

THE ROLE OF PARAPHRASING IN PROMOTING SPEAKING ABILITIES OF TURKISH EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract: Promoting speaking skills is one of the most challenging tasks among EFL Turkish students, as it requires not only vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, but also enough amount of cultural information about the target language and correct sound formation. However, especially for the foreign language situation, it isn't that easy to catch up with enough proficiency in Turkey if the environment isn't a touristic place. This study, therefore, suggests that speaking skills of EFL learners can be promoted tremendously if the learners are given certain paraphrasing tasks in accordance with their language levels. To this end, 28 intermediate level students (10 males and 18 females) attending regularly to Kafkas University in Kars, Turkey, participated in this study. An oral pretest was given to the participants before starting the study. Throughout the study period the participants were given intermediate level short texts and were wanted to paraphrase them. At the end of the study the participants were given an oral test. According to the result of the study there was a significant difference between pre and posttest. ($p=,01$). However, no difference was observed between males and females related to pretest and posttest.

Keywords: Promoting Speaking, paraphrasing, Turkish EFL students, Kafkas University.

Introduction

It is well-known that among the four skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing – seems to be the most important and active. Thus, “for most people, the ability to speak a language is synonymous with knowing that language since speech is the most basic means of communication” (Lazaraton, 2001: 103). Besides its being so important, it is a challenging task for nonnative speakers since the beginning of foreign and second language teaching and learning. The reason why speaking is a challenging task for second language learners as well as for foreign language learners is that learners “must master several difficult microskills, including the pronunciation of unfamiliar phonemes, the correct placement of stress and intonation, and the appropriate use of formal and informal expressions” (Zhang, 2009: 32). In order to promote speaking abilities, numerous studies have been carried out (Hendrickson, 1980; Faerch and Kasper, 1984; Murphy, 1991; Riggenbach, 1999; Harvey and Goudvis, 2000; Lazaraton, 2001; Alptekin, 2002; Rybold, 2006;), however no perfect method has been found yet.

Background of the Study

English language is the most commonly taught foreign language in Turkey, still the intended level is not promoting in both receptive (listening and reading) productive skills (speaking and writing). Because of the University placement tests given by the Higher Educational Council, students planning to attend to the departments of English language and Literature or of ELT and Linguistics, take intensive courses mostly emphasizing test skills rather than speaking or listening. Even while attending to the classes at Universities, in classes that utilize comprehension-based approaches to language teaching, grammar structures and vocabulary acquisition are stressed before speaking, if speaking is stressed at all.

Statement of the Problem

Despite having enough knowledge on grammatical structure, vocabulary and other aspects of English language, Turkish EFL students studying at Kafkas University, in the Department of English Language and Literature in Turkey, most of the time don't have the stimana to speak English in and out of classes.

Purpose of the study

The aim of this study is to search about the effectiveness of paraphrasing technique on promoting fluency in speaking skills. It is thought that paraphrasing can make the learners more active and self confident in using spoken English as well as other skills.

Limitation

This study is limited only to the fluency of the students pronunciation and intonation haven't been taken into account.

Review of Literature

According to Cambridge Learner's Dictionary paraphrase is "to express something that has been said or written in a different way, usually so that it is clearer". Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines it as "to express what sb has said or written using different words , especially in order to make it easier to understand". So it is clear from both definitions that paraphrasing is primarily related with speaking skills.

On the other hand, paraphrasing has been viewed as a student study skill (Fisk and Hurst 2003:182), however it can be used as a tool promoting speaking skills. According to Fisk and Hurst (2003), " ... when students are taught a technique how to paraphrase a text , paraphrasing can strengthen comprehension of both fiction and nonfiction"(p .82). Study of speaking skills has been one of the most favourable subjects of methodology , therefore, "...with the advent of the theory of communicative competence and the practice of communicative language teaching, the teaching of oral communication skills as a contextualized socio-cultural activity has become the focal point in many ESL classrooms" (Lazaraton, 2001: 103). According to Chastain (1988)"...having students talk keeps them involved in the class and gives them the impression that their participation is important" (p.272), in doing so, students can be encouraged to participate in the classroom activities more frequently. Chastain maintains that "although productive practice does not contribute to learning, it does foster retention, which is an important component of learning" (Chastain, 1988:272).

Methodology

Participants

Twenty-eight intermediate-level students (10 males and 18 females) at Kafkas University, in the Department of English Language and Literature served as participants. All participants received a statement of subjects anonymity and confidentiality before participating in the study.

Materials

Intermediate comprehension passages of Longman Publication written by Byrne(1987) have been used as paraphrasing text for promoting speaking.

Procedure

The study started on 18th September 2008 and ended on 12nd November. As the study was conducted during the regular class hours (3 hours a week), all the students attending to preparatory class participated in the study. At the beginning of the study, the participants were given an oral pretest in order to determine their levels. At the end of the study a post test was given. And the results have been given in tables in Data Analysis part.

Data Analysis

As seen in **Table 1**, 10 (35,7 %) of the participants were males, however, 18 (64%) were females.

Table 1. Gender Distributions of the Participants.

	Frequency	Percent
Female	18	64,3
Male	10	35,7
Total	28	100,0

Table2. Descriptions and Correlations of Pre- and Posttest Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Pearson Correlation	Sig.
Pretest Scores	28	25,00	65,00	44,50	10,25	.48**	,01
Posttest Scores	28	65,00	95,00	77,71	8,84		

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

According to *Table 2*, there is a significant difference between pretest and post-test.(p=,01.)

When the means and significance levels are taken into consideration, it is clear that the grades of the participants increased significantly in the post-test. The use of paraphrasing for speaking purposes seems to have worked well.

Table 3. The Relationships between Gender and Pre- and Post Test Scores

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Pretest Scores	Female	18	42,00	9,36	,22	,94
	Male	10	49,00	10,73		
Posttest Scores	Female	18	78,94	9,12	,05	,83
	Male	10	75,50	8,32		

However when *Table 3*, is observed, it can be seen that there is no significant difference between pre-test and post-test related to genders of the participants. So it can be said that using paraphrasing for promoting speaking skills is the same for both males and females.

Conclusion

Developing speaking skills is one of the most difficult tasks of a foreign language learner, as it requires not only learning the way of the native speakers use a language, but also the structures and vocabulary of that language. In this sense, one basic thing in learning language is to speak it at least fluently as accuracy may follow during the later stages of the teaching-learning process. "... speaking invites feedback, either overt or covert, which is the basis upon which students make adjustments in their learned language system" (Chastain, 1988: 272).

Although paraphrasing is mostly used in writing and reading tasks, it can, also, be used for promoting speaking skills. Therefore, as a result of the study it can be concluded that:

1. Paraphrasing as a speaking technique should be taught to Turkish EFL students.

2. The students should only concentrate on the fluency, at least for a certain time.
3. When the expected fluency is reached, other aspects of the language such as accuracy of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary choice as well as intonation should follow.

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