Journal of

Second and Multiple Language Acquisition

JSMULA

2016, June Vol 4 Issue 2 ISSN: 2147-9747

Table of Contents

ARTICLES

Journal of Second and Multiple Language Acquisition – JSMULA
Vol: 4 Issue: 2 53-65, 2016, June
ISSN:4147-9747

The Interpretability Hypothesis and the Importance of Positive Evidence in Universal Grammar-Second Language Acquisition Studies

Received: 29.04.2016
Accepted: 25.06.2016
Published: 30.06.2016

Sinan ÇAKIR[1]
Adıyaman University

Abstract

The Interpretability Hypothesis (Tsimpli et. al., 2003; Tsimpli & Dimitrakopoulou, 2007) claims that uninterpretable features which are not instantiated in L1 are unavailable for L2 acquisition. This hypothesis is supported (e.g. Hawkins & Hattori, 2006; Al-Thubaiti, 2011) and opposed (e.g. Rothman et. al., 2010; Bond et. al., 2011) by many other studies. Some of such studies were carried out on the L2 learners who were exposed to natural input in the target language by living in a country where it is spoken as a mother tongue; yet some others were carried out just on the ones who acquired it in their home country. In this respect, (not) being exposed to natural input in L2 acquisition might have played some role in the results obtained in such studies. The present study aimed to analyze the validity of the Interpretability Hypothesis and the possible role of positive evidence in L2 acquisition process. The data of the study were collected through a grammaticality judgment test, a wh-question formation task and a translation task. Along with a native control group (N:58), four learner groups were formed according to the place they live (USA or Turkey) and their level of proficiency in English (advanced or intermediate) (N:46, N:38, N:20, N:30 respectively). The results of the study stood against the Interpretability Hypothesis, emphasizing the importance of positive evidence in L2 acquisition process. According to the statistical test results, the uninterpretable (uwh*) feature appeared to be available only for the highly proficient L2 learner of English who are exposed to natural input in this language. As the findings of the study suggest, to assess the availability of UG in SLA precisely, such studies should be carried out on the participants who are exposed to natural input in the target language.

Keywords universal grammar, second Language acquisition, island constraints, interpretability hypothesis

1. Introduction

The availability of universal grammar in second language acquisition process has been debated for several decades, and there have been different hypotheses claimed by various scholars on this issue. The recent account of partial access to UG approach is the *Interpretability Hypothesis* which was put forward by Tsimpli et.al. (2003), Hawkins & Hattori (2006) and Tsimpli & Dimitrakopoulou (2007). According to this hypothesis, uninterpretable syntactic features are unavailable for second language learners after a critical period, but interpretable features are available for them lifelong. It is supported (e.g. Kong, 2005; Hawkins & Hattori, 2006; Tsimpli & Mastropavlou, 2007; Al-Thubaiti, 2011) and opposed (e.g. Montrul et.al.,

[1] Bio: Assist. Prof, Adıyaman University, Faculty of Science and Letters, Department of English Language and Literature, scakir@adiyaman.edu.tr

2006; Tanner, 2008; Rothman et. al., 2009; Rothman et. al., 2010; Bond et. al., 2011) by many other studies.

1.1. The Statement of the Problem

In the present study, it is hypothesized that uninterpretable features are available for L2 acquisition along with the interpretable features. Some of the studies that favor the Interpretability Hypothesis focus on UG-SLA intercourse are carried out on the L2 learners who are exposed to natural input in the target language by living in an environment where this language is spoken as a mother tongue for a long time (e.g. Hawkins & Hattori, 2006; Tsimpli & Mastropavlou, 2007); yet some others (e.g. Tsimpli & Dimitrakopoulou,2007; Kong, 2005; Al-Thubaiti, 2007) were carried out just on the ones who acquired it in their home country. In this respect, (not) being exposed to natural input in L2 acquisition might have played some role in the results obtained in such studies.

The participants of Tsimpli & Dimitrakopoulou (2007) were native speakers of Greek acquiring English as a foreign language. They were students at Aristotle University in Thessaloniki. The participants of Kong (2005) were 75 Chinese speakers learning L2 English in China. Al-Thubaiti had a similar case as well; only one of his adult participants had stayed in an English-speaking country. Carrying out studies on the participants who had never stayed in an English-speaking country might have influenced the results obtained in such studies.

1.2. The Purpose of the Study

The main aim of the study is to analyze the validity of the Interpretability Hypothesis. Turkish is a wh-in situ language and such languages are claimed to lack the uninterpretable [uwh*] feature (e.g. Hawkins, 2005, p.129). Therefore, the island effects are not strictly observed in Turkish. On the other hand, this uninterpretable feature exists in English and this language strictly obeys the island effects. For instance, while the Complex NP Island Constraint is not violated in the Turkish sentence given in (1), its exact syntactic equivalence in English contains the violation of this constraint, as given in (2):

(1) [[Kim-in yaz-dığ-ı] mektub]-u oku-du-n?
Who-Gen write-Nom-Poss letter-Acc read-Past-2sg

(2) *Who did you read [the letter[t wrote]]?

Hence, having a study on the acquisition of the island constraints in English by Turkish learners may provide valuable data to support or refute the Interpretability Hypothesis mentioned above.

The study also aims to analyze the possible role of the natural input in second language acquisition process. More specifically, it aims to investigate if there are any differences between the performances of Turkish speakers who are exposed to natural input by living in a country where English is spoken as a mother tongue, with the ones who acquired this language completely in their home country.

1.3. The Research Questions

The following research questions are investigated in the study:
1- Do the performances of late L2 acquirers of English (whose L1 is Turkish) on the island constraints in wh-movement support the Interpretability Hypothesis? In other words, when the performances of these L2 acquirers is compared with that of native speakers of English, is there a significant difference in the results as asserted by the IH?
2- Is there any significant difference between the performances of the L2 learners who are exposed to natural input in the target language by living in an English-speaking country for at least four years compared with the ones who acquire it only in their home country?

1.4. Significance of the Study

In the review of the literature, it was observed that none of the UG-SLA studies, which stand for or against the Interpretability Hypothesis, take into account the possible role of the positive evidence that is received in a naturalistic learning environment. That is to say, none of such studies contained two L2 learner groups: one acquiring it in home country alone, the other acquiring it in an environment where this language is spoken as a mother tongue. If the data of these studies had been collected from these two L2 learner groups, it would have been possible for us to determine the possible role of the exposure to positive evidence in a naturalistic learning environment. In this respect, the present study is the first to take into account the role of positive evidence that is received in a naturalistic learning environment in second language acquisition process.

