جامعه شناسی زبان و توانش‌های زبانی
فراگیرندگان زبان انگلیسی
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اثر: دکتر علی افخمی

دانشیار دانشکدهٔ ادبیات و علوم انسانی دانشگاه تهران

چکیده:

فراگیری یک زبان در محیط خارجی که امکـان بکـارگیری زبـان را بسیار کاهش می‌دهد با مشکلات زیادی مواجه است. به عنوان مدرس زبان‌های خارجی ملاحظه می‌نمائیم که دانشجویان ایـن رشـته بـیشتر وقت خود را صرف حفظ کردن لغات و متون نوشتاری می‌کنند و کمتر مجالی برای به کـارگیری ایـن عنـاصر زبـانی (آمـوخته‌های خـود) در موقعیت های واقعی پیدا می‌کنند و این امر باعث می‌شود که دانشجویان اصل توانش ارتباطی را فراموش کنندو در این زمـینه مـوفق نباشند، بعبارتی دیگر در کلاس‌های درس قواعد و هنجارهای فرهنگی اجتماعی حاکم بر زبان کنار گذاشته می‌شود و صرفاً قواعد گرامری و واژگان و احیاناً تلفظّی خاص تدریس می‌گردد. در این تحقیق سعی بر آن است که برآوردی از موفقیت و توانایی دانشجویان ایرانی را در حـوزه تـوانش ارتباطی بعمل آوریم.

واژه‌های کلیدی: جامعه شـناسی زبان، تـوانش زبـانی، تـوانش ارتباطی، زبان خارجی، زبان دوم.

مقدمه:

Sociolinguistic and Grammatical
Competencies in EFL learners

Learning a new language is a difficult job, especially when it is to be carried out in a foreign language situation; the reason being that a "foreign language situation" provides language learners with little authentic communication in the foreign language. As experts, we have noticed that most language learners spend most of their time doing written exerises, memorizing words and preparing for exams rather than writing lettres, reading newspapers, and speaking in or listening to the foreign language.

Such a situation deprives most language learners of acquiring the optimal ability in communicating correctly in the foreign language: by "communicating" I mean a kind of communication which is both linguistically correct (according to the rules of grammar) and sociolinguistically appropriate (according to the social rules of the society in wich the language is spoken). This , in turn , results in language learners´ ignorance of the social and cultural rules of the foreign language. Obviously , this kind of social and cultural ignorance can be a big obstacle in the way of successful communication.

This study tries to assess Iranian EFL learners´ success in learning the sociolinguistic aspect of English as well as its linguistic aspect.

I would like to thank Mr. Seyed MASOUD HADJI SEYED HOSSEINI FARD without his contribution this research could not have been successfully completed.

Statement of the problem:

if language is the most important means of communication in a soceity , it is most logical that it be studied at a societal level.

Clearly EFL learners in Iran can successfully learn the grammar and Vocabulary of English by means of studying books, and tapes and with the help of teachers; whereas, they have little if any authentic communication with native speakers of English in a communicatively oriented situation. Here, the main question is this : If it is true that through reading stories or watching films in English a language learner develops more advanced grammatical skills (which show themselves in his / her ability in reading and structure), can we expect the same practice (reading stories, watching films) to have a simultaneous effect of producing a sociolinguistically more competent learner? In other words, when EFL learners can learn the linguistic aspect of English by just

having contact with and exposure to the language in a mainly non - communicative situation, can they learn the sociolinguistic aspect of English in the same way?

Research Questions and Hypothesis

Following the previous argument, the questions addressed by this research are:

1. Do language learners in an EFL situation learn the sociolingistic rules of English as well as its linguistic rules?

2. Does the level of sociolinguistic mastery (ability to use linguistic forms appropriate for a specific situation) have anything to do with the level of EFL learners´ knowledge of grammar and vocabulary of English?

In order to answer these research questions the following two null hypotheses are suggested. The hypotheses will be tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between EFL learners´ grammatical and sociolinguistic competencies.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference between EFL learners´

sociolinguistic performance regarding their level of grammatical competence.

Definition of Important Terms

In order to avoid any ambiguity in the use of key words, I feel it is necessary to define some of them which are the focus of this study. It is good to add that these terms are defined according to F -Bachman´s (1990:87.97) framework for communicative language ability.

Grammatical Competence is defined as the language user´s "knowledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax and phonology" Sociolinguistic Competence is defined as the language user´s "sensitivity to, or control of the conventions of language use that are determined by the features of the specific language use context".

An EFL learner is a language learner who is learning English in a foreign language situation, that is he / she does not (or can not) use English for his / her daily communication needs.

The situations where an EFL learner can communicate in English are the English class, or conversation with some other language learners. such a learner has little opportunity for authentic communication in the foreign language. An EFL learner is contrasted with an ESL learner i.e, one who learns English in a society in which English is spoken and used for daily

communications. Obviously , one expects an ESL learner to have a better mastery of sociolinguistic rules of English than an EFL learner.

