



The Effect of a Socio-cultural Factor on the Organization of Communication Structure among Iranian Teenagers in EFL Context

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ABSTRACT

Whether language acquisition takes place in formal or informal language learning situations, language learners are in need of exposure and access to a kind of language input (Gass, 1997). Thus, this study investigated the effect of watching films as a socio-cultural factor on EFL learners' informal speaking proficiency. Thirty homogenous advanced female learners out of the pool of 50 were selected through International English Language Testing System (IELTS) in Urmia, Iran, and randomly assigned to two groups of 15 learners, one as the experimental group and the other as the control group. The researchers prepared a test of 160 informal expressions and words extracted from 6 American movies and administered it to a group of participants similar to the sample of the present study. At last, 140 unknown expressions and words were selected. Then, the we gave the selected expressions and words to the participants as pretest to write their Persian or English translation. During the treatment period, the experimental group was exposed to movies inside and outside the classroom for two terms. However, the control group was provided with non-videos program, that is, the teacher in that class followed the syllabus for advanced level. At the end of the treatment, the same test used in the pre-test was used as the post-test to check the enhancement of the learners' informal speaking proficiency. The results of an independent-samples t-test revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group regarding their informal speaking proficiency. The implications are discussed in terms of the advantages of using films in EFL contexts.

Keywords: Informal speaking proficiency; Organization communication structure; Socio-cultural factors.

1. Introduction

Educational researchers have always attempted to find the ways to facilitate students' learning. The demand and need for accuracy and fluency in English has been widely increasing because English is a language for international communication. Therefore, the ability to speak English fluently and accurately creates great opportunities for success in life (Dolati & Mikaili, 2011).

The distinction between formal and informal learning settings is also significant in discussions about speaking proficiency development. According to Lightbown and Spada (2001), in the formal setting, the emphasis is on the language itself. However, in informal setting the focus is on meaning. Informal language

learning was first introduced by Knowles (1950). In informal learning situations, language learners interact with native speakers in the target language, use different technologies at home or at work, watch a movie, or listen to music or songs which can lead to language learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2001).

In other words, by using technology and by watching a movie or listening to a song in informal settings, language learners indirectly get involved in the language learning process by trying to understand the movie or the song while using a dictionary or subtitle (Pemberton, Fallahkhair & Mosthoff, 2004). For instance, many scholars have indicated that movies applied in ESL classroom can become a vital part of the courses. This claim is in accordance with the fact that movies create exposure to “real language” used in authentic contexts as well as in the cultural setting which the second language is spoken. They also have found that movies catch the learner’s attention, and it can positively influence their motivation to learn (Xhemaili, 2013). According to Pourhosein Gilakjani (2017), technologies such as movies assist learners in creating balance in their own learning process and by using the movies, lots of information can be available to them that their instructors are not able to provide.

Recently teachers have tried to employ the multimedia materials to activate learners’ oral skills. Video technology acts as a major motivator for language development and helps students in acquiring language skills. Providing access to friendly learning environment and exposure to a large amount of comprehensible speech are the two major advantages of technology for EFL learners (Butler-Pascoe & Wiburg, 2003). TV and radio are two old technologies that allow easy access to authentic language input via different programs such as news, films, songs, documentaries, and many other programs have also been the focus of many studies (Baker, 1996; Bell, 2003; Berber, 1997; Brinton & Gaskill, 1987; Poon, 1992).

In short, using pedagogical films, as audio-visual (A/V) aids, has been taken into consideration in teaching EFL. However, the use of films as a source of authentic language input has not been investigated fully. To this end, the researcher intended to apply film-mediation on informal type of organization communication structure to uncover whether using films can be useful in improving learners’ informal speaking proficiency. Thus, this research sought to do a comparative study to see the effects of sociocultural factors (watching films) on organization communication structure (improvement of informal speaking) of EFL learners.