2. Methodology

The study focused on the acquisition of the four island constraints: Wh-Island Constraint, Complex NP Constraint, Sentential Subject Constraint and Adjunct Island Constraint.

2.1. Participants

Along with a native control group, four learner groups were formed according to the place they live (USA or Turkey) and their level of proficiency in English (advanced or intermediate). The control group consists of 58 participants who are all native speakers of English living in Gainesville, Florida- USA. Their ages range from 18 to 24.
All learner group members are native speakers of Turkish who are acquiring English as a second language. These participants were distributed into four groups which fall into two categories according to the place they live.

2.1.1. The Learner Groups who live in USA

The participants in these groups are native speakers of Turkish who are living in different parts of USA and who are acquiring English as a second language. Their ages range from 20 to 68. They have been living in USA at least for four years. There are two groups in this category: The participants who scored better than 40 out of 50 questions of Michigan Placement Test

formed *Learner Group 1 (N:46)*; and the ones who scored between 30 to 40 were placed in *Learner Group 2 (N:38).*

2.2. The Learner Groups who live in Turkey

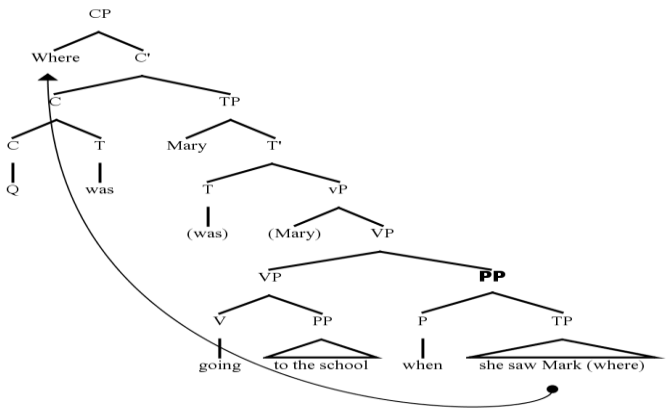
The L2 learners of English in these groups are native speakers of Turkish who live in Turkey and who have never lived in a foreign country. Their ages range from 21 to 38. There are two groups in this category: The participants who scored better than 40 out of 50 questions of Michigan Placement Test formed *Learner Group 3 (N:20)*; and the ones who scored between 30 to 40 were placed in *Learner Group 4 (N:30).*

2.3. Data Collection

In the study, the data were collected through some specifically designed tasks that aim to address the knowledge of the language users on island constraints on wh-movement in English. These tasks are (1) a grammaticality judgment test, (2) a wh-question formation task, and (3) a translation task. Beside these tasks, Michigan Placement Test was given to the participants in the learner groups to determine their level of proficiency in the target language.

The Michigan Placement Test consists of 50 questions; 30 of which test their knowledge on vocabulary, and 20 of which test their knowledge on grammar. The Grammaticality Judgment Test contained 40 items, 20 of which were grammatically well-formed complex sentences that did not contain any island violations. The other 20 items contained violation of one of the four target island constraints. The participants were required to assess the sentences in a -2,+2 Likert scale: (-2: totally grammaticality unacceptable, -1: grammatically unacceptable, 0: not sure, 1: grammatically acceptable, 2: totally grammatically acceptable). The following test item and its tree derivation exemplify the items in this test:

Test Item 2: Where was Mary going to school when she saw Mark?



According to the Adjunct Island Constraint, the wh-words cannot move out of adjunct clauses. Yet, in the derivation above, the wh-word 'where' originates within the adjunct clause and moves to the spec position of the

matrix CP for checking purposes. The PP that c-commands the lower TP prohibits the movement of the wh-word 'where' to a higher node. Therefore, the Adjunct Island Constraint is violated in this sentence.

The Wh-Question Formation Task contained 25 items. In 20 of these test items, the participants were manipulated to set up sentences that contain island violations. That is to say, they were directed to produce sentences which violate the target island structures. In each of these test items, short dialogues which take place between two people were given. After reading the dialogue, the participants were asked to form a wh-question about the dialogue and the replies for the questions they would form were given underneath. The following test item exemplifies this task:

Thomas: What is Jim doing right now?
Sue: He is reading a book. He bought it yesterday.

Test Item 1. When ……?
Jim is reading the book which he bought yesterday.

In this test item, the participants are asked to set up a wh-question which could be a valid question for the reply "Jim is reading the book which he bought yesterday." If they form an interrogative sentence like "When is Jim reading the book which he bought?", they violate the Complex NP Constraint, because the wh-element 'when', originates in the subordinate clause c-commanded by the NP, "the book", and it moves to the spec CP position passing this NP. According to the Complex NP Constraint, the wh-elements cannot pass the NPs which exist in higher nodes. Hence, this movement violates the Complex NP Constraint. On the other hand, if the subjects form a question like "When did Jim buy the book which he is reading now?", they do not violate any island structure. This can be counted as an avoidance strategy to escape violating this island constraint.

In The Translation Task, the participants were asked to translate 16 Turkish sentences into English. All of the Turkish sentences were grammatical in this language, yet their exact syntactic equivalences in English contained island violations. The following item exemplifies this task:

Test Item 18.
Cem'in kime sinirlenmesi herkesi üzdü?
Cem-Gen who-Dat get-angry-Nom-Pos everyone-Acc make-upset-Past
(*Who did Cem get angry made everyone upset?)

In this test item, the wh-expression originates within a sentential subject, and movement out of a sentential subject is prohibited by Sentential Subject Constraint. In the Turkish sentence above, the wh-expression that stay in-situ in the sentential subject position does not violate the SSC. On the other hand, its exact syntactic translation into English which is given in brackets violates this constraint. Hence, when the participants translate this sentence as its exact syntactic equivalent in English, they violate this constraint. However, they may develop another strategy to escape violating this constraint, as well.

The tests were given to the participants in online form with the use of "Surveygizmo" Survey Preparation Program. The data gathered were first listed down in an Excel Document and then transferred and analyzed by a statistics program. For the inferential analysis of the data, two non-parametric tests were applied: Kruskal-Wallis H Test and Mann-Whitney U Test. The alpha level was determined to be >0.05 for these non-parametric tests.

