

News Episodes in Advance Level Classes

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Abstract Today, having access to audio/visual mass media programs such as TV and radio news is very easy for all the people around the world. In the same line, many studies have emphasized the pedagogical values of TV and radio programs to be used in language learning. Accordingly, the present study tries to investigate the effect of listening to TV and radio news on improving language learners' speaking proficiency at the advance level. For this purpose, a speaking test was administered to two hundred language learners and finally sixty language learners were selected as advance language learners and randomly divided into group one and group two. During the experiment, group one participants had exposure to TV news to work on in-and out-side the classroom. On the contrary, the participants in group two had only exposure to a sample selected utterances extracted from different kinds of TV and radio programs rather than news. At the end of the experiment, both groups took another sample speaking test to see whether or not any changes happened regarding their speaking proficiency. The results of the post-test showed that the two groups performed differently on the post-test which was indicative of the fact that exposure to mass media news promote language learners' speaking proficiency at the advance level.

Keywords: Integration, TV news, Speaking proficiency, Advance level

1. Introduction

Linguistically speaking, there are a number of particular characteristics observed in developing any TV and radio news which make it different from other genres.

In this regard, one of the characteristics of TV news which make it pedagogically valuable to be used in English language classrooms is vocabulary recycling (Blatchford, 1973; Brinton & Gaskill, 1978). The recycling feature of vocabulary in TV and radio news genre is also known as redundancy of language input which is generally understood by the students to help their second language comprehension (Chaudron, 1983; Chiang & Dunkel, 1992).

In the same line, news writers and news reporters or newscasters are aware of the role of the news genre in the public attitude. Accordingly, they make their attempts to present the news stories, discussions, and commentaries as precisely and directly as possible to draw individuals' attention. To reach the goal, news agendas also use specific vocabularies and structures to make the news stories more understandable to the public. In other words, ambiguous structures which may hamper comprehension are almost avoided in developing and presenting news stories. As the news consistently consist of the same vocabularies, a good tutorial benefit implicitly exists in TV and radio news programs (Blatchford, 1973).

Fluency of speech which comprises the use of appropriate pausing, intonation, stress, rate of speaking, and the use of interjections and interruptions is another crucial characteristic of TV news stories (Bell, 2003). Consequently, fluency of speech is a dominant linguistic feature which can be observed in utterances designed and developed to be read by newscasters. However, Chambers (1997) considered fluency as a component of oral proficiency which is acquired and emerges naturally.

In this relation, one of the most important ways of improving language learners' speaking proficiency may be through having exposure to fluent native speakers or even fluent nonnative speakers. In more particular situations, from among all the TV and radio programs, the TV and radio news stories

have proved to be effective in teaching different skills of language such as listening comprehension.

However, TV news stories may have a different look for at least two reasons: first, many language learners seem to be interested in different news types; second, due to the various discursual functions of the TV news stories, the listener may or may not have to focus on either form or the content.

Considering all the above-mentioned issues, one of the audio-visual inputs which proved to be effective in helping language learners at the advance level to improve their speaking proficiency is TV and radio news stories. Regarding this point, the present research intended to investigate the effect of exposure to TV and radio news stories on advance level language learners' speaking proficiency.

2. Review of the Related Literature

The pedagogical value of news stories and the possibility of using various news stories at all levels of language learning classes in order to boost different language skills have been the focus of so many studies.

In a research carried out by Brinton and Gaskill (1978), the effect of listening to news from TV on improving the listening comprehension of language learners was studied. Brinton and Gaskill (1978) argued that using TV and radio news utterances as teaching material has proved effective on improving listening comprehension of language learners having difficulty in dealing with comprehending news utterances.

A similar study which focused on using TV news to improve listening comprehension was also conducted by Poon (1992). In addition to the above-mentioned studies, Baker (1996) also focused on the pedagogical value of TV news in EFL classes and listening comprehension. According to Baker (1996), TV and radio news can help EFL students improve their listening comprehension.

The use of fast speech such as those of TV and radio news in EFL/ESL classrooms has also been studied by some other scholars. In this regard, Cauldwell (1996) conducted a study aiming at discovering the relationship between direct encounters with fast speech such as TV and radio news and teaching listening to EFL students. Accordingly, students may have some problems coping with fast speech at first. However, EFL students can diminish these problems and improve their listening through great amount of exposure to fast speech. Another short study conducted by Mackenzie (1997) also highlighted the possibility of using TV and radio news reports at all levels of EFL learning. The study rejected the assumption that because the reporters speak too fast, the content is too complex, and the vocabulary is too difficult, TV and radio news cannot be used at lowest levels of EFL situations.

