, Personal interviews, seminar or meeting organized by institutes or corporate or simply discussing with client or associate. English is almost a mandatory language to communicate or take part in these activities. It is more difficult for a non-English background person to face this kind of situation. English is becoming a basic need now a day. Whatever you work on internet, computer, mobile or any document; mostly they use English as their language.

Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information (Brown, 1994; Burns and Joyce, 1997). Its form and meaning are dependent on the context in which it occurs, including the participants themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for speaking. It is often spontaneous, open-ended, and evolving. However, speech is not always unpredictable. Language functions (or patterns) that tend to occur in certain discourse situations (e.g., declining an invitation or requesting time off from work), can be identified and charted (Burns and Joyce, 1997).

For example, when a salesperson asks, "May I help you?" the expected discourse sequence includes a statement of need, response to the need, offer of appreciation, acknowledgement of the appreciation, and a leave-taking exchange. Speaking requires that learners not only know how to produce specific points of language such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary (linguistic competence), but also that they understand when, why, and in what ways to produce language (sociolinguistic competence). Finally, speech has its own skills, structures, and conventions different from written language (Burns and Joyce, 1997; Carter and McCarthy, 1995; Cohen, 1996). A good speaker synthesizes this array of skills and knowledge to succeed in a given speech act.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology

1. Introduction

Methodology refers to the choice and use of particular strategies and tools for data gathering and analysis. Methodology of the present thesis intensively tells us how powerfully our research was planned to be done by exploring design of the study, procedural method by which the researcher was going to interpret data, followed by subjects and materials.

All items were discussed separately below.

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2. Design of the Study

This study was an attempt to discover possible relationship by which EFL learners can take advantage from learning slang expressions toward brushing up their speaking ability. Current survey stands as a quantitative research, which has quasi-experimental design. According to Susan Gass (2005), quantitative research generally starts with an experimental design in which a hypothesis is followed by the quantification of data and some sort of numerical analysis is carried out. By attributing quasi-experimental design to present study and following the characteristics that it carries, 40 intermediate male learners out of 80, learning English as their foreign language, parted into experimental and control group to investigate how teaching slang can affect speaking ability of qualified learners. Applied treatment to experimental group was assigned as the key factor in assessing existing relationship by determining any difference between two groups on their pre-test to post-tests performances. In next parts, more information was covered.

3. Participants

Population who the researcher decided to contribute in survey was selected from Shokouh institute- males branch- located in Sari. 80 learners all studying English, were picked up to provide 40 qualified ones after homogenizing their current proficiency level as intermediate EFL learners by conducting Preliminary English Test (PET). All learners were between 15-17 years old who were distributed in two experimental (N=20) and control group (N=20) randomly.

4. Materials

The researcher applied two phases doing the study. The first phase was administering Preliminary English Test (PET) for homogenizing learner's current level of language proficiency with reliability of 0.78 which includes reading, writing, listening and speaking parts respectively. Preliminary English Test is considered to be more appropriate for learners who are studying English in institutes; therefore the researcher selected it conventionally.

The second phase is body of survey that was supposed to clear whether teaching slang can affect speaking ability of learners that claims teacher-made questions carrying slang expressions which functions as pre and post-test. These questions were designed by the researcher in the conventional form of judging speaking ability namely, oral interview. According to Farhady and et al. (2003) the oral interview is the most valid test of speaking ability that should follow some guidelines to validate itself:

- Each interview should be carefully structured. Interviews should be natural and realistic to the extent possible; yet it is not desirable to conduct them spontaneously.
- To obtain dependable results, it is necessary to utilize the services of at least two raters.
- At the beginning of the interview, the candidate should be put at ease by being asked simple questions.
- The decision to use a global or specific scoring system should be based on the purpose of the test.
- Each interview should be recorded to be scored later.

Bearing mentioned guidelines in mind, the researcher made two tests, one as pre-test that happened once group arrangement shaped.