3. Findings

The data obtained in the study were statistically analyzed and assessed in accordance with the research questions. The results are presented below:

3.1. The Results for the Grammaticality Judgment Task

The Grammaticality Judgment Task results are displayed in Figure 1 below:

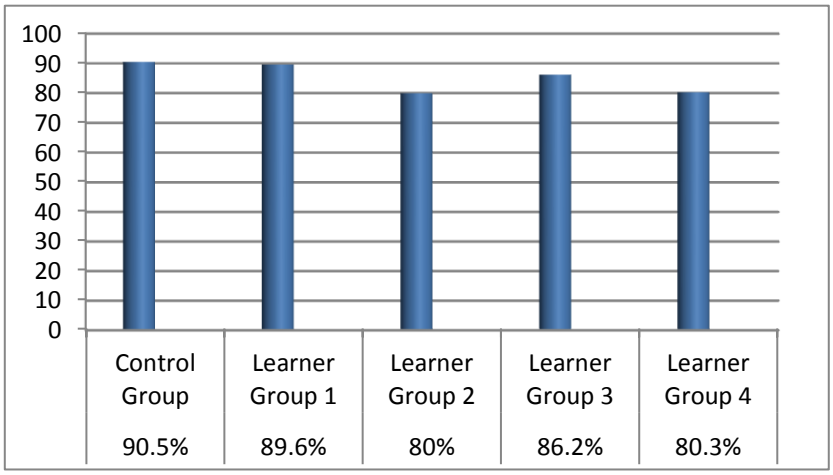


Figure 1. The overall success of the groups in the Grammaticality Judgment Task

The Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that there was a significant difference among the five groups (H(4)=48.676, p=0.001), with a mean rank of 101.43 for the Control Group, 94.54 for the Learner Group 1, 44.02 for the Learner Group 2, 70.80 for the Learner Group 3, and 44.23 for the Learner Group 4. It means that the performances of the groups on the items in this part were not alike and they significantly differed.

The control group members and the participants in the first learner group performed rather similarly in the GJT: 90,5 per cent and 89,6 percent respectively. According to the results of the Mann-Whitney U Test, there is no significant difference between these groups: (U=649, p=0.450). This finding is completely against the predictions of the 'Interpretability Hypothesis'. These L2 learners of English must have already acquired the necessary uninterpretable [uwh*] feature in the target language, since they could perform as well as native speakers of English on a poverty of stimulus issue like the island constraints on wh-movement.

The percentage for the Learner Group 3 appeared to be the closest one to these groups: 86,2 per cent; yet, the difference is still significant: Control Group & Learner Group 3 (U=318, p=0.003); and Learner Group 1 &

Learner Group 3: (U=160, p=0.041). This result demonstrates the importance of being exposed to sufficient amount of positive evidence in a naturalistic learning environment in the process of L2 acquisition. Since the participants in the Third Learner Group acquire English in their home country without living in an environment where English is spoken as a mother tongue, they performed significantly worse than native speakers of English on island constraints. Although they are equally proficient in the target language, their performance was significantly poorer than the ones who acquire this language among the native speakers as well.
The performances of the lower proficiency groups were significantly worse than that of Control Group as well: The Control Group & Learner Group 2: (U=202,5, p=0.001); The Control Group & Learner Group 4: (U=226.5, p=0.001). The success of the participants in Learner Group 2 and Learner Group 4 appeared to be rather similar, which is relatively lower than other groups. The Mann-Whitney U test results also showed that there is no significant difference between these groups: (U=293, p=0.673). These data reveal that only the L2 learner of English who are exposed to positive evidence in a naturalistic learning environment in the target language and who are highly proficient in this language perform similarly to native speakers of English.

3.2. The Results for the Wh-Question Formation Task

The results for the Wh-Question Formation Task are shown in the Table 1 below:

Table 1

The Results for the Wh-Question Formation Task

	Control Group	Learner Group 1	Learner Group 2	Learner Group 3	Learner Group 4
Number of Responses	1156	173	177	392	584
Island Violations	19	1	6	27	24
Percentage of Responses & Island Violations	1,64%	0,57%	3,38%	6,88%	4,10%

The Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that there was a significant difference among the groups (H(4)=20.493, p=0.001), with a mean rank of 53.84 for the Control Group, 47.33 for the Learner Group 1, 72.72 for the Learner Group 2, 85.93 for the Learner Group 3, and 69.30 for the Learner Group 4.
The most successful group in the wh-question formation task appeared to be the Learner Group 1. Only one island violation was observed in the responses of the participants in this group, which makes the 0,57 per cent of the total responses. The same percentage for the control group members is

1,67. The Mann-Whitney U test results showed that the difference between these two groups is not statistically significant: (U=237, p=0.509).
As for the other groups, they appear to be relatively less successful compared to these two groups according to the Kruskal Wallis U test results. Their performances are significantly worse than that of the native control group, as presented below:

- The Control Group & Learner Group 2: (U=178, p=0.041).
- The Control Group & Learner Group 3: (U=288, p=0.001).
- The Control Group & Learner Group 4: (U=661, p=0.019).

These results are consistent with the ones obtained for the Grammaticality Judgment Test. They reveal that only the L2 learners of English who are exposed to positive evidence in a naturalistic learning environment in the target language and who are highly proficient in this language can perform as well as the native speakers of this language.

3.3. The Results for the Translation Task

The obtained results are demonstrated in Table 2 below:

Table 2
The Results for the Translation Task

	Learner Group 1	Learner Group 2	Learner Group 3	Learner Group 4
Number of Responses	192	121	305	572
Island Violations	2	4	18	30
Percentage of Responses & Island Violations	1,04%	3,30%	2.20%	5.24%

The results showed that all groups were rather successful in the Translation Task. The participants in Learner Group 4 made the worst performance in the study, yet the percentage of the island violations committed by them is only 5,24. That means that they could successfully translate the Turkish sentences into English without violating any island structure with 94,76 per cent success, which is, in fact, rather successful. The first learner group members had the best performance in the Translation Task. Only, 1,04 per cent of their responses contained island violations. The participants in the third and second learner groups followed them. Only 2.20 and 3.30 per cent of their responses contained island violations respectively. The Kruskal-Wallis H Test results showed that there was not any significant difference among the groups (H(3)=5.518, p=0.138), with a mean rank of 26.08 for the Learner Group 1, 30.72 for the Learner Group 2, 37.05 for the Learner group 3, and 39.50 for the Learner Group 4. The reason for not obtaining significant differences in this task might be related with the nature of it: it is

a production task, and in production tasks it might be difficult to obtain significant differences among groups. All in all, the magnitudes obtained in the test are still very valuable. If one group produces sentences which contain less island violation than another group, this is still a valuable finding, and the data obtained from this task can be assessed as a weak support for the importance of positive evidence in L2 acquisition process.

