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Effect of Teaching Modern English Drama on the Students' Fluency and Accuracy of Speaking

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Abstract

Speaking a language involves more than simply knowing the linguistic components of the message, and developing language skills requires more than grammatical comprehension and vocabulary memorization (Chastain, 1988). In teaching-learning processes, drama method may have some positive effects on ELL students' speaking fluency and accuracy. This study attempts to probe one of the main concerns of language learners, that is, how to improve their speaking components, e.g. oral fluency and accuracy. To attain this aim, the researchers investigated the effect of two selected texts from modern English dramas on students' speaking fluency and accuracy. They distinguished fluent from non-fluent and accurate from no accurate learners. Therefore, the current study was designed as a true experimental research and the data were gathered from 60 EFL students of English language and literature at Hormozgan University in Iran. The data were the recorded speaking transcripts which were analyzed to show the probable progresses after four-time (10 weeks) treatment. The factors to be considered in present study were the numbers of filled and unfilled pauses in each narration, the total number of words per minute, mean length of utterance, and number of stressed words. The results were compared and their temporal and linguistic measures were correlated with their fluency scores. They revealed that the speech rate, the mean length of utterance, phonation time ratio and the number of stressed words produced per minute were the best predictors of fluency scores, and thus, students' speaking fluency increased, whereas the students' speaking accuracy decreased in some areas of speaking abilities and oral communications.

Keywords: Modern English Drama, Fluency, Accuracy, Speaking Here

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1. Introduction

One of the most challenging difficulties in learning a foreign language is finding ways to improve one's oral fluency. This is most commonly true in countries like Iran where the learners share a common native language and have very little or no exposure to the foreign language outside the classroom. Most of the linguists believe that language is just like a habit formation. In their view, language is learnt through use and practice (exposure). We live in an educational world where oral communication is seen as a necessary, positive personal characteristic (Daly, 1991). Although the Iranian language learners spend many years (up to 8 years) in learning a foreign language, we must know the fact that a great number of them are still not accurate and fluent in speaking the foreign language. Since the actual tendency in learning the foreign language is directed toward the development of oral proficiency, and since oral fluency is one of its components, language learners need to speak with a certain degree of fluency in order to demonstrate their oral proficiency. The first step was to define oral fluency, followed by the development of an appropriate device to evaluate it. One of the main concerns of language learners is how to improve language learners' speaking fluency and accuracy in general and communication in particular.

Speech fluency is hard to acquire for most language learners but greatly contributes to one's image of fluent speaking. Identifying and analyzing working mechanisms that influence fluency then should be regarded significant for our understanding of the complexities of speaking. It is probably one of the most significant features of speech which greatly helps to examiners' intuitive understanding of proficiency and technical assessment of learners' oral performance. Learners should be able to make themselves understood, using their current proficiency to the fullest. Therefore, the current paper discusses the different influences and benefits that together build the framework that justifies the potential using of the modern English drama as a valuable teaching approach for the FL classroom.

Segalowitz (2010) proposes that a distinction should be made between the following three notions of fluency: cognitive fluency, utterance fluency, and perceived fluency [Closely related to cognitive fluency is the perception that the speaker's cognitive machinery is efficient (Segalowitz, 2010).]. Cognitive fluency can be defined as the fluency that characterizes a speaker and has to do with the speaker's abilities to efficiently plan and execute his speech. Utterance fluency is the fluency that can be measured in a sample of speech. One can define utterance fluency objectively by measuring (temporal) aspects of the speech sample. Skehan (2003) and Tavakoli and Skehan (2005) noted that utterance fluency is a construct with several aspects. They distinguish between breakdown fluency, speed fluency, and repair fluency. Breakdown fluency has to do with the ongoing flow of speech and can be measured by counting the number and length of filled and unfilled pauses. Speed fluency has to do with the speed with which speech is delivered and can be measured by calculating speech rate such as number of syllables per second. Repair fluency has to do with how often speakers use false starts, make corrections, or produce repetitions. Most studies investigating fluency have confounded some aspects of utterance fluency. For instance, speech rate is usually calculated as words or syllables per total time (including pauses). With this measure, breakdown fluency and speed fluency are taken together into one measure that encompasses aspects of pausing as well as speed of delivery. In speech, fluency is almost

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accepted as a function of variables related to time such as rate of speaking and the number of words or syllables uttered between pauses (Wood, 2008). Although this definition is the most prevalent one, there are many disagreements over this explication of fluency (Wingate, 1984). Fluency is measured as syllables uttered per minute, the length of run (the number of syllables uttered between pauses), and the number of pauses (Wood, 2008).