Both control and experimental groups took the test to estimate their ability, using slang expressions while speaking on everyday topics which was held in the form of oral interview tested by 4 judges and second test as post-test occurred after 8 sessions of teaching slang expressions as treatment process to experimental group which carried different questions- Q. and A. part and cards to be drawn- from pre-test on slangs in oral interview form as well. All questions made by the researcher as teacher-made ones were inter-rated by three teachers (with M.A. degree) who were teaching English to students having advanced level studying in Shokouh institute in Sari.

After taking their advice and suggestion, the researcher reached to the desired and semi-standard tests which were used as pre-test and post-test with the reliability of 0.53 computed by KR-21 formulae. Worth mentioning here that all questions about slang expressions have content validity by been presented in pamphlet and none of them were bewildering to be understood.

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5. Procedure

The treatment trends lasted for one month through learners in experimental and control group participated in their classes twice a week. As it was mentioned before, the researcher adopted interview as pre and post-tests for assessing students speaking power. During 8 sessions of treatment, experimental group members were taught a pamphlet containing the most common slangs used in everyday speech of English language users without separating different domains of slang such as business slang, film slang, school slang and et cet. In question pamphlet was reprinted from the street talk.1 republished in 2004 by David Burke, which was used as genuine material teaching applicable slangs. Once the treatment finished, learners of both groups are asked to take part in an interview as post-test. This time the post-test is nearly in the same form of stems having different slangs from pre-test. As before on what has been done in pre-test, each single student was interviewed by the panel including the researcher and three instructors (two males, one female) who were teaching English in shoukouh and kanon-e- zaban-e- Iran institutes in Sari. Tests have 2 forms of eliciting information on slangs. Part A included 5 free questions that students are asked and simultaneously they were shown two slangs to pick correct one and then answer the question using that slang. Part B contained 7 cards with slangs written on that individual interviewee was obliged to pick out 5 out of 7 to make sentence on each. They have one minute to answer each question on part A and make five sentences presented them on cards which they selected randomly. If they fail to say appropriate slang which is specified by judges as being correct answer, or make related sentences using slangs no score is given to them. Allocated score to each single stem was (1) that totally came out in 10 marks. Meanwhile each session of interview was recorded impeding any ambiguity while scoring among judges. In order to prevent cheating, students who were interviewed stayed in different room from those of waited learners to been called for interview. The whole procedural process lasted for nearly four hours. Complete applied tests were shown in appendices A and B (pp.71-74) with correct answer for each question.

6. Statistical Analysis

Analyzing data in this study compatible with methodology of work was formed by Paired T-test to depict any difference from pre to post-test in experimental group and Independent T-test was used to figure out to what extent students of both experimental and control group function differently on their pos-test performance. All data analyzing was done by 16th version of SPSS software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. Introduction

The main aim of this study was to explore whether an experimental application of the slang could positively influence speaking skills. In this chapter, the researcher discusses the research questions and hypotheses related to this problem. The mean scores of both the experimental and control groups will be applied to verify or reject the research hypotheses. In addition, an independent sample t-test and a paired sample t-test will be used to see whether the differences were significant or not. The computer program called SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science) will be used since it has been admitted by many researchers in the field as being the best program used for the analysis of results.

2. Data Analysis and Findings

As it was expressed before, 20 male students participated in the experiment. Each was supposed to answer 10 questions. In order to measure the effect of teaching slang styles on Iranian EFL learner's speaking skills, a number of questions were raised.

To answer these questions, this section will present the results of the statistical analyses of the independent sample t-test in order to compare the means between two unrelated groups on the same dependent variable, as well as the paired sample t-test in order to compare the means of two variables for a single group, which in this study is used to compare the pretest and posttest scores of the experimental group.