2. Literature Review

In learning English as a foreign language (EFL), speaking is an important skill because learners need it for communication (Nunan, 2001). Bailey and Savage (1994) believed that “speaking in a second/foreign language has often been viewed as the most demanding of the four skills” (pp. 6-7).

According to the advocates of communicative language teaching (CLT), there is a need to distinguish knowing grammatical rules from the ability to use the rules effectively and appropriately when speakers are communicating (Dahmardeh, 2009). From this point, learning to communicate and speak in a second language is a social practice rather than an individual skill. According to Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural theory (SCT), socio-cultural factors have a significant role in the development of the human’s mental processes (Fahim & Haghani, 2012). SCT considers human mental functioning as essentially a mediated process organized by cultural artifacts, activities, and concepts (Lantolf, 2000) to enable human beings to regulate and modify their behavioral and biological activities. Language is believed to be the primary means of mediation. Thus Vygotsky stresses on the importance of linguistic interactions within social contexts in the development of human’s cognitive ability (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007).

In social contexts such as informal type of organization communication structure, learners might interact with native speakers in the target language country, use different technologies at home or at work, watch a movie, or listen to music or song just as an entertainment which can lead to language learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2001). In other words, by viewing a movie or listening to a song in informal settings, language learners indirectly get involved in the language learning process (Pemberton, Fallahkhair & Mosthoff, 2004).

A number of studies have been carried out on the use of films as authentic materials in EFL/ESL educational programs (Ryan, 1998; Gebhardt, 2004). For example, Chapple and Curtis's (2000) study emphasized how intrinsically motivating materials such as films along with content-based instruction can enhance language learning. Similar studies were also conducted by Ryan (1998), Heffernan (2005), and Gebhardt (2004) focusing on enhancing motivation and language learning through the use of films in language classrooms without providing empirical evidence.

The effect of listening to TV and radio on enhancing EFL students' listening comprehension was examined by Brinton and Gaskill (1987). Tabatabaei and Gahroei (2011) examined the impact of utilizing movie clips on EFL learners' idiom learning. Moreover, Roohani and Rabiei (2011) investigated the effect of watching movies with subtitles (bimodal and standard) and without subtitles on incidental learning of formal and informal vocabulary in the classroom. In addition, Bahrani and Sim (2011) focused on the role of audio/visual mass media news on language learning. The findings proved that exposure to TV and radio can improve learners' speaking fluency. Gorjian (2014) explored the role of subtitled movies in the language classroom in which the subtitles increased the students' interaction with the movies. The researcher listed the advantages of watching a subtitled movie in ESL contexts as follows: (a) improving listening skill, (b) interacting with the movie, (c) making a translation between the source language and target language.

Ebrahimi, Kargar and Zareian (2018) in another research focused on the use of movies in improving participants' language productive skills. In this case study, they exposed female intermediate learners to watching English movies with and without subtitles, and after that the participants were required to report their own experiences in the form of diaries. Data for this study was gathered based on the results of two tests which was the speaking and writing parts of Cambridge IELTS Test and participants' diaries. The findings represented that input-flood via watching English movies caused performance on intermediate EFL learners' speaking skill and had some significant effects on intermediate EFL learners' writing skill, but it should be used by practicing writing. More recently, Albiladi, Abdeen and Lincoln (2018) in a study focused on language learners' perceptions and beliefs on the plus points and demerits of relying on English movies to develop their language competency. The findings revealed that language learners believed that clips and movies as authentic sources of language learning can be utilized in educational contexts like classrooms in an effective way to enhance language skills including speaking, listening, reading, vocabulary, and writing. Findings also indicated that in language learners' ideas, movies are influential in terms of performing students' cultural awareness.