Accuracy is defined as the ability to produce error-free speech (Housen and Kuiken, 2009). Ellis (2005) stated that accuracy can be defined as the ability to avoid errors in performance, possibly reflecting higher levels of control in the language as well as a conservative orientation. Accuracy of the performance can be measured by self-repair attempts or as a function of errors produced (or the lack thereof). Self-repair has been measured as a percentage of self-repairs or as a ratio of self-repairs to errors (Michel, Kuiken, & Vedder, 2007). It is unclear how a lower score or a higher score of self-repairs reflects accuracy in the language produced. Self-correction does not really measure accuracy of the language produced; it is more accurately labeled a measure of the speaker's orientation toward accuracy (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). Accuracy is often measured by the learner's suppliance of a specific form in obligatory contexts, which is best suited for focused tasks (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). This means that research with data from lower proficiency students measures accuracy on a different target form than research with data from higher proficiency students, because the accuracy on the first target form is expected to approach ceiling. If accuracy is determined by correctness of certain forms, accuracy and development (perhaps complexity or proficiency) are confounded in the measure and potentially misleading (Pallotti, 2009). Nation (1989) found an increase in speech rate (words per minute) and a decrease in the number of false starts, repeated words, and hesitations (such as uh, um). Accuracy improved only slightly for half of the participants, mostly when grammatical contexts were repeated but not for errors that involved inflections.

There are a number of ways in which the texts of the modern English drama can be defined. It could be seen as a blanket term covering "a wide range of oral activities that have an element of creativity present" (Kormos, & D´enes, 2004). Holden (1982) takes the texts of drama to mean any kind of activity where learners are asked either to portray themselves or to portray someone else in an imaginary situation. In other words, the texts of drama is concerned with the world of 'let's pretend'; it asks the learner to project himself imaginatively into another situation, outside the classroom, or into the skin and persona of another person. (Holden, 1982).

Like all linguistic texts, the texts of modern English dramas must be well prepared and conceived before the lesson gets underway. The teachers must decide why they want to apply dramatic methods with any particular class in order to be able to justify the decisions taken. Some reasons for using the texts of the modern English dramas could be their relevance to the curriculum, the chance to increase awareness of paralinguistic features, linguistic accessibility, intrinsic interest, practicability in terms of lesson time, student numbers and space, and the possibility of using dramatic activities in the future, thereby providing continuity. Maley (2005) listed many points supporting the use of the texts of the modern English dramas as follow: 1- It integrates language skills in a natural way. Spontaneous verbal expression is integral to most of the activities.

2- The texts of modern English dramas integrate verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication.

3- It draws upon both cognitive and affective domains, thus restoring the importance of feeling as well as thinking.

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4- The texts of modern English dramas promote self-awareness (and awareness of others), self-esteem and confidence; and through this, motivation is developed.

The current study attempts to explore an alternative approach, namely the use of the two texts of modern English dramas as a method for foreign language learning, at the university level in Hormozghan University for the ELT students. This paper argues that drama based learning and teaching can provide an excellent setting for foreign language acquisition and application. It can serve as a means of generating authentic conversation as well as a positive situation for social learning and the promotion of the English language and culture among BA students of ELT in Iran. Perhaps one of the greatest advantages to be gained from the use of texts of modern English dramas are that language learners become more confident in their use of English by experiencing the language based on real interactions that come from the texts of modern English dramas which are presented to the ELT students in this study. The student-centeredness inherent in all drama texts based instruction also improves students' maturity and motivation, and the physical involvement contained in texts of modern English dramas along with the concept of learning language through the texts of modern English dramas(Kormos, & D´enes, 2004). These texts can foster language skills such as reading, writing, speaking and listening by creating a suitable context. They are powerful language teaching tools that involves all of the language learners interactively all of the class time and these texts can also provide the means for connecting language learners' emotions and cognition as it enables students to take risks with language and experience the connection between thought and action.

The most important features of modern English drama are based on its short colloquial phrases, slangs and idioms which can motivate students for learning and memorizing of them. These features in the texts of modern English dramas may have great effect on the speaking fluency of speaking but it seems that since these phrases, slangs and English idioms do not follow grammatical rules, therefore it may cause inaccuracy in speaking and communication. For this study, we considered two modern texts of English dramas, "Death of Salesman", by Arthur Miller and "Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf" which is Albee's most successful play. Both of them as it was mentioned above are full of short colloquial phrases, slangs and idioms which students can use them in their daily communication and it is supposed that they can increase ability of communication and fluency among Hormozghan EFL, BA students as the target of the this study. Therefore, The purpose of this study was to determine whether the communicative skills of teaching program prepared through the texts of modern English dramas technique is effective on improving the basic skills, advanced speaking, continuing an interaction, working at a group, self-control, emotional and cognitive skills. In order to determine the effectiveness of the instruction through the texts of modern English dramas technique experimental design with pre-test and post-test was used.