4. Discussion

The results of the study stand against the claims of the Interpretability Hypothesis. Both in the Grammaticality Judgment Test and in the Wh-question Formation Task, advanced level L2 acquirers who live in USA became as successful as the control group members. The results for the Translation Task were also in parallel with the ones for these tasks. As there was not any control group for this task, no comparison could be made between the mother tongue users and L2 learners. Yet, the results still revealed the remarkable success of the L2 learners in the Translation Task. Island constraints are poverty of stimulus issues which are rooted in the existence or non-existence of [uwh*] feature that exist in matrix CP. In order for L2 acquirers to deal with these structures successfully, they must have already acquired this uninterpretable feature. At this point, the findings of the present study favor *the Full Transfer and Full Access Hypothesis*, which claims that UG is fully accessible for the L2 learners. The researchers who favor this hypothesis (e.g. Montrul et al., 2006; Tanner, 2008; Rothman et al., 2009; Rothman et al., 2010; Bond et al., 2011) examine the acquisition of uninterpretable features that exist in the target L2 but lacks in L1 in order to get empirical evidence to refute the hypotheses which claim that UG is not fully available for L2 acquirers. In fact, this approach does not ignore the fact that L2 acquisition cannot reach at ultimate attainment in general. It simply claims that this incompleteness does not stem from inaccessibility to UG. The reason for this incompleteness should be sought for in different sources. Some of the hypotheses which have been developed to that end are: *The Interface Hypothesis* (Sorace, 2000; 2003; 2004; 2005; Valenzuela, 2006), *The Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis* (Haznedar and Swartz, 1997; Prevost and White, 2000; Haznedar, 2003), *The Feature Assembly Hypothesis* (Lardiere, 2008) and *The Morphological Underspecification Hypothesis* (McCarthy, 2007; 2008).

The effects of exposure to natural input in the target language were clearly observed in the data. As a matter of fact, the present study would be supporting the Interpretability Hypothesis, if the data of the study had been collected only from the participants who are acquiring English in their home country. Both in the Grammaticality Judgment Test and Wh-question Formation Task, the highly proficient Turkish L2 acquirers of English who learn this language in their home country performed significantly worse than native control group. Therefore, the results of the study would have meant that the (uwh*) feature that exists in the target language but lacks in their mother tongue was no longer available for L2 acquisition. However, the data obtained from the participants who have been living in US stood against the Interpretability Hypothesis firmly.

The importance of (not) being exposed to positive evidence in a naturalistic learning environment can be viewed in similar studies as well. For instance, Isabelli (2004) carried out a study to check the importance of getting positive evidence in L2 acquisition process in a naturalistic learning environment. Her study focused on the acquisition of the Null Subject Parameter by English L2 learners of Spanish. Her participants stayed in Barcelona, Spain for 9 months and the data of the study were collected before and after the stay. Grammaticality Judgment Test and Oral Narrative Tests were given to 31 adult intermediate L2 learners of Spanish. The results showed that the performance of the participants on Null Subject Parameter increased remarkably after the stay. All necessary L2 properties were observed to be acquired by them since they were as successful as the natives on NSP after being exposed to positive evidence in the target language by living in an environment where it is spoken as a mother tongue. These results show the beneficial effects of getting positive evidence in a naturalistic learning environment in L2 acquisition.

The importance of getting positive evidence in second language acquisition process is also emphasized by Schwartz (1993). She states that all linguistic behavior is the overt manifestation of some type of underlying knowledge that is represented in the mind/brain of an individual and exposure to linguistic data is necessary for growth of the system of knowledge. As she asserts, only positive data can effect the construction of an interlanguage grammar that is comparable to the knowledge system that characterizes the result of first language acquisition.

Similarly, Felix & Weigl (1991) investigated the factors that may potentially increase or block UG-access in second language acquisition process and they analyzed whether such factors can be related to certain properties of the learning environment. In their study, they examined the acquisition process of English as a second language by 77 German high school students who learned and were exposed to English exclusively during classroom hours. These students were tested for their ability to correctly judge grammaticality contrasts in English that are standardly attributed to UG principles. Their results suggested that these students did not show any evidence of having UG-access. Rather, they utilized a number of strategies that (a) tied them very tightly to properties of German and (b) prevented them from making any generalizations that went beyond what had been explicitly taught in the classroom. Hence, leaning on their findings, they concluded that formal school environments would not be ideal places to assess the accessibility of universal grammar in second language acquisition process.

As Isabelli (2004), Swartz (1993) and Felix & Weigl (1991) also suggest, L2 learners should be exposed to positive evidence in order to be able to access to UG like native speakers of the target language. Having education in formal school environments may not be enough for them to reset the L2 parameter values in full sense. Hence, as the present study also puts forward, getting positive input in a naturalistic learning environment in second language acquisition has vital importance to reach at native-like performance in the target language. It is for sure that (not) being exposed to positive evidence in a naturalistic learning environment may not be the only factor that has an

influence on the performance of the L2 users. There might be other factors like methodological issues or the characteristics of the grammatical structures that are focused on in the target language pairs. However, as the findings of this study suggest, exposure to positive evidence in a naturalistic learning environment does play a role in this process. Therefore, the studies that focus on UG-SLA relationship should take into account the importance of the positive evidence that the participants get in a naturalistic learning environment while assessing the availability of UG in second language acquisition process.

5. Conclusion

The debates among the scholars which have got different claims on the availability of UG in second language acquisition exist for a few decades and it seems that they will not end in the near future. It appears that there will be scholars who favor one of these hypotheses. One thing for certain is that there is a need for further studies on different grammatical points between different language pairs. In such studies, the role of having or lacking positive evidence in the target language should not be ignored as well. As the present study suggests, being exposed to natural input in the target language has an importance role in determining the availability of universal grammar in L2 acquisition.