Significance of the study

Using sociolinguistically inappropriate forms can seriously endanger interpersonal communication which is the ultimate goal of language teaching and learning . Being aware of this fact, authorities in language teaching, curriclum development and language testing have to somehow evaluate the system of language education to see whether it can produce language learners capable of successful communication with native speakers of the target language. This study will show the degree of subjects´ dependence / independence on their own language and culture and in a way will test the success of our pedogogical system in familiarizing foreign language learners with the cultural and social system of the target language. Something that is an indispensable part of successful communication.

Delimitations of the Study

Grammatical competence as defined by Bachman (1990) includes knowledge of syntax, vocabulary, morphology and phonology. However in this reasearch, due to practical limitations

the listening section of the grammatical test used as the measure of grammatical competence was not administered. Therefore the term "grammatical competence", in this study , does not account for the phonological ability of the EFL learners. As for the morphological part, there was no exclusive morphology test on the grammatical test, but the test of vocabulary may to some extent account for the knowledge of morphology of the EFL learners. Therefore the term "grammatical competence" is used as the knowledge of vocabulary, structure and partially morphology.

And that in the sense of passive knowledge of these components, rather than active, because the date are obtained through a multiple - choice test which is an indicator of passive knowledge of any kind.

Method

This study included two phases. In the first phase the research prepared two valid tests; a grammatical test to assess the grammatical competence of the EFL learners, and a functional test to estimate the sociolingustic competence of the same subjects. These two tests were selected based on the fact that they were to be administered to subjects with different levels of abilities both in grammatical competence and in sociolinguistic competence. In the second phase of the study, the two valid tests were administered to

the subjects and the data were analyzed through appropriate statistical procedures.

A.Subjects

A number of 122 students (male and female) from Tehran were randomly chosen as the main subjects of the study. The subjects were randomly chosen as the main subjects of the study. The subjects were all majoring inEnglish as a foreign language at different levels ranging from freshmen, sophomores, junior, seniors to post - graduate student , studying at the Universities of Tehran, Tarbiat Moalem and Azad University. All these subjects are called "EFL learners" in this study.

The reason for having subjects who were at different levels of competence had to do with the purpose of the study . They main purpose of the study was to find out whether there was any relationship between subjects´ performance on the functional test and their performance on the grammatical test. Therefore the researcher decided to group the subjects into three levels; namely, elementary, intermedinte, and advanced.

In order to do this the subjects themselves had to be from different levels of a ability . And this is what accounts for the high standard deviation of the scores on the grammatical test SD = 31.03 X=96.16 out of 160.

The subjects falling between one SD below and one SD above the mean were assigned to the "intermediate" group. Those below - 1SD were assigned to the "elementary" group while the ones above + 1 SD were assigned to the "advanced" group. The common characteristic of all the subjects was that they had all learned English in Iran ; in school, institute and universities, and those who had , for some time, lived in an English speaking country were exluded from the study.

B. Procedure

The procedure followed in this research was as follows: An already validated functional test along with a grammatical test were administered to the subjects. There was no time interval between the tests and the grammatical test was administered right after the functional test. In order to have a variety of subjects at different levels, the tests were aministered to subjects having passed different number of semesters at the university. The gathered data were then submitted to a correlation and an ANOVA to test the two null hypotheses of the research.

C. Instrumentation

A functiono, test and a grammatical test were used as the main measures in this study. The functional test was a multiple - choice

test with 32 items developed and validated by Ms. Marandi (1997). Based on the theoretical foundation of functional tests, the test was used to assess the level of sociolinguistic competence of the EFL learners. The grammatical test was composed of 160 multiple choice item including 80 structure items and 80 vocabulary items. This test was a combination of Toefl items which was validated by p. Estiri (1997).

Following Bachman´s (1990) definition of grammatical competence as "the knoweledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax and phonology / graphology" , this grammatical test was aimed at assessing the grammatical competence of the EFL learners. In correcting the answer sheets only the correct answers were counted, the worng answers were not penalized.

The functions tested by the multiple - choice functional test can be put under four categories:

1. Representatives including "affirming" and "predicting"

2. Directives including "requesting" and "commanding"

3. Commissives including "warning" and "promising"

4. Expressives including "apologizing" and "reprimanding"

D. design

Subjects with different levels of English command were randomly selected. The subjects were given two tests, one after the

other, a functional test and a grammatical test. Besed on their performance on the Grammatical test, the subjects were divided into three levels; elementary, intermediate and advanced. The performance of these three groups on the functional test was then compared with one another using an ANOVA. In an overall evaluation and comparison the gathered data of the performance of the subjects on the two tests were correlated and the correlation coefficient of the data was worked out.

E. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the administration of the grammatical test and the functional test were analyzed and results were worked out.