This study focuses on the main causes that hinder the students' fluency level in foreign language. The study also was designed to search out the language components that affect the oral fluency of speakers in a foreign language:

1. Which features of modern English drama can enhance students' accuracy to have a better communication?
2. Can the texts of modern English dramas-which contains slangs, English idioms, short phrases and colloquial expressions-with help of task based approaches for speaking, help students' fluency, and communicative competence?

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3. How the texts of modern English dramas with the help of role playing tasks can enhance students' rates of fluency and accuracy in their oral interactions and speaking?
4. A modern English drama is usually based on the real and daily interactions (dialogues), how the oral and communicative features of the texts of modern English dramas which are presented by can improve, and repair, ELL students' oral interaction?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

60 upper intermediate ELT students from Hormozghan University, Iran, participated in this study. After homogenizing with OPT, 36 students whose scores were between 13 and 17 were chosen. Using stratified sample, they divided into two groups (treatment and control). The treatment were based on the texts of two modern English dramas presented to the 18 students in treatment group. Students' temporal and linguistic measures were compared with the fluency scores they received in the both groups.

2.2. Instruments

After determining the treatment group and texts which students should study during ten weeks the texts of two modern English dramas (A. Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and E. Albee's *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf*) which were presented to the 18 students as a treatment group. These texts contain so many short phrases, colloquial words, English idioms, slangs and daily short dialogues which can motivate students to use them in their daily conversations. This study considered ten weeks treatment after OPT, pretest, oral interview and recording their voices.

2.3. Procedure

The data were the speaking transcripts which were analyzed by Praat software to see the progress after four-time (10 weeks) treatments were given. OEPT (Oral English Proficiency Test) is a spoken English test aimed to assess the oral English proficiency of prospective international teaching assistants. The students' oral performance sound files were stored in a recorder. The test includes some items: compare and contrast, pass on information, read aloud, personal history, and summarizing the conversations from the texts which are selected from the two modern English dramas. The factors which were considered were the number of filled and unfilled pauses in each narration, the total number of words per minute, speech rate, mean length of utterance, and number of stressed words.

3. Results

Table 1 shows that the students who got the scores between 13 and 17 had been chosen and randomized by stratified sample. The texts of the modern English dramas bridge the gap between course-book dialogues and natural usage, and can also help to bridge a similar gap between the classroom and real-life situations. If these texts of drama are considered as a teaching method in the sense of being part of the eclectic approach to language teaching, then it can become a main aid in the acquisition of communicative competence. They can facilitate the type of language behavior that should lead to fluency and accuracy of speech in oral communications and interactions. In addition, these texts of drama could always be extended and used as a starting-point for other activities in social communications and interactions.

The following tables (1&2) show the descriptive analysis of treatment and control groups of students' pretest that indicates the students' level of fluency and their ability to be fluent before starting of treatment. These tables indicate that all of them have good and acceptable levels of fluency for starting any kind of social and personal communications and interactions.

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Table 1. *Students in Treatment Group, Fluency Pretest*

Treatment group of students	Number of stressed words	Total number of pauses filled/ unfilled in each narration	Total Number of words per minute
1	87	17	125
2	61	22	115
3	88	16	128
4	63	19	121
5	62	23	117
6	91	11	138
7	89	16	129
8	86	18	123
9	80	18	121
10	80	19	121
11	90	13	133
12	94	9	141
13	86	18	122
14	90	15	131
15	91	11	138
16	63	19	120
17	104	6	157
18	90	14	132

Table 2. *Students in Control group, Fluency Pretest*

Control group of students	Number of stressed words	Total number of Pauses filled/ unfilled in each narration	Total number of words per minute
1	104	5	157
2	62	23	116
3	80	17	121
4	93	9	140
5	89	16	120
6	63	18	120
7	62	23	118
8	88	16	126
9	88	16	127
10	91	15	130
11	104	5	156
12	90	15	130
13	90	14	131
14	80	17	120
15	104	6	159
16	87	17	123
17	91	13	135
18	85	18	119

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In the current study, accuracy was measured by calculating the number of error-free clauses. All errors in syntax, morphology, and lexical choice were counted. High means indicate less number of errors and as a result better performance. The same measure was used in some previous studies (Yuan and Ellis, 2003; Guará-Tavares, 2008).