References

Al-Thubaiti, K. (2007). Age effects on the acquisition of uninterpretable features by proficient Saudi Arabic speakers of English. In N. Hilton, R. Arscott, K. Barden, A. Krishna, S. Shah & M. Zellers (Eds.), The proceedings of the 5th University of Cambridge Postgraduate Conferences in Language Research (pp. 1-8). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bond, K., Gabriele, A., Fiorentino, R., & Banon, J.A. (2011). Individual differences and the role of the L1 in L2 processing: An ERP investigation. In J. Herschensohn & D. Tanner (Eds.), The proceedings of the 11th Generative Approaches to Second Language Acquistion Conference (pp. 17-29). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.

Felix, S. W., & Weigl, W. (1991). Universal grammar in the classroom: The effects of formal instruction on second language acquisition. *Second Language Research, 7 (2),* 162-181.

Hawkins, R. (2005). Revisiting wh-movement: The availability of an uninterpretable [wh] feature in interlanguage grammars. In L. Dekydtspotter (Ed.), The proceedings of the 7th Generative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition Conference (pp. 124−137). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.

Hawkins, R., & Hattori, H. (2006). Interpretation of English multiple wh-questions by Japanese speakers: A missing uninterpretable feature account. *Second Language Research, 22 (3)*, 269-301.

Haznedar, B., & Schwartz, B.D. (1997). Are there optional infinitives in child L2 acquisition? In E. Hughes, M. Hughes & A. Greenhill (Eds.), In the proceedings of the 21st Annual BUCLD (pp. 257-268). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.

Haznedar, B. (2003). The status of functional categories in child L2 acquisition: Evidence from the acquisition of CP. *Second Language Research*, *19 (1),* 1-41.

Isabelli C. A. (2004). The acquisition of the Null Subject Parameter properties in SLA: Some effects of positive evidence in a naturalistic learning context. *Hispania*, *87*, 150-162.

Kong, S. (2005). The partial access of universal grammar in second language acquisiton: an investigation of the acquistion of English subjects by L1 Chinese speakers. *East Asian Linguistics,14,* 227-265.

Lardiere, D. (2008). Feature assembly in second language acquisition. In J. Liceras, H. Zob & H. Goodluck (Eds.), *The role of formal features in second language acquisition* (107-140). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum.

McCarthy, C. (2007). *Morphological variability in second language Spanish.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). McGill University, Montréal.

McCarthy, C. (2008). Morphological variability in the comprehension of agreement: An argument for representation over computation. *Second Language Research, 24,* 459-486.

Montrul, S., Foote, R., Perpinan, S., Thornhill, D., & Vidal, S. (2006). Full access and age effects in adult bilingualism: An investigation of Spanish accusative clitics and word order. In N. Sagarra & A. J. Toribio (Eds.), The proceedings of the 9th Hispanic Linguistics Symposium (pp. 217-228). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.

Prévost, P., & White, L. (2000). Missing surface inflection or impairment in second language acquisition? *Second Language Research*, *16*, 103–133.

Rothman, J., Iverson, M. & Judy, T. (2009). Bound variable, split antecedent and ellipsis interpretations in L2 Portuguese: Implications for L2 acquisition theories. *Estudos da Lingua, 7 (2),* 261-300.

Rothman, J., Judy, T., Fuentes, P.G., & Pires, A. (2010). On the (un)-ambiguity of adjectival interpretations in L2 Spanish: Informing debates on the mental representations of L2 syntax. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 32,* 47-77.

Schwartz, B.D. (1993). On explicit and negative data effecting competence and linguistic behavior. *Second Language Acquisition,15, (2),* 147-163.

Sorace, A. (2000). Syntactic optionality in non-native grammars. *Second Language Research, 16*, 93-102.

Sorace, A. (2003). Near-Nativeness. In C. Doughty, M. Long. (Eds.), *The Handbook of Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 130-151). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Sorace, A. (2004). Native language attrition and developmental instability at the syntax-discourse interface: Data, interpretations and methods. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, 7*, 143-145.

Sorace, A. (2005). Selective optionality in language development. In L. Cornips, K. Corrigan. (Eds.), *Biolinguistic and sociolinguistic accounts of syntactic variation* (pp. 55-80). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Tanner, D. (2008). Agreeing that agreement isn't the problem. In M. Bowles (Ed.), The proceedings of the 2007 Second Language Research Forum (pp. 22-34). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.

Tsimpli, I.M., Dimitrakopoulou, M., Roussou, A., & Kalaintzidou, M. (2003). Clitics and determiners in the Greek L2 grammar. In J.M. Liceras, H. Zobl

& H. Goodluck (Eds.), The proceedings of the 6th Generative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition Conference (pp. 331-339). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.

Tsimpli, I.M., & Dimitrakopoulou, M. (2007). The Interpretability Hypothesis: Evidence from *wh*-interrogatives in SLA. *Second Language Research, 23 (2)*, 215-242.

Tsimpli, I.M., & Mastropavlou, M. (2007). Feature interpretability in L2 acquisition and SLI: Greek clitics and determiners. In J. Liceras, H. Zobl & H. Goodluck (Eds.), *The role of formal features in second language acquisition* (pp. 142-183). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Valenzuela, E. (2006). L2 end state grammars and incomplete acquisition of Spanish CLLD constructions. In S. Roumyana, S. Montrul and & P. Prevost (Eds.), *Special Volume in honour of Lydia White*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Journal of Second and Multiple Language Acquisition – JSMULA
Vol: 4 Issue: 2 66-75, 2016, June
ISSN:2147-9747

The Impact of Text-Based vs. Non Text-Based Method on Iranian Upper-Intermediate EFL learners, L2 speaking Ability

Seyede Nasrin Sadraie[1]
Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon, Iran
Mohammad Reza Khodareza[2]
Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon, Iran

Received: 31.08.2016
Accepted: 09.09.2016
Published: 12.09.2016

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the effect of text-based methods on male and female upper-intermediate students' English speaking accuracy. The question this study tried to answer is if Text-based vs. non text-based method has any effect on Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners L2 speaking ability. To find the answer to the question, 15 upper intermediate level students from Shookooh institute were selected. They were both male and female upper- intermediate level students who were deal for the current study because they were learning all skills of language at the same time, and they were familiar with words. Their English proficiency was enough to speak English and to understand the importance of speaking. The students were selected administrating OPT which divided them into two groups, one Experimental group (with text-based method) and one control group (non text-based method). And the results revealed that experiment group performed better on English speaking accuracy.

