

The Impact of Two Production Task-mode Types on FL Vocabulary Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

In the ESL/EFL instructional context , the role of output tasks on target language learning has been investigated , and all of them have supported the positive role of output on target language acquisition, but few studies have compared the effect of two types of production modes (written and oral output) on target language acquisition, The present study examined the effects of two types of production modes on the productive English vocabulary knowledge .Two groups of intermediate learners (n=38) were subjected to the two production-modes tasks (Round Robin and Buzz group).Then T-test was used to analyze data. The Buzz group students better gained knowledge of vocabulary in comparison to those in the Round Robin group although no significant difference was observed between the two. The results represented that two types of production task played positive roles in improving the productive vocabulary knowledge of the learners. As a result, applying output tasks could be recommended to the syllabus and text book designers and teachers.

Keywords: written production, oral production, Buzz group, Round Robin

INTRODUCTION

Output task involves a group of learners engaging in activities such as discussing and writing where they can receive immediate feedback in order to solve a problem or build knowledge (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Swain, 2000). This knowledge can be new information, language skills or components, etc. A language component that plays a major role in communication competence is vocabulary (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Learners engage collaboratively in producing or interacting, clarifying and manipulating the target language while their attention is on meaning and form of L2 components which leads to the acquisition of language (Nunan, 1989; Schmidt, 1990). Thus, negotiation of meaning in a conversational exchange leads to the subconscious acquisition of L2 vocabulary (Jepson, 2005). Collaborative exchange along with production plays a more direct role in acquisition because group collaboration allows learners to notice their linguistic gap, note the link between form and meaning, and get feedback from their peers (Swain, 2000). Vocabulary is mostly taught through listening and reading in classroom. Receptive methods may be popular to apply in the class than are productive tasks, but the influential role of production on target language acquisition should not be neglected. Swain (1985) claims that the major problem is do not have enough opportunity to get involved in mutual negotiated interaction in the passive environment of teacher-centered classrooms. A student-centered classroom plays a significant role in improving the English proficiency and motivation of learners. Different output tasks have been proposed in an attempt to change passive language learning environments to active, real world-like contexts so that target language skill and components could be better developed (Kim, 2008; Luan, 2011).

The problem to be addressed in this study is the effect of two types of production task modes (Round Robin, and Buzz group) on the productive acquisition of English vocabulary by intermediate learners. Additionally, this research aims to determine which of these output tasks is more effective.

Theories of output

Many studies about the role of output in SLA have been based on Swain's hypothesis (1995) who argued against Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis. Swain claimed that input is not a sufficient factor to improve L2 learning, Swain's output hypothesis claims that during production, the learner is engaged with linguistic form and meaning, moves from meaning processing to syntactic processing, finds his linguistic knowledge gap, and understands what he can and cannot say (Swain, 2000).

Swain defined four functions of output: noticing, hypothesis testing, metalinguistic functions, and fluency development (Swain, 1995, 1998; Swain & Lapkin, 1995). The noticing function refers to the fact that when learners are engaged in the production of output, they realize they cannot say their intentions because of gaps in their knowledge. This function draws the attention of learners to problem areas in their linguistic production and leads them to modify their linguistic shortcomings.

Output also creates opportunities for hypothesis testing, in other words, when learners are talking to each other, they try to say the same meaning in various structures in order to make sure their speech is comprehensible or well-structured. If learners cannot speak their minds, they may ask for help from others or pay more attention to the next input. L2 acquisition takes place when the learners test their hypotheses about L2 structures on the basis of the feedback they receive from their peers. Even if they do not receive feedback, they can still shape their new structures (Swain, 1995).

As for the metalinguistic function of output, learners internally talk about and consciously pay attention to their own language (Swain, 1995). In other words, This function provides an opportunity for learners to internalize their language productions, and can thus contribute to the improvement of the learner's language accuracy and fluency (Swain, 1995).

Fluency development function of output refers to the fact that processing language in meaningful ways along with repetition during exchanging information and communication leads to L2 knowledge access and increases the speed of access (Swain, 1985). Some aspects of output functions have been explored in many studies in support of the role of output in L2 acquisition.