Since fluency of speech is a key feature of the utterances produced in different films, teachers should help language learners acquire a satisfying speaking proficiency by exposing them to authentic communicative input or data such as audio/visual mass media programs from TV and radio (Baradaran Torabi & Poordaryaie Nejad, 2014; Bahrani, 2014). To this end, the researcher applied the sociocultural theory through film-mediation on informal type of organizational communication structure to uncover whether using films can be useful in improving learners' informal speaking proficiency. It is hoped that investigating such a problem would help language learners and teachers to be aware of the effectiveness of greater exposure to films inside and outside the class in promoting EFL learners' informal speaking proficiency. The following research question was therefore put forward to the issue:

What is the effect of exposure to mass media (film) on organization communication structure (informal speaking) of Iranian teenagers?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

By means of an IELTS speaking proficiency test in a high school in Urmia, Iran, where all technological equipment such as the Internet, Tablets, Watchboards, and so forth is available for all learners, 30 homogenous advanced female participants out of the pool of 50 were selected and randomly assigned into two groups, namely, experimental and control (i.e., 15 learners in each group). The participants were of the same English proficiency level (i.e., at advanced level)

according to Iran Language Institute Placement Test. All the participants were within the age range of 16-18 and had the experience of learning English for at least 4 years.

3.2. Instruments

In the current study, some instruments were utilized to pave the way for quantitative data collection procedures. IELTS speaking proficiency test scores were used to put the participants in two homogeneous groups. The purpose was to ensure that prior to the treatment participants in the experimental and control groups were not significantly different from each other in terms of speaking ability.

Before and after the treatment, a researcher-made test of informal language use was also given to the participants. The test verified by two experts was extracted from the movies based on Katz and Kahn's (1978) table showing the difference between formal and informal communication. It asked the learners to write their meanings in English or in Farsi in response to some informal expressions.

From among 11 movies, the researchers selected 6 American movies with English subtitles to be used during the treatment period for the experimental group. The movies included *Cinderella Man*, directed by R. Howard, *King Kong*, directed by P. Jackson, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, directed by P. Jackson, and *The Silence of the Lambs*, directed by J. Demme, *Robin*.

3.3. Data collection procedures

Before embarking on the study, due to the need to watch films in classes, with the permission of the head of a famous smart school in Urmia, where all technological equipment is available for all learners (i.e., it is a must for all learners to have access to all the equipment if they want to study in that school), the researchers administered the study there. That school has a contract with Iran Language Institute (ILI) and twice a week the ILI teachers go there and teach general English to the students who are placed in the appropriate levels based on the ILI Placement Test.

To ensure the speaking homogeneity of the subjects at the very beginning, the researchers used speaking proficiency tests from IELTS as a test of speaking homogeneity and pre-test. To do so, 50 initial EFL learners including just females were interviewed (since we could not get an official permission to conduct the research in the males' department) and among them 30 participants having homogeneous speaking proficiency were selected and divided into two groups as an experimental group ($N= 15$) and a control group ($N= 15$). Regarding the speaking test, it should be mentioned that each interview was scored out of 30 according to Askari's speaking proficiency checklist which includes six scales of fluency, comprehension, communication, vocabulary, structure, and accent and each scale incorporated five levels (5 points). To guarantee the homogeneity of the participants in both control and experimental groups, the researcher calculated an independent samples *t*-test between the control and experimental groups to get assurance that there is no meaningful difference between them.

After ensuring that the two groups were homogeneous and that there was no significant difference between them, the researcher prepared a test of informal expressions based on Katz and Kahn's (1978) table ($N = 160$) and the targeted films. Then the researcher administered the test to a sample similar to the population. The researcher asked the learners to write their either English or Farsi meanings and 140 expressions unknown to all the learners and were selected and then verified by two experts. Moreover, the researcher calculated the reliability of the test which was 0.88. Having made sure that the test was reliable, the researcher administered it to both experimental and control groups as pre-test to test their informal language knowledge.

The next step was to launch the instructional procedure. Each group was instructed for a six months (two terms) period, about four hours a week (i.e., two sessions each week). They received the same instruction in all the language skills and components except for the informal expressions and words.