Keywords Text-based Method, Non Text-based Method, EFL Learners, Speaking, Communication

1. Introduction

Speaking is one of the important skills that should be mastered by students in order to communicate in English fluently and clearly. Speaking is an interaction with one or more participants (Harmer, 2001), so it can be proposed that effective speaking also involves a good deal of listening. Speaking occurs everywhere and becomes parts of our daily activities. It is believed that speaking is the most difficult skills to be learned by students, among the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing).

For those learners who are studying English in a non-English speaking setting, it is essential to experience real communicative situations in which they will learn how to express their own views and opinions, and to develop their oral fluency and accuracy which are very important for the success of FL communication. Classroom Interaction then, is necessary and useful as an educational strategy to enhance learning.

Speaking is an activity of delivering massage, it occurs between speaker and listener orally. In speaking activity, the main point is that speakers communicate their massage to the listeners.

Rivers (1981) states that through speaking someone can express her or his ideas, emotions and reactions to other person or situation and influence other person. Furthermore, someone can communicate or express what he

[1] Bio: Researcher at Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon, Iran. Corresponding author: sadrei.n47@yahoo.com

[2] Bio: Assistant Professor at Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon Branch, Tonekabon, Iran

or she wants from other and response to other speaker. It means that in order to express someone's ideas, speaker must also attend the aspect of speaking, in order that the massage is understandable to the listener. He also believes that speaking is the main skill in communication. Based on this idea it is understood that through speaking, someone can communicate or express what she or he wants in order to understand one another.

1.1. Review of Literature

At present, speaking a foreign language represents one of the essential requirements of today´s society. Besides other skills and knowledge, it is considered as one of the most influencing factors while applying for a job or sustaining in a particular work position under the condition of advancing the language level.

For most people, the ability to speak a foreign language is synonymous with knowing that language because speech is the basic means of human communication for them. English learners no longer expect the traditional approach of their teachers based on developing mainly the grammatical competence and using methodology popular in the past. Today, teachers are expected to provide their students with useful active knowledge of the foreign language, not just theory about the language.

Communicative approach focuses on a balance between fluency and accuracy and is the most suitable for those students whose aim is to gain confidence in speaking and conversational abilities. Nevertheless, speaking in a foreign language has often been viewed as the most demanding of the four skills. According to Harmer (1991) "While listening and reading involve the ability to correctly receive messages and are therefore referred to as receptive skills, speaking and writing, on the other hand, involve language production and are referred to as productive skills."

Producing spoken language is always with full of difficulties and it can be an obstacle for English learners, so we face with this question "why". The answer is clear. Totally students are required to know how to produce a fluent speech, such as reduced forms, use of slang or idioms, fixed phrases, collocations and most importantly the pace of speech. While practising conversation in class all of these have to be taken into consideration. On the other hand, our spoken language would sound bookish and unnatural. To avoid this, it is essential to introduce and practise "real" communication with our students within the learning process. If it is neglected, it may be a reason why students are often shocked and disappointed when using a foreign language for the first time whilst interacting in foreign environment. They have not been prepared for spontaneous communication and could not cope with all of its simultaneous demands.

The embarrassment is usually caused by students' inability to adjust to native speakers' speech. Native speakers are a great support and the opportunity to communicate with them means even greater encouragement for our students. Although it is quite demanding for students to keep up in conversation with them, they take it as an advantage in their studies. Most English learners are actually familiar with the fact that the best way to advance their speaking skills is adjusting to it in an English speaking environment.

1.2. Trends in speaking skills

As Richards (1990) says "Transactional uses of language are those in which language is being used primarily for communicating information" Transactional exchanges are interactions which have an outcome. In such contexts the range of language used is quite limited and therefore sensibly predictable. Most spoken interactions "can be placed on a continuum from relatively predictable to relatively unpredictable" (Nunan, 1991). According to him interactional conversations are relatively unpredictable and can range over many topics, with the participants taking turns and commenting freely. Nunan(1991) also states that "Transactional encounters of a fairly restricted kind will usually contain highly predictable patterns".

Nunan (1991) believed that interactional speech is more fluid and unpredictable than transactional speech (such as telephoning for a taxi cab), which is shaped in part by the needs of the parties involved to successfully accomplish the exchange of information, goods, or services.

Transactional uses of language are those in which language is being used primarily for communicating. Brown (2007) explained that transactional strategies are taught within the context of real reading events. Learners don't practice them in isolation. At first the teacher models and explains everything but gradually students are responsible for their learning. Speaking is a productive oral skill which is considered the hardest skill, in teaching English at a foreign language (EFL) because it happens in real time (Nunan, 1991). Furthermore speaking includes productive verbal utterances to convey meaning. Spoken language is auditory and temporary.

Speaking is "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols, in a variety of contexts" (Chaney and Burk, 1998). Due to Ur (1996), speaking seems the most important skill among four skills and people who have knowledge about language are called speakers of the language. Speaking is one of the main aspects of communication. According to Haley and Austin (2004), "To be more orally productive, learners would need to be more capable of responding in a relevant and socially appropriate manner to the communication of others". Richards (2008) stated that the main point for many foreign-language learners is speaking skills in English. So EFL teachers provide the strategies for developing speaking abilities.

Lindsay and Knight (2006) declared that it is essential to notice some points to be a good speaker such as producing connected speech, the ability to interact, talking round gap in their knowledge, speaking in a range of contexts and balancing accuracy and fluency. Bygate (2001) cites, "Teaching oral language was thought to require no more than engineering the repeated oral production of structures concentrating on the development of grammatical and phonological accuracy is combined with fluency". Brown and Yule (1983) stated that interactional speech refers to conversation and it has a social function. The focus is more on the speakers and how they wish to present themselves to each other and transactional speech pays attention to what is said or done. The main focus is on making oneself understood. Interactional language is language for maintaining social relationship and transactional language is message-oriented.

Speaking can be defined as the people way to convey the message to others. Understanding the topic being uttered is the purpose of speaking is to make the receiver.

The following research question was formulated:
Q: Does Text-based vs. non text-based method have any significant effect on Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners L2 speaking ability?

Hypothesis of the Study
H0: Text-based vs. non text-based method does not have any effect on Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners L2 speaking ability.

