The Effect of Information vs. Reasoning Gap Tasks on the Frequency of Conversational Strategies and Accuracy in Speaking among Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners

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Abstract : Speaking skills merit meticulous attention both on the side of the learners and the teachers. In particular, accuracy is a critical component to guarantee the messages to be conveyed through conversation because a wrongful change may adversely alter the content and purpose of the talk. Different types of tasks have served teachers to meet numerous educational objectives. Besides, negotiation of meaning and the use of different strategies have been areas of concern in socio-cultural theories of SLA. Negotiation of meaning is among the conversational processes which have a crucial role in facilitating the understanding and expression of meaning in a given second language. Conversational strategies are used during interaction when there is a breakdown in communication that leads to the interlocutor attempting to remedy the gap through talk. Therefore, this study was an attempt to investigate if there was any significant difference between the effect of reasoning gap tasks and information gap tasks on the frequency of conversational strategies used in negotiation of meaning in classrooms on one hand, and on the accuracy in speaking of Iranian intermediate EFL learners on the other. After a pilot study to check the practicality of the treatments, at the outset of the main study, the Preliminary English Test was administered to ensure the homogeneity of 87 out of 107 participants who attended the intact classes of a 15 session term in one control and two experimental groups. Also, speaking sections of PET were used as pretest and posttest to examine their speaking accuracy. The tests were recorded and transcribed to estimate the percentage of the number of the clauses with no grammatical errors in the total produced clauses to measure the speaking accuracy. In all groups, the grammatical points of accuracy were instructed and the use of conversational strategies was practiced. Then, different kinds of reasoning gap tasks (matchmaking, deciding on the course of action, and working out a time table) and information gap tasks (restoring an incomplete chart, spot the differences, arranging sentences into stories, and guessing game) were manipulated in experimental groups during treatment sessions, and the students were required to practice conversational strategies when doing speaking tasks. The conversations throughout the terms were recorded and transcribed to count the frequency of the conversational strategies used in all groups. The results of statistical analysis demonstrated that applying both the reasoning gap tasks and information gap tasks significantly affected the frequency of conversational strategies through negotiation. In the face of the improvements, the reasoning gap tasks had a more significant impact on encouraging the negotiation of meaning and increasing the number of conversational frequencies every session. The findings also indicated both task types could help learners significantly improve their speaking accuracy. Here, applying the reasoning gap tasks was more effective than the information gap tasks in improving the level of learners’ speaking accuracy.
Keywords : accuracy in speaking, conversational strategies, information gap tasks, reasoning gap tasks
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