Previous studies of Output and second language acquisition

Earlier attempts to investigate output tried to determine whether production activities affect L2 learning. Some studies compared input-based and output-based activities in order to find out about the effectiveness of these tasks on the acquisition of target language skills or component (e.g.; Dekeyser & Sokalski, 1996; Salaberry, 1997; VanPatten, Cadierno, 1993). All these studies provide support for Swain's output hypothesis, in that they proved the facilitative effect of output on L2 learning. Other studies mostly focused on the noticing function of the output (e.g. Adams, 2003; Horibe, 2003; Izumi, Bigelow, Fujiwara and Fearnow, 1999). They showed that the nature of the task affects the performance of L2 learner. The result confirmed the role of output in second language learning.

Many studies have empirically investigated the effect of various pedagogical tasks on L2 learning. Kowal and Swain (1994) examined the effect of dictogloss (collaborative output task) on second language learning by engaging a group of intermediate and advanced learners of French in reconstructing a text after they first listened to it. The results revealed that learners noticed their linguistic gap, linked form and meaning, and received feedback from their peers during group collaboration. The experimental group outperformed the control group. Swain and Lapkin (2001) tried to compare two kinds of pedagogical tasks: dictogloss and jigsaw. The study found no significant difference between the two tasks in term of learner attention to form, [LREs LREs (language related episode are segments of learner interaction in which learners either talk about or question their own or others' language use within the context of carrying out a given task in the L2 (Swain & Lapkin, 2001), and degree of language acquisition. Garcia Mayo (2002a) investigated dictogloss and a text reconstruction task in terms of frequency of LREs and the focused attention of learners on form.

The results showed the text reconstruction task to be more effective than dictogloss. He concluded that different task types cause learners to pay attention to different aspects of language. According to Reinders (2005), different task types have different effects on learner intake and the degree of acquisition of grammatical structures. In line with the study of Garcia Mayo (2002), Reinders (2009) examined the effect of three kinds of output tasks (dictation, individual reconstruction, and a collaborative active reconstructive task) on the acquisition and uptake of negative adverbs in English. No significant difference was found between the three activities. Nassaji and Tian (2010) drew a comparison between reconstruction cloze and reconstruction editing tasks to determine their effect on learning English phrasal verbs. The results make us aware of the role of editing in enhancing negotiation and learning.

Previous studies of written Output and L2 Vocabulary Acquisition

As mentioned earlier, few studies have focused on the role of output on vocabulary knowledge. Lee (2003) studied the role of different training techniques on the productive vocabulary knowledge. Three forms of vocabulary instruction (reading, writing, and comprehension of L2 vocabulary within grammar exercises) were implemented. The result showed that all of the instructional methods contributed significantly in converting receptive vocabulary to productive vocabulary. Browne (2003) studied vocabulary acquisition among Japanese college students through reading, writing, and instructional output tasks. The results showed that more vocabulary was learned through the pushed output task. VanGelderen, Snellings, and DeGlopper (2004) conducted a study about the effect of output activity on knowledge of productive L2 vocabulary through some writing activity.

The result showed speeded vocabulary retrieval in the experimental groups as a result of treatment. VanGelderen, Snellings, and DeGlopper (2004) also claimed that this increased vocabulary retrieval led to narrative writing and content explanation. Elsewhere, Schoonen and Verhallen (1998) proved that lexical retrieval and sentence making activity affected the extent to which the participants used second language vocabulary in their writing. Jalilifar (2008) investigated the effect of three types of output tasks (information-gap, opinion-gap, and reasoning-gap) on vocabulary learning in lower-intermediate Iranian learners of English. The results proved that output task has an improving effect on language learning and that the nature of task (i.e., degree of negotiation of meaning and interaction among learners) affects vocabulary acquisition.

Previous Studies of oral output task and L2 Vocabulary Acquisition

A number of studies have investigated the impact of oral production task on vocabulary acquisition (e.g., Hwang, 2002; Jung, 2004; Luan, Sappathy, 2011; Newton, 2001). Luan and Sappathy (2011) investigated the impact of negotiated interaction on L2 vocabulary acquisition. A total of 48 participants with the same first language membership at a primary school were divided into two groups. One group was engaged in an information-gap two-way interactive task, and the other group was taught using traditional methods or a one-way input task. The comparison of the pre test and post test scores revealed that learners who engaged in two-way interaction gained higher scores on the vocabulary test.