Regarding proficiency and comprehension of television and radio news in a foreign language, a research by Berber (1997) highlighted the point that through enough exposure to these materials, students can easily cope with the comprehension of such materials. Cabaj and Nolic (2000) also noted that a great amount of exposure to TV and radio news could help students to cope with TV and radio news broadcasts easier. Moreover, through exposure to TV news and radio programs students acquire the knowledge, structures, strategies, and vocabularies they can use in everyday situations.

In the same line, a study was conducted by Bell (2003) focusing on the pedagogical value and informative aspects of TV and radio news broadcasts in EFL settings. He considered background knowledge or content schemata, formal schemata, and linguistic difficulty as three broad categories for selecting any kinds of TV and radio news stories for the EFL classrooms. However, Wetzel et al. (1994), in their study, found that TV news is not always helpful in comprehension.

In short, the majority of the aforementioned descriptive and experimental works have been conducted on the pedagogical value and the effect of exposure to TV and radio news genre on promoting different language skills especially listening comprehension but none of them has specifically focused on the relationship between exposure to mass media news genre and EFL learners' speaking proficiency (Poon, 1992; Baker, 1996; Berber, 1997; Beach & Somerholter, 1997, to name only a few). This was one of the initial reasons to carry out the present study.

3. Statement of the Problem

Developing speaking proficiency in general has always been the main concern of English language learners. In the same line, this researcher believes that language learners cannot develop a satisfying speaking proficiency mostly because of their few amount of exposure to utterances filled with fluently produced discourses such as those found in various news stories. English language learners mostly watch different kinds of movies for their intensive and extensive listening practice. However, this researcher still

believes that high amount of exposure to news from TV and radio may prove effective in promoting advance level language learners' speaking proficiency.

4. Research Questions

More particularly, this study is set out to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent does greater exposure to TV and radio news improve advance level language learners' speaking proficiency?
2. To what extent does greater exposure to TV and radio general language listening material (non-news) improve advance level language learners' speaking proficiency?

5. Methodology

5.1. Subjects

The initial population of this study comprised one hundred last year language learners including both males and females majoring in TESL. Out of the initial population, 60 participants were selected based on a speaking proficiency pre-test to carry the research.

5.2. Instruments and Materials

The first instrument was a set of sample parallel speaking proficiency tests from IELTS which were used as pre-post tests. Efforts were made to ensure that the post-test was not focused on input from any one type of genre, for example, news or non-news. Moreover, the tests were selected to be parallel to increase the internal validity.

Regarding the materials that were utilized, it should be mentioned that 2 kinds of different materials from the same mass media (TV and radio) were used. The first one was a collection of 150 hours authentic news programs including both video and audio extracted and prepared from Voice of America (VOA) and CBS which was given to group one to work on in-and out-side the classroom. The second material was a collection of 150 hours authentic programs rather than news prepared from the same mass media for group two to work on in-and out-side the classroom. Regarding these two collections of materials, it should be mentioned that their difficulty levels were evaluated to be the same in terms of vocabulary, structure, and syntaxes.

5.3. Procedure

This research was conducted based on pre-test and post-test design. The first step to take, before the participants were selected, was to verify the reliabilities of the sample IELTS speaking pre-post tests. Regarding verifying the reliability of IELTS test, it should be mentioned that there is a disagreement among the scholars. Some believed that IELTS test is standardized and there is no need to verify its reliability. On the contrary, some other scholars believe that it should be verified. However, in order to leave any question, the reliabilities of the sample IELTS tests were verified by employing parallel tests method.

To do so, both tests were given to a trial group of last year students including both males and females. Then, the reliabilities of both tests were calculated separately by parallel tests method and the following results were obtained:

Reliability Statistics related to the two parallel tests

<i>Common Variance</i>	.556
<i>True Variance</i>	.496
<i>Error Variance</i>	.060
<i>Common Inter-Item Correlation</i>	.893
<i>Reliability of Scale (Test 1)</i>	.943
<i>Reliability of Scale (Test 2)</i>	.945

Accordingly both tests were reliable enough to be used. Once the reliabilities of the above-mentioned tests were verified, one of the tests was given to one hundred last year language learners including both males and females. When the scores of the tests were obtained, 60 participants who scored above the

mean were selected as homogeneous advance language learners. Then, the 60 homogeneous participants were divided into two groups as group one (n=30) and group two (n=30) based on random judgment sampling.

Throughout the experiment which lasted for one academic semesters (3 hours a week), the researcher provided group one participants with the news media exposure (from the above mentioned 150 hour collection) to work on in-and-outside the classroom with researcher monitoring. On the contrary, group two was provided with exposure to non-news programs (from the above mentioned 150 hour collection) to work on in-and-outside the classroom with researcher monitoring.

During the experiment and for each interval between every two sessions, the participants in group one were asked to watch and listen to at least 4 hours of the already selected news from the collection from mass media outside the classroom and write down the summary of whatever was heard which will be viewed and discussed later inside the classroom.