It should be again noted that the grammatical test had 160 items and the functional test, 32 items. As can be seen in the table above the data rejected the two null hupotheses proposed in this research.

As for the correlation coefficient of the data, first the overall correlation coefficient was workedout. The correlation coefficient came out to be statistically significant, thus, rejecting the first null hypothesis. Then the correlation coefficient of each group, I.e., advanced, intermediate, elementary,: was seperately workcd out.

As for the ANOVA the performance of the three groups on the functional test were compared with each other. This comparison showed a significant difference in performance between these three.

This resulted in the rejection of the second nully hypotheses.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This Research was done to find out the relationship which might exist between two main competencies of the communicative language ability. The idea that grammatical competence alone does not mean success in communication is stressed by many scholars (Hymes 1973, Brown 1986). The problem becomes more serious when the grammatical knowledge is learned in an EFL situation where there is little social and communicative intercation carried out through the target language. This, in turn, results in insufficient

knowledge of sociocultural rules of the target language and inability to do sociolinguistically well in communicative events. So this research aimed at finding out the relationship between sociolinguistic and grammatical competencies in an EFL situation. Another aim of the research which in fact, is an extension of the first aim was to see whether there were any meaningful difference between sociolinguistic performance of learners who came from different grammaticalabilities.

A. Results and Findings

The table below includes the analyzed data obtained from the administration of the grammatical test and the functional test.

The data illustrated in the data analysis section forms the basis of the discussion that follows.

First, I would discuss the results and their implications group by group, and at the end an overall evaluation will be presented.

1. The Advanced Group

The advanced group consisted of 26 subjects. Their mean on the Grammatical test was 134.88, well abow the total mean of 96.16. Their standard deviation was 5.75 well below the total SD of 31.03. This show that the advanced group was to a good extent homogeneous in terms of their grammatical competence. On the

functional test, the advanced group had a mean of 18.80 (Y_{Tot} = 13.81) with a standard deviation of 4.96 (SF_{Tot} = 6.35). The correlation coefficient between this grop´s performance on the test was 0.28. This value is not statistically significant and shows that although the advanced group, on the functional test, did better than the other two groups: there is no one - to - one relatioship between grammatical performance and sociolinguistic performance at the advanced level. Therefore, we can not safely conclude that a grammatically advanced learner does sociolinguistically better than another leanrer, if he is grammatically more competent. An Fobserved of 43.96 and the Turkey test used indicate that the advanced group did sociolinguistically much better than the intermediate and the elementary groups.

2. The Intermediate Group

There were 72 subjects in the intermediate group. Their scores on the Grammatical test resulted in a mean of 98.62 (X_{Tot} = 96.16) with a standard deviation of 14.82. (SG_{Tot} = 31.03) on the functional test this group gained a mean of 14.58 (Y_{Tot} = 13.81) with a standard devation of 5.29. (SF_{Tot} = 6.35) The correlation coefficient between the grammatical test and the functional tests came out to be. 49 wicch is statically significant. Thus we can conclude that an intermediate learner will do sociolinguistically

better than his counterpart if his grammatical knowledge is higher. An F obsered of 43.96 and the Turkey test used indicated that the intermediate group did sociolinguistically much better, than the elementary group.

3- The Elementary Group

The elementary group had 24 subjects with a Grammatical mean of 46.83 ($X_{Tot} = 96.16$) with a standard, deviation of 11.17. ($SG_{Tot} = 31.03$) On the functional test, this group gained a mean of 6.16 ($Y_{Tot} = 13.81$) with a standard deviation of 6.71. ($SF_{Tot} = 6.35$) This standard deviation is higher than the total standard deviation of the functional test and shows the heterogeneity of elementary learners' performance on the functional test. The correlation coefficient of 0.46. shows an avarage relationship between Grammatical and functional scores. Therefore elementary students with higher grammatical knowledge can be expected to have better sociolinguistic knowledge as well.

B. Conclusion

In an overall evalution Iwould conclude that there is a positive relationship between grammatical performance and sociolinguistic performance of EFL learners. The more lingustically competent learners can be expected to be also socilinguistically more

competente . This is supported by the high total correlation coefficient of 0.72.

The total mean of the grammatical scores is 96.16 . This means that on avarage every subject answered more than %60 of the items on the grammatical test. However the total mean of the functional test is 13.81 which means that on avarage each subject answered about %45 of the items on the functional test. This illustrates that in general the subjects´ performance on the functional test has been poorer than their performance on the grammatical test.

Moreover, the advanced group´s performance on the functional test had no significant correlation with their performance on the grammatical test. This shows that their performance on the functional test has been unsystematic which in turn means that the advanced subjects themselves have not done equally well on the functional test.

Interestingly, the performance of the elementary learners on the functional test resulted in a mean of 6.16 with a standard deviation of 6.71. This huge SD shows the great dispersion of scores which again emphasizes the unsystematicity of performance on the functional test by the elementary group.

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