As for oral output, Mohamed (2009) explored incidental receptive and productive vocabulary acquisition in an ESL conversation class. Posttest results showed correlation between frequency and receptive/productive gains. The researcher stated that ESL teachers should provide an opportunity for learners to gain vocabulary knowledge incidentally. Hwang (2002) examined the impact of negotiated interaction on L2 vocabulary acquisition of Korean beginner learners, and found that the negotiated interaction group gained more vocabulary than the non-negotiated interaction group. Newton (2001) suggested vocabulary learning through communication tasks.

Learners were exposed to new words during interaction in a cooperative context. As a result of this treatment, not only rich language use was attained, but also the meanings of most words were retained for a long period of time. Mackey, Gass and McDonough (2000) applied the stimulated recall method in their English class, and found that learners were more ready to notice and gain vocabulary feedback than syntactic or productive feedback.

Joe (1998) studied vocabulary acquisition through reading and retelling tasks, and concluded that learning greatly depends on the degree of generation of language and that unfamiliar vocabulary, when used in a new structure or context led to long-lasting retention. So, the above mentioned studies advocated the positive role of two types of production modes on target language learning.

Now that we have studied the role of output in SLA, the question which remains to be answered is, “Which components of language can best be acquired through two types of production task modes?” An important area which has been explored in this regard is knowledge of vocabulary, which is the focus of this study. The researcher aims to answer the following research questions: “Is there any significant difference in the effect of two types of production task modes (Round Robin, and Buzz group) on productive vocabulary knowledge?”

METHODOLOGY

The experiment was an attempt to get an insight into the effect of output tasks on the productive vocabulary by Intermediate Iranian learners of English. The present study investigated the effect of an independent variable with two levels (Round Robin, Buzz Group) on a dependent variable (productive vocabulary learning). For this purpose, a T-Test procedure was employed to analyze the posttest scores.

Participants

The learners in this study were 38 Persian-speaking learners of English as a Foreign Language enrolled at Jahad Daneshgahi in Qazvin. Their ages varied between 24 and 30. The subjects were at the intermediate level. Indeed, they were screened from among a total of 80 students based on their score on the vocabulary section of a Michigan general proficiency test. Indeed, the participants who scored between -1 SD and +1 SD were included in the study. The selected subjects were placed into two groups to receive different treatments. The first group, with 20 members in it, was instructed through the Snowball technique. The second group, with 18 members in it, was treated with the Round Robin technique.

Instruments

Pretest

The vocabulary section of a Michigan general proficiency test (2009): This was a 40-item multiple-choice test which was administered to homogenize sample. The test took 35 minutes to complete. A pretest consisting of 80 vocabulary items: For each of the eight topics to be answered in the experiments, 10 essential words were chosen. These words were then placed and underlined in a series of 80 sentences. The learners were given about 45 minutes to write the Persian meaning of each word. The purpose was to decrease the effect of prior vocabulary knowledge. The words which the test takers were already familiar with were excluded from the posttest.

Posttest

A posttest was administered at the end of the treatment. The questions in this test came from the words used by the students during class discussions. The words the learners identified in the pretest were excluded from the posttest. This posttest which was intended to measure productive vocabulary knowledge was in fill-in-the-blank format. 30 minutes was allotted for the posttest.

Procedure

Once the pretest was given to all the students, two groups were treated with oral and written output tasks (Round Robin, and Buzz group). Each class met two sessions a week for one month: 8 sessions in all. The same teacher taught the same materials to the two classes. Before the treatment actually began, the teacher explained the whole procedure to the students and listed the topics to be worked out in each session. At the beginning of each session, some words were placed on the board to help the students with the discussion. These included the words given in the pretest. The posttests were administered in the tenth session.

In implementing the Round Robin technique, the students were placed in three groups of six. The teacher asked several questions to which the students in each group were supposed to respond by sharing their ideas. The questions were posed at 10-min. intervals. The students had to write their responses to each question and shared them among themselves. The teacher went from group to group in case some students might need help. One student in each group read the responses. The students were also reminded there was no right or wrong answer.