Throughout the experiment which lasted six months (twice a week), we provided the

experimental group with 6 English films during two terms to work on inside and outside the classroom. In order to watch films inside the class, teacher of that class gave the film to the Technology Station of the school to copy it in the learners' tablets to be watched in the classroom.

During the experiment between every two sessions, the experimental group was asked to watch 15 minutes of the already selected film in the classroom and write the unknown expressions in their diaries. While learners were busy watching the films and taking notes in their diaries, the teacher moved around, observed and helped the students in case they had questions and the researcher just observed what was going on in the class. After 15 minutes, the teacher asked the learners to talk and give the summary of what they saw and discuss the expressions and words they wrote. Moreover, learners were asked to watch 15 minutes of the film every day at home and write the unknown expressions they heard in their diaries and the next session discussed about the film and expressions they jotted down. On the contrary, the control group was provided with non-videos program (the Advanced Students' Book) to work on inside and outside the classroom, that is, the teacher in that class followed the syllabus for advanced level.

After the treatment, in order to see the effect of watching films on the learners' speaking improvement, all the participants took the same researcher-made test administered in pre-test, which had 140 informal expressions, as a post-test to check if there was any improvement in their informal language knowledge. It is worth mentioning that the expressions in the test were similar to the informal expressions and words written in the learners' diaries especially the ones recorded by most of the learners.

3.4. Data analysis

Prior to the treatment for pre-test scores and for post-test scores, an independent-samples *t*-test was used to examine the differences between the mean scores of the speaking tasks of the experimental and control groups using IELTS speaking proficiency test.

4. Results

In order to analyze the obtained data, the researchers used independent-samples *t*-tests. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for differences between the experimental and control groups prior to the treatment period (i.e., researcher-made test). According to the mean scores, there was no difference between the two groups in pre-test, and an independent *t*-test was employed to confirm it.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for IELTS Scores in Pre-test among Participant

	Group	N	Mean	SD	SEM
IELTS	Experimental group	30	12.02	.924	.206
Speaking	Control group	30	12.31	1.50	.335
Proficiency					

An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the pre-test scores of the experimental and control groups (Table 2). There was no significant difference in scores for the experimental group ($M = 12.02$, $SD = .92$) and control group [$M = 12.31$, $SD = 1.50$; $t(28) = -.72$, $p = .47 > .05$].

Table 2. t-test for Researcher-made Pre-test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for quality of means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Differences	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	5.02	.03	-	28	.47	-.28	.39	-1.08	.51
Equal variances not assumed				24	.47	-.28	.39	-1.09	.51

An independent *t*-test was run to compare the mean score of the experimental and control groups on researcher-made post-test. The results of the descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics for Researcher-made Post-test

	Group	N	Mean	SD	SEM
Researcher-made	Experimental group	30	22.62	2.18	.487
Post-test	Control group	30	12.31	1.50	.335

According to the mean scores, there was a difference between two groups in post-test and an independent *t*-test was employed to see whether it is significant or not.

Table 4. t-test for Researcher-made Post-test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for quality of means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Differences	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	5.207	-	17.4	28	.00	10.312	.592	9.11	11.51
Equal variances not assumed			17.4	24.77	-.00	10.312	.592	9.10	11.51

An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the scores of experimental and control group in the post-test (Table 4). There was a significant difference in scores for experimental group ($M = 22.62$, $SD = 2.18$) and control group [$M = 12.31$, $SD = 1.50$; $t(32) = 17.4$, $p = .00 < .05$], that is, the researcher-made post-test scores of the experimental group was significantly more than that of the control group.

5. Discussion

The use of movies, in which auditory and visual stimuli are combined, might be one of the ways of providing context for language learning, hence, a rich source for incidental vocabulary learning. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of watching films on EFL learners' informal communication structure. The analysis of the findings quantitatively indicated that watching movies had a great impact on learners' informal language improvement. In other words, the informal vocabulary knowledge of the experimental group which had exposure to movies inside and outside the classroom increased to a large extent from pre-test to post-test in comparison to the control group.