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3. Descriptive Analysis of the Data

Descriptive statistics is a set of brief descriptive coefficients that summarizes a given data set, which can either be a representation of the entire population or a sample. The measures used to describe the data set are measures of central tendency and measures of variability or dispersion. Descriptive statistics are useful and serviceable if you do not need to extend your results to any larger group. Descriptive statistics of the present study done by the SPSS software will be presented below:

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of the data of Experimental Group of the study

Tests	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Missing value
Pretest	20	3.40	1.23	0
posttest	20	5.30	1.34	0

As it is seen, table (1), shows that the number of students in both pretest and posttest of the experimental group is 20 (N=20). There has been no missing value. It means, all the selected students participated in the experiments of the study. The mean for the speaking pretest in the experimental group was shown to be 3.40 with the standard deviation of 1.23, as compared to the mean for the posttest scores of the speaking ability in the same group which was 5.30 with the standard deviation of 1.34. The standard deviation obtained for the experimental group indicates that there is more variability among the posttest scores. This may show the participants pretest scores are more homogeneous before conducting the treatment of the study.

The same descriptive analysis has been done for the pretest and posttest of the speaking ability in the control group of the study, as you can see in table (2) below:

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of the Data of the Control Group

Test	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Missing Value
Pretest	20	3.20	1.47	0
posttest	20	3.95	1.31	0

Table (2) indicates that the number of the participants has been 20 in each experiment (N=20). The experiment has been done with no missing value. The mean for the for the pretest scores of speaking skill in control group was shown to be 3.20 with the Std.deviation of 1.47 and the mean for the posttest scores of speaking in the same group was 3.95 with the Std.deviation of 1.31. The standard deviation for the control group of the study shows more variability among the scores in the pretest. It means the participants in the posttest of the control group are more homogeneous.

Table 3: Descriptive analysis of the pretest scores of the experimental and control group of the study

Groups	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
EG	20	3.40	1.23
CG	20	3.20	1.47

Table (3) demonstrates the descriptive analysis of the pretest scores of the experimental and the control group of the study. There are 20 participants in each group. Both groups seem to have approximately mean scores near to each other which mean the students had almost similar speaking skill before the administration of the treatment of the study.

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Table 4: Descriptive analysis of the posttest scores of the experimental and the control group of the study

Groups	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
EG	20	5.30	1.34
CG	20	3.95	1.31

Table (4) represents the descriptive analysis of the posttest scores of the experimental and control group of the study. The number of subjects is 20. The mean scores in these two groups of the study are significantly different to each other. This can indicate the two groups of the study are at different level of speaking ability after conducting the treatment which in this case was teaching slang styles to the subjects.

4. Inferential Analysis of the Data

This section focuses on the inferential analysis of the obtained data of the study. Such analysis was done via the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) from which the 'compare mean', 'Independent Sample Test' were selected for calculating the t-test, also the 'compare mean' and then 'Paired Sample T-Test' were selected for calculating the paired t-value.

Table (5) summarizes the results of calculating the t-value in an 'Independent Sample T-Test to compare the posttest scores of experimental and control group.

Table 5: the T-Test result of the study

T-Result	F	sig	t	df	Sig(2-tailed)
Equal Variance assumed	0.509	0.480	3.211	38	0.003
Equal variance not assumed			3.211	37.987	0.003

As it is represented in table (5), the t-value of the study was calculated between the posttests of speaking skill in the experimental and the control groups. The observed t value was calculated as to be 3.211 (tobs=3.211) and the degree of freedom was 38 (df = 38) in Equal Variance assumed and df was 37.987 in Equal Variance not assumed. The level of significance was calculated as to be 0.480 which has been used in interpreting the data for the rejection or support of the first hypothesis of the study.

The next inferential analysis of the data in this study was related to the degree of progress in experimental group of the study from pretest to posttest. This has been shown by calculating the paired sample t-test. The result has been illustrated in the table (6) below:

Table 6: Paired Sample t-test for the pretest and the posttest of the experimental group

Experimental group	t-value	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	correlation
Pair 1 Pretest-posttest	-6.371	19	0.00	0.465

According to table (4.6), the correlation between the two sets of pretest and posttest scores of the experimental group is 0.465, t-value is -6.371, and degree of freedom is 19 with the level of significance 0.00.