Descriptive statistics was used to calculate the mean and standard deviation of the TOEFL test which was used. Also the reliability of TOEFL test used was calculated through running KR-21. After homogenizing and randomization via OPT and stratified sample the collected data according to the number of filled/ unfilled/ repetitious pauses, number of syllabus and stressed words and finally according to the number of words which were expressed and uttered in one minute, have been analyzed. The descriptive statistics for placement test, pretest and posttests of control and treatment groups have been presented in tables 3 and 4 which show the level and method of homogenizing, randomization and the level of treatment and control groups before and after four-time, ten weeks treatment with the texts of two modern English dramas.

These two tables indicate that there are significant differences between the performances and levels of fluency of the treatment and control group after teaching the two texts of the modern English dramas as a treatment to the treatment group and this teaching and treatment promoted the level of speaking fluency among ELT students of Hormozghan University. The combination of several measures, as used in the present research, can give evidence of chunking and proceduralization, as explained below. First, there is the mean length of pauses measured in seconds. Second, the phonation/time ratio is calculated as the percentage of time spent speaking as a proportion of the total time taken to produce the speech sample. This measure is related to the number of pauses in a speech: If the mean length of pauses is stable but the number of pauses decreases, phonation/time ratio increases. Third, the mean length of fluent runs is the mean number of syllables produced between pauses. Finally, the articulation rate—in syllables per minute—is calculated by dividing the total number of syllables produced by the amount of time taken to produce them, excluding pause time. It is slightly different from speech rate, which

Table 3. *Descriptive Analysis of Pretest and Post Test of the Control Group*

T-F	Group	N	Mean	Median	Mod
Pretest	Number of stressed words	18	83.0556	87.5000	90.00
	total number of pauses filled/ unfilled in each narration	18	15.7778	16.5000	19.00
	Total Number of words per minute	18	1.2844E2	1.2650E2	121.00
Posttest	Number of stressed words	18	94.3333	97.0000	97.00
	total number of pauses filled/ unfilled in each narration	18	9.3333	10.0000	10.00[a]
	Total Number of words per minute	18	1.4650E2	1.4100E2	141.00

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Table 4. *Descriptive Analysis of Pretest and Post Test of the Treatment Group*

Control-f	Group	N	Mean	Median	Mod
Pretest	Number of stressed words	18	86.1667	88.5000	104.00
	total number of pauses filled/ unfilled in each narration	18	14.6111	16.0000	16.0
	Total Number of words per minute	18	1.3044E2	1.2650E2	120.00
Posttest	Number of stressed words	18	86.3333	88.5000	62.00
	total number of pauses filled/ unfilled in each narration	18	14.6667	16.0000	16.00
	Total Number of words per minute	18	1.3117E2	1.2700E2	116.0

includes pause time. Kormos and D´enes (2004) found that the first three of these measures were good predictors of fluency ratings by native and nonnative speaker judges, although articulation rate was not. Towell et al. (1996) argued that these measures in combination can be used as indicators of proceduralization.

Another measure to consider is the mean length of fluent runs (i.e., stretches of speech that are spoken without pauses). Speech repetition, which is our focus here, may lead to an increase in fluency because of advantages at several levels. First, at the semantic level (conceptualization), students generate the content for their delivery during their planning time and while they speak. In the second and third deliveries, they can benefit from this, which removes the need to pause and hesitate to plan new semantic content. The measures of utterance fluency that were used in the current study were chosen such that breakdown fluency, speed fluency, and repair fluency were not confounded. We measured number of silent pauses, mean duration of silent pauses, and number of filled pauses (“uhms” and “uhs”) to measure breakdown fluency. To measure speed fluency, we calculated inverse articulation rate, that is, mean duration of syllables (speaking time divided by total number of syllables). In this way, the measures for pausing and for speed of delivery are not confounded. Finally, to measure repair fluency, we used number of corrections and number of repetitions. In this study, we will first ascertain how the different measures of utterance fluency that cluster theoretically are related in practice. To compute measures of utterance fluency, in this study transcripts of all speaking performances were made, including information about filled pauses, corrections, and repetitions. From these transcripts, number of filled pauses per 100 words, number of corrections per 100 words, and number of repetitions per 100 words, were calculated. Using a script written in PRAAT (Boersma & Weenink, 2007), number of silent pauses, total duration of speaking time, and total duration of pausing time were measured. Combining the information from the transcripts with the automatic extraction of speaking time and pausing information, we calculated number of silent pauses per 100 words, and mean duration of syllables. Mean duration of syllables is calculated by

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dividing speaking time by total number of syllables. This is the inverse of articulation rate (Crystal & House, 1990; Quen´e, 2008). An advantage of using inverse articulation rate is that, in line with all other measures we calculated, it is a measure of disfluency, in the sense that higher values (longer mean syllable times) mean less fluent speech.