For the Buzz group, the students were divided into five groups of four. The learners in each group were seated in a row. The teacher first asked a question related to the topic at issue and allowed the students in all groups to work out the response for a few minutes. Then, in each group the student sitting on the far left side replied to the question. The teacher put this answer on the board for other students to see. Then, the second question was posed by the teacher, to be answered by the second student in each group. This procedure was repeated for the remaining group members. In the end, the teacher asked some students to elaborate the responses they had previously provided. At the end of the treatment, the posttest was given to the two experimental groups in order to measure the students' knowledge of productive vocabulary. The student responses were scored, and the data were submitted to the SPSS statistical package for analysis.

RESULTS

The present study investigated the effect of an independent variable with two levels (Round Robin, Buzz group) on a dependent variable (productive vocabulary learning). For this purpose, A T-Test procedure was employed to analyze the posttest scores.

Investigation of the research question

The research question investigated the effect of Buzz group, and Round Robin techniques on productive vocabulary acquisition by intermediate Iranian learners. The descriptive statistics are given in Table 4.1. It can be seen in this table that the Buzz group earned the highest mean, and it was followed closely by the group treated with the Round Robin technique.

Table 4.1 Descriptive statistics for the two experimental groups(performance on a test of productive vocabulary Group Statistics)

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Buzz Group	20	20.40	2.03	.45
Round Robin	18	19.22	2.15	.50

From these descriptive data, it can be seen that the Buzz group performed better, closely followed by the Round Robin students. However, to make sure these observations are also statistically significant, T-Test was run, with probability level set at $p =$ or < 0.05 . The results are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Results of the T-Test comparison of means for learners' productive vocabulary knowledge Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Standard Error
Equal variances assumed	.00	.99	1.73	36	.092	1.17	.68
Equal variances not assumed			1.72	35.03	.093	1.17	.68

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

As with the results obtained in the test of Levene for Equality of Variances, the variances in both groups are equal. Sig. value (p) is larger than .05, we use the first line in the table, which refers to Equal variances assumed. It can be also seen in the table of t-test for equality of means that the group means are not statistically significant. The value in the Sig. (2-tailed) is above .05, therefore, there is no significant difference between the two groups.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the effects of two types of production tasks (Buzz group, Round Robin) on the acquisition of productive English vocabulary by Intermediate Iranian learners. Regarding the research question, the statistical analysis showed that the learners acquired productive vocabulary more through Buzz group technique than through the Round Robin. This is in line with the finding of Browne (2003) that pushed output leads to more vocabulary gain than reading and writing instruction. The underlying reason for the positive role of the Buzz group technique in improving productive vocabulary acquisition lies in the fact that the learners were engaged in the production activity, gained feedback from the responses of other students to the same question. All this led the learners to better notice new vocabulary and to find out about their knowledge gap. The students receiving oral production task performed better in the test of productive vocabulary knowledge than students in the written production task. This may due to lesser extent of negotiation of meaning among the learners being treated with Round Robin. Statistical results also showed that the Buzz group technique led to better performance on the part of the learners, a finding which is attributable to the deeper level of processing involved. These findings are compatible with DelaFuente (2002), who pointed out that negotiated interaction and pushed output significantly improved performance in tests of receptive and productive vocabulary. The findings of this study also agree with those of Ellis, Tanaka, and Yamazaki (1994), who stated that interaction among learners fosters the productive use of new vocabulary if learners are engaged productively in using them. The results also lend strong

support to Prabhu's (1987) view that the high-level information processing contributes to language knowledge gain.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study compared the affects of two types of production modes task on the learners' productive vocabulary knowledge. The findings showed that the difference between the Buzz group, and Round Robin was not significant. Buzz group was a more effective technique in terms of productive vocabulary acquisition by intermediate learners. Although, there was no significant difference in the degree of effectiveness of two types of production task, both of them improved vocabulary knowledge of learners. The results of the present study provide implications for syllabus and English book designers, who try to design textbooks that involve a combination of both production modes. Moreover, the findings of the present study promote the learners' knowledge of different role of teacher and students in either teaching tasks. The results of this study also have implications for learners. Students can benefit from the advantages of production task. The replication of this study can be conducted on the effects of these production tasks on other language components and skills. Comparison among production tasks can be according to sex and age differences of learners.

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