2. Methodology

In order to investigate The Impact of Text-Based vs. Non Text-Based Method on Iranian Upper-Intermediate EFL learners, L2 speaking Ability, this study adopts a quantitative approach. Quantitative methods are research techniques that are used to gather quantitative data - information dealing with numbers and anything that is measurable. In other words quantitative methods are a systematic process in which numerical data are controlled and measured to address the accumulation of facts and then utilized to obtain information about the world. This study found a quantitative research design to be appropriate for this study because it is statistically reliable and allows results to be analyzed and compared with similar studies.
The current study consists of two groups of upper-intermediate EFL Learners at institute level participated in class with a teacher in which one group was taught speaking according to text-based practice, and the other group received a placebo (no treatment: non text-based). Both groups had pretest and posttest to measure their speaking. Only experimental groups received text-based practice to improve speaking, that is, the other group (control group) didn't receive any text-based practice at all. At the end of the study, the results of pre- and post-tests of both groups were compared with each other to see the possible effect of text-based practice on speaking.

2.1. Participants

The participants for this study consisted of 30 upper-intermediate level students out of 100 from ShooKooh institute. The students came from the same L1 background. The students' age range was from 16-20 years old. They were both male and female. Upper-intermediate level students were ideal for the current study because they were learning all skills of language at the same time, and they were familiar with some words, also their English proficiency was enough to speak English and to understand the importance of speaking. The students were selected administrating OPT which divided the participants into two groups, one experimental groups (text-based practice) and one control group (placebo (no treatment: non text-based). The research was conducted during their classes within 5 sessions in spring course, 2016.

2.2. Materials

This section elaborates on the instruments used in this research. These instruments used were: OPT, Pretest of speaking, treatment through text-based practice, and post –test of speaking.

In order to achieve maximum possible homogeneity among the subjects regarding their general English proficiency, an OPT test was administered at the beginning of the study. Then the selected students were divided into two groups, control group and experimental one. After that a pretest of speaking was administered to the two groups of the study including experimental and the control groups. It was conducted in the form of KET exam, with the reliability of 0.72 estimated by KR 21 formulas same rating scale used throughout the treatment itself, to gain information on their speaking proficiency before the treatment, in order to compare with the post-test taken at the end of the treatment. The test contained three parts general questions which examined the aspects in learners' speaking.

Then, in each five sessions students of experimental group were taught speaking through text-based practice, and the control group received no text. In the end, post test was administered to investigate the possible effect of the independent variables .The characteristics of the posttest of the study resembled those of the pretest.

2.3. Methods of Analyzing Data

Following the collection of data through pre-test and post-test, descriptive statistics and percentages were calculated for both tests. Both tests were scored separately for each participant. For each student, they were then entered into a computer-based statistical program (SPSS). The first format of the data collection process was designed for quantitative analyses, and involved listing the participants of both control and experimental groups, with their individual scores for each test. Learners scored one point for each correct speaking test. Participants received no score if the incorrect answer was given. The data obtained from testing the hypotheses of this study were analyzed via calculating the descriptive statistics as well as the inferential statistical method of an Independent Samples T-test between the posttest scores of the study and Paired Samples T-test between the pretest and the posttest of each group of the study for determining the effect of the independent variable of the study on the dependent variable and the degree of progress of the participants from the pretest to the posttest of the study. The collected data were analyzed in order to answer the research questions. The numerical statistics and the analysis of the data obtained will be discussed through the following part.

3. Findings

3.1. The Descriptive Analysis of the Data

This section focuses on the descriptive analysis of the obtained data in this study. Such analysis was done using the SPSS software. Table (4.1) shows the descriptive analysis of the experimental and the study:

Table 4.1.
Descriptive results for the experimental group of the study

		Mean	N	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest EX	16.0667	15	0.88372	0.22817
	Posttest EX	16.0667	15	1.24595	0.32170

As is indicated in table (4.1), the number of participants has been 15 in each experiment which means that all selected participants participated in the experiments of the study. The mean for the pretest of speaking for the EX group was shown to be 16.0667 as compared to the mean for the posttest of speaking which was 16.0667.

Table 4.2.
Descriptive results for the control group of the study

		Mean	N	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Meean
Pair 2	Pretest CON	14.0667	15	1.57963	0.40786
	Posttest CON	14.2667	15	1.22280	0.31573

As is indicated in table (4.2), the number of participants has been 15 in control group which means that all selected participants participated in the experiments of the study. Similarly, the mean for the pretest of speaking for the CON group was shown to be 14.0667as compared to the mean for the posttest of speaking which was 14.2667. As for the standard deviations obtained for the experimental and the control group, there seems to be more variability among the pretests scores than the posttests scores. This may give an image of the participants' posttest scores being more homogenous after conducting the treatment of the study.

3.2. The Inferential Analysis of the Data

This section focuses on the inferential analysis of the obtained data of this study. Such analysis was done using the SPSS from which the 'Compare Means', 'Independent Samples Test' and paired sample t-test for calculating the t value of the study was followed.

Table 4.3.
Independent Samples T-test results of the study

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Speaking	Equal variances assumed	7.247	28	0.000
	Equal variances not assumed	7.247	27.990	0.000

In table (4.3.), the t-value of the study was calculated between the posttests of speaking the participant in the experimental and the control groups. The observed t value was calculated and it was 7.247 (tobs= 7.247) and the degree of freedom was 28 (df = 28). The reason why the degree of freedom

here was not calculated based on the common formula of df = N-1 was that the SPSS calculated the degree of freedom. The observed t value calculated by the SPSS was 7.247 (tobs = 7.247) while the critical value of t determined on the basis of considering the 2-tailed significance level of 0.00 (P = 0.00) was 2.048 (tcrit = 2.048). Thus, the observed t was higher than the critical t and high enough to reject the null hypothesis of this study. Finally, the level of significance was calculated as to be 0.00 (p = 0.00) which has been used in interpreting the data for the rejection or support of the hypothesis of the study in the next section.

The next inferential analysis of the data of this study was related to the degree of progress from pretest to posttest of L2 speaking accuracy in each group of the study. This was indicated by calculating the paired sample t-test. The results of the paired sample t-test from pretest to posttest scores of the experimental and control group of the study have been illustrated in table (4.4) below:

Table 4.4. Paired Sample T-test result of the study

		Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pretest EX – Posttest EX	1.46667	0.63994	8.876	14	0.000
Pair 2	Pretest CON – Posttest CON	0.2000	0.14475	1.382	14	0.000

According to table (4.4) the observed t between the pretest and the posttest of the experimental group is 8.876, and the observed t between the pretest and the posttest of the control group is 1.382, and the critical t was 2.048. Also, the level of significance in both pairs is lower than 0.05 (P < 0.05) which indicates that the obtained data have been dependable enough and the calculations are error-free.