5. Result of Hypotheses Testing

This part of the research strongly emphasizes on what has occurred to the research questions and hypotheses as well as presenting the understanding of how teaching slang styles can improve the speaking ability of the Iranian EFL learners. Before analyzing the data, the hypotheses of the current study will be expressed once more:

1. The instruction of slang styles does not affect on EFL learner’s speaking ability.

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2. There is no difference between the results of posttests of control group and experimental group.

The above-mentioned hypotheses can be expressed in terms of following questions:

1. Does instruction of slang styles affect on EFL learner's speaking ability?

2. Is there any difference between the results of posttests of control and experimental groups?

Sets of pre- and posttest style experiments were administered to answer these research questions. Student's speaking ability was observed and analyzed concerning using slang styles. First the subjects were asked to give answer to the pretest and posttest. The data was gathered and analyzed in order to have descriptive statistics. The mean and standard deviation was generated by Statistical Package for the social sciences (SPSS).

As it was mentioned before, an independent sample t-test was used to answer the first question and a paired sample t-test was used to answer the second question.

The hypothesis of the study, there is no difference between the results of posttests scores of experimental and control group was rejected by some reasons. The first evidence which shows the verification of the rejection, come from the T-Test of the study (see table 5). The observed t- value calculated by the SPSS was 3.211 (t obs=3.211) while the critical value of t determined on the basis of considering the 2-tailed significance level of 0.05 (p=0.05) and according to the number of subjects (N=40) was 2.021(t crit=2.021). Since the observed t was higher than the critical t, it can be implied the hypothesis is rejected. The next evidence to clarify the rejection of hypothesis was the level of significance which was shown to be 0.003. Since this value was lower than 0.05, it can contribute to the rejection of the hypothesis. Also based on data analysis report in the above tables, there is mean difference between posttests of experimental and control groups of the study.

Regarding the next hypothesis, teaching slang styles does not affect on speaking ability, can be said it is rejected too. The rejection of this hypothesis could also be confirmed by showing the experimental group participant's progress from pretest to posttest.

Table (6) shows the paired sample t-test. According to this table the level of significance was to be 0.00. Since it is lower than 0.05 (based on the SPSS regulations). In addition, it should be mentioned that the lack of progress from pretest to posttest of the control group can help us to the better understanding of the rejection of these null hypotheses.

Implication of the Study

Underlying purpose of what was done in this study overtly stand for theoretical and pedagogical division because it clarified the ultimate intention on which in question investigation has been carried out.

From the point of theoretical touchstone, findings of the study will accentuate vivid role of learning informal version of living language contributing to the more versatile and dynamic speaking tone. Besides learners need to know social interactions whereby a successful communication possibly happen through preserving interlocutors preferences to be addressed such as social status, gender, age and et.cet. It is believed that by teaching slangs as one of the informal ways of speaking, non-native speakers can commit fruitful negotiation which no longer is thought to be a dream.

Unquestionably, pedagogical system will benefit the most from the results of the present survey because in spite of its fake simplicity, speaking skill is still a tough one to be undertaken by EFL learners and everything that helps learners to reduce its difficulty will be welcome eagerly. Based on the findings of this study teaching slang expressions efficiently make learners to speak comfortably and decrease their stress, which according to Krashen (1985) learner's emotional state or attitude as an adjustable filter freely passes, impedes or blocks input necessary to acquisition. Employing any informal terms such as slangs, jargons, colloquial expressions will motivate students to set a more confident association with fourfold skills particularly speaking ability.

By stating theoretical and pedagogical purpose behind this study, educational specialists can feed curriculum plans with more authentic speech alternatives, which occur in real situations and try to make less immense difference between native and non-native speakers.

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