Moreover, group two participants were also asked to do the same with non-news media programs outside the classroom. In other words, they were also asked to watch and listen to at least 4 hours of the already selected non-news media programs from the collection outside the classroom and write down the summary of whatever was heard which will be viewed and discussed later inside the classroom. As the matter of fact, this was only done to make sure that group one participants had at least the same minimum amount of exposure to news from the mass media and group two participants had at least the same minimum amount of exposure to non-news programs from the mass media outside the classroom.

After 16 weeks of exposure of group one to news from mass media and group two to non-news programs from mass media, all the participants took the second parallel IELTS speaking proficiency test as a post-test to check if there was any change in their speaking proficiency. After the participants were interviewed (speaking post-test), the scores of both groups gained from pre-test and post-test were compared by means of t-test analysis to see whether or not any changes happened regarding their speaking proficiency.

6. Results and Discussion

After the end of the experiment, the research questions were answered according to the data obtained from the administration of the pre-post tests to both groups. In relation to the first question, the results obtained from the pre-post tests related to the participants who had exposure to news during the period of the study showed a great difference in the means of the pre-test and the post-test. However, in order to find out to what extent this change in the means was significant, a statistical analysis of t-test was employed. According to the results of the t-test, the difference was significant which was indicative of the fact that greater exposure to news had a significant effect on improving the speaking proficiency of advance level language learners.

Considering the second question which was about the effect of exposure to non-news on advance level language learners' speaking proficiency, the results of the pre-post tests related to the participants who had exposure to non-news during the period of the study showed a minor difference in the means of the pre-test and the post-test. However, in order to find out to what extent this small change in the means was significant, a statistical analysis of t-test was also employed. According to the results of the t-test, the difference was not significant enough which was indicative of the fact that greater exposure to non-news did not have a significant effect on improving the speaking proficiency of advance level language learners.

Following is the statistical analysis related to the data obtained from the administration of both tests to the both groups:

Descriptive statistics related to group one pretest and posttest results

<i>Groups</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>MEAN</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t-test</i>
<i>Group one pretest</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>.50</i>	<i>-4.253</i>
<i>Group one posttest</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>.46</i>	

T-observed=-4.253

T-critical=1.671

T-observed bigger than t-critical

Descriptive statistics related to group two pretest and posttest results

<i>Groups</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>MEAN</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t-test</i>
<i>Group two pretest</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>.58</i>	<i>-.0.235</i>
<i>Group two posttest</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>.41</i>	

T-observed=-0.235

T-critical=1.671

T-observed smaller than t-critical

The results of the present research are indicative of the fact that greater exposure to news genre boosts speaking proficiency at the advance level more than that of the non-news.

Accordingly, the results of the present study are in line with the studies conducted by Brinton and Gaskill (1978), Cauldwell (1996), and Mackenzie (1997) regarding the effect of exposure to mass media news on improving different language skills. The findings of the present research shed more light to what Mackenzie (1997) put forth regarding the pedagogical value of news stories and the possibility of using news stories at all levels of language learning.

In the same line, the present study proved that greater exposure to audio/visual mass media news can improve speaking proficiency at the advance level to a significant extent. The reason behind this might be that the recycling feature of vocabulary used in TV news and the lack of inappropriate pausing, which is fluency of speech, could help the participants in group one to improve their speaking proficiency to a significant extent. Following is the descriptive analysis of the data obtained from the pre-post tests related to both groups.

Accordingly, those participants who had exposure to news items rather than non-news ones had the chance to have exposure to utterances in which fluency of speech is a dominant feature. This feature is observed less in non-news materials such as films.

Moreover, appropriate pauses and intonation which lead to fluency in speech are other dominant features of news episodes. This criterion also paved the path for the participants in the first group to improve their speaking proficiency.

In relation to the limitation of the study and its findings, it should be mentioned that the participants of the present research were all advance level language learners who showed great interest in having exposure to both news and non-news. However, further studies can be conducted with low or intermediate levels language learners to find out the effectiveness of having exposure to news on their language proficiency.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to provide empirical evidence on fill the effect of exposure to mass media news on speaking proficiency at the advance level classes. In brief the researcher arrived at the following conclusions:

- Because fluency of speech is a key feature of any audio/visual news episode, language learners aiming at improving their speaking proficiency in general and speaking fluency in particular should have greater exposure to these kinds of materials.
- Stress, intonation, and appropriate pauses at appropriate junctures are essential features for the enhancement of speaking proficiency. Accordingly, having exposure to language materials in which these features are highly observed can boost speaking proficiency.
- Vocabulary recycling is another feature regarding any audio/visual news which is generally understood to help language learners build up their lexicon over time.

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