The following tables (5, 6, and 7) discuss about the results of t-test and compare results of Hormozghan University ELT students' achievements according to pretests and posttests of control and treatment groups. The effects of training were assessed by speaking test scores, transcription the data from the tests for their speaking. The findings revealed that participants in the treatment group improved their oral fluency in their communications and oral interactions because of teaching and learning of the texts of two modern American dramas by Hormozghan University ELT students' test scores, but those in the control group did not. The results of the achievement tests indicate that treatment group of ELT students of Hormozghan University, I.R. Iran as a foreign language students after four-time, for ten weeks treatment with the texts of two modern American dramas use certain and familiar phrases which they learnt from the texts of these American dramas in short sentences during their treatment. These tables show that students have gained a considerable speaking fluency and if the drama technique is taken into consideration during teaching process, and ELT language learners

Table 5. *Comparison of Pretests and Posttests of Control and Treatment Groups, Fluency*

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	t	Sig. (2- tailed)
Pretest	Control	18	87.1667	4.56650	34	.119	.906
	Experiment	18	86.9444	6.49409			
Posttest	Control	18	87.0556	4.51758	34	-4.000	.00001>
	Experiment	18	93.3889	4.97214			

Table 6. *Comparison of Pretests and Posttests of Control and Treatment Groups Accuracy*

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest	Control	18	86.9444	4.37200	34	.827	.414
	Experiment	18	85.5556	5.62790			
Posttest	Control	18	86.6667	3.88057	34	1.572	.127
	Experiment	18	83.8333	6.59099			

Table 7. *Comparison of Pretests and Posttests of Control and Treatment Groups Difference*

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Difference Accuracy	Control	18	.2778	1.01782	34	-2.440	.020
	Experiment	18	1.7222	2.29592			

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may get their target very easily, but because the texts of these two modern English dramas contain little grammatical points and they are based on the informal oral communications and oral interactions ELT students of Hormozghan University did not learn so many grammatical points for their oral communications and oral interactions and due to this matter their accuracy did not change too much. Language fluency is used informally to denote a high level of language proficiency, most typically foreign language and more narrowly to denote fluid language use, as opposed to slow, halting use. The fluency and accuracy in oral and speaking abilities are necessary but not sufficient for language proficiency, because fluent language users may have limited vocabularies, narrow discourse strategies, and inaccurate word use. The table 7 shows that according to the achieved result of the control group's pretest and in fluency (.906) which are higher than 0.05 the hypothesis is accepted, but in the protest because it is smaller than 0.05, that is, (.00001), therefore the hypothesis is rejected.

4. Discussion

The texts of modern English dramas can encourage students to actively participate in teaching learning English process and they can motivate students to increase their speaking fluency. This study considered 36 BA EFL students of Hormozghan State University (control and treatment group) and was designed in the form of true experimental research and data was gathered by recording their voices to take students' performance after four-time in ten weeks treatment. The result of the OPT and the homogenizing and randomization these students was presented in the table one. These aspects were used to analyze scores of these students that were supposed that will indicate that teaching speaking fluency by using two texts of Modern English dramas (Death of a Salesman and Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf) can increase the students' speaking fluency, and accuracy.

In this study, it was indicated that objective measures (with the exception of filled-pause information) obtained from direct signal level measurements serve as good predictors of fluency scores. These quantifiers may be reliably measured from a thin slice of the utterance. Finally, combining these quantifiers in a logistic regression pattern yields an objective fluency scoring system whose performance compares favorably with that of standard rubrics and speaking scales. This study is novel in two ways: one, it provides another justification for the automatic fluency assessment procedure that uses measures of temporal aspects of speech production which are good predictors of fluency; two, it shows the utility of standard measurements in objective fluency assessment. This study suggests that more needs to be done to improve oral fluency, and accuracy, while the findings on language quality show that improvements are made in areas such as oral fluency and range of lexis and grammar by using the texts of these two modern English dramas which contain little grammatical points and they are based on the informal oral communications and oral interactions.

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