The language improvement made through exposure to films as an authentic source of language input in this study is in line with the studies conducted by Roohani and Rabiei (2011) and Tabatabaei and Gahroei (2011) regarding the effect of exposure to films on improving different language skills especially vocabulary knowledge. When English TV programs including cartoons, movies, etc. are broadcast, learners' chance of learning the language both at schools and in the society is enhanced.

Watching movies can positively affect students' learning of formal and informal vocabulary. Although some teachers and students may underestimate the effect of watching movies, specifically, on vocabulary learning and, generally, on language learning, watching them with the foreign language in the soundtrack can be a rich source for L2 learning at school or even at home. The development of foreign language vocabulary depends on experience within rich and natural language context. Watching movies in English can provide semantic and syntactic context for EFL learners. Because the vocabulary in the movies are presented in the appropriate context of their use, such contextual clues can help students learn more L2 words.

As Beck et al. (1991) stated, learning words from context can be a gradual process where language learners construct the meaning of words and make use of cues in the context to make inference. The cues can be linguistic or nonlinguistic such as facial expressions or gestures.

Accordingly, the results obtained from the analysis of the pre-post test scores of group two participants are in line with the studies conducted on effectiveness of exposure to various audiovisual mass media technologies that can provide the necessary language input for language learning (Brinton & Gaskill, 1987; Milton 2002; Mackenzie 1997; Pemberton et al. 2004; Becker 1996).

In practical terms, EFL students who have little contact with native speakers of English can benefit from watching movies in the classroom and at home, which can be a supplementary method to explicit teaching of vocabulary in the formal context of classroom. Accordingly, there is a need for the teachers to train their students how to benefit most from watching movies. Because watching movies provides the students with an "easier overall acquisition and a friendlier and more pleasurable learning approach" (Zanon, 2006, p. 51), language teachers can make use of them for developing learners' knowledge of informal vocabulary.

Exposure to English outside the classroom has an important role in learning a second language in EFL contexts. The TV, as a typical example, is the most frequently used medium that provides and makes programs such as movies in English and cautiously in line with the purposes of the educational system. It is the TV which can broadcast many programs in English for familiarizing the people and motivating them to learn. It is really through a very good input that a language can be even acquired (Roohani & Rabiei, 2011).

The findings of the present study can have significant implications for many teachers. First, rather than applying a single method in teaching informal language, teachers can use multiple techniques for teaching them in classes in order to enhance their students' comprehension of informal language. As an example, using films, as done in this study, can be more effective. Moreover, by knowing the advantages of films, teachers can integrate technology (e.g., films) into English classes to address informal words and expressions and incorporate them in students' everyday lives. Therefore, the use of educational television programs in L2 (i.e., films) should be considered in educational setting such EFL classrooms and language laboratories.

Employing the films for comprehension of vocabulary, reducing stress and foreign language

anxiety and providing more contextual clues can positively affect incidental vocabulary learning. Syllabus and textbook designers can provide informal vocabulary in context and can design syllabuses and courses for informal words and expressions through media to students' interests, level, gender, and culture.

Since this study focused on a small number of EFL learners from one educational context, it would be fruitful to focus on larger samples from various educational contexts in further research. In addition, it seems that researchers can reach better interpretations provided that they consider the effect of watching films on learners' delayed informal language retention, that is, by giving a delayed post-test.

6. Conclusion

The present study aimed at investigating the effect of watching films on organization communication structure (informal speaking) of Iranian teenagers. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that films have a positive effect on learners' informal language proficiency and can best contribute to developing informal language proficiency in an EFL context which lacks the social context similar to that of the ESL one. The results of the study were indicative of the fact that exposure to films can contribute more to language development. The results showed that language learners can improve their informal language proficiency to a significant extent through exposure to films.

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