3.3. Results of Hypotheses Testing

In this section, the results of testing the hypotheses of the study have been presented and elaborated. In order to give a detailed analysis, attempts were made to take advantage of the results of the study as evidence to determine the rejection or support of the hypothesis. In addition, the rejection or support of the hypothesis was justified by explaining the consequences of such rejection or support, i.e. what would happen if the hypothesis of the current study was rejected or supported. Before analyzing the hypothesis, it will be repeated below:

H0: Text-based vs. non text-based method does not have any effect on Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners L2 speaking ability.

The hypothesis of the study which targeted the effect of Text-based vs. non text-based method on Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners L2 speaking ability was rejected. Evidence from various sources of data could help to verify the rejection. The results of the T-Test of the study (see table 4.3) could be employed to confirm this analysis, accordingly, the observed t value calculated by the SPSS was 7.247 (tobs = 7.247) while the critical value of t determined on the basis of considering the 2-tailed significance level of 0.00 (P = 0.00) was 2.048 (tcrit = 2.048). Thus, the observed t was higher than the critical t and high enough to reject the null hypothesis of this study.
A further evidence for the rejection of the hypothesis of the study was the control group participants' lack of progress of from the pretest to the posttest. Table (4.4) provides the evidence for this. According to the paired sample t values illustrated in table (4.4), the observed t between the pretest and the posttest scores in the control group was lower than that of the experimental group. This meant that the posttest scores of speaking accuracy were close to the pretest scores in the control group and indicated that not using Text-based method did not have significant effect on the participants' L2 speaking accuracy and caused the posttest scores to stand as close as possible.

4. General Discussion

As for the research question, the mean scores of the experimental and control group of the study are different, our answer is affirmative. The results of the T-Test of the study (see table 4.3) could be employed to confirm this analysis, accordingly, the observed t value calculated by the SPSS was 7.247 (tobs = 7.247) while the critical value of t determined on the basis of considering the 2-tailed significance level of 0.00 (P = 0.00) was 2.048 (tcrit = 2.048). Thus, the observed t was higher than the critical t and high enough to reject the null hypothesis of this study. A further evidence for the rejection of the hypothesis of the study was the control group participants' lack of progress of from the pretest to the posttest. Table (4.4) provides the evidence for this, so the question got the answer.
It was concluded that the participants performed better when they took part in a test after they were treated with Text-based method for about 5 sessions. This was further confirmed by the sub-results from testing the hypothesis, that is, the participants in the experimental group showed a rise in their posttest scores while no significant rise in the posttest scores was shown in the control group of the study.
In terms of learning, the obtained findings revealed that the experimental group significantly outperformed than control group when it comes to question development. The superior rates of speaking in the experimental group can be largely attributed to their saliency when compared to control group. As explained before, Text-Based vs. Non Text-Based method effects on Iranian Upper-Intermediate EFL learners, L2 speaking Ability.

5. Implications of the Study

Language learning is a step-by-step process during which errors or mistakes are to be expected. The findings of this study can have various pedagogical implications in TEFL/TESL. These implications can be used in different

domains of TEFL, like language teaching methodology, syllabus design, materials development and assessment. As far as the teaching methodology is concerned, Text- based methods can be very helpful. The current study made it clear that Text- based method is definitely more effective than traditional approach in teaching speaking in general. In fact, teaching speaking to EFL learners through Text- based methods has all of the advantages of the process approach to speaking. Text- based methods pay enough attention to all of the processes which are involved in producing a fluent speaking. It fully considers such processes and helps learners generate more new sentences; it also activates their previous schemata and background knowledge, motivates the students and encourages them to write and talk freely without any concern over formal linguistic features. It adopts a dynamic view toward the act of speaking and considers all of the involved factors and processes which take place when talking. It seems that Text- based methods is very effective in teaching speaking to EFL learners. Text- based methods can be used in teaching speaking to the upper-intermediate students and even in teaching writing skills to the beginners due to its robust pedagogical characteristics. Text- based methods can also be employed in the teaching of letter writing to EFL learners and ESP learners in Iran, and probably in other EFL contexts. Text- based method seems to be the best methodology for teaching collaborative learning because it is quite interactive and follows the principles of cooperative learning.

With regard to the syllabus design and writing instructional materials, the findings of the present study suggest that each instructional situation is a unique one and it demands its own syllabus and instructional materials. According to the findings of present study teachers should write or select tasks for their own teaching situations. The teachers cannot use a set of fixed tasks or activities for all learners and in all situations, because in order to teach real-world and authentic language we have to use our situation aspects and the available resources in devising our tasks and instructional activities.

The findings of the current study also suggest that formative assessment during the course can be more effective than final summative assessment at the end of the instructional period. For example, the Text- based methods by the learners during the course can be assessed to check their progress instead of the final speaking post-test. Furthermore text- based methods operationalize the concept of alternative assessment in reality by focusing on the gradual progress of the learners' skill/knowledge during the instructional course.

Text- based methods c can be used in teaching other language skills and sub-skills like listening comprehension, vocabulary and writing. The effect of Text- based methods on the writing performance of the Iranian EFL/ESP learners could also be a very good and interesting topic for further research.

References

Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Teaching the spoken language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. New York: Pearson Education.

Bygate, M. (2001). *Speaking*. In R. Carter & D. Nunan (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages* (pp. 14–20). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chaney, A. L., Burk, T. L. (1998). *Teaching oral communication in grades k-8.* Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Haley,M. H. & Austin, T.Y.(2004). *Content-based second language teaching and learning.*USA: Pearson Education

Harmer, J. 1991. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Essex:Longman, 296p., ISBN:0-582- 046564

Harmer, J. 2001. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*: Third Edition. Completely Revised and Updated. Cambridge, UK: Longman.

Lindsay, C., & Knight, P. (2006). *Learning and teaching English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nunan, D. (1991). *Language teaching methodology: A textbook for teachers*. New York: Prentice Hall.

Richards, J.C. (1990). *The Language Teaching Matrix*. USA: Cambridge University Pres.

Richards, J. C. 2008. *Teaching Listening and Speaking: From Theory to Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ur, P. (1996). *A course in Language Teaching. Practice and Theory.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.