

The Effect of Conversational Shadowing on Enhancing Iranian EFL Learners' Oral Performance Based on Accuracy

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Abstract

The present study is an investigation of the extent to which conversational shadowing improve the level of accuracy of EFL learners during their oral performance. Participants in this study were consisted of 60 students studying English in an English institute at intermediate level in Tehran as an EFL context. The participants received conversational shadowing practice during their interaction with the instructor and peers. A general English proficiency test, pre-test and post-test of simple past tense were administered to them. Two intact classes were selected as a control and experimental group in this study. Experimental group was taught simple past tense based on conversational shadowing while the control group was taught as it had been demonstrated in their books. The results of the quantitative and qualitative studies, when integrated, supported this assumption by showing that oral repetition served as a scaffolding device that helped learners use correct form of simple past tense. Conversational shadowing was not perceived as enjoyable or useful in itself, but a few highly proficient students, who had utilized the pertinent technique in the service of more interesting activities, acknowledged that they had learned useful sentences and make fewer errors during their conversation. Therefore, conversational shadowing can be best utilized to help intermediate EFL students to perfect their correct use of grammar when they are interacting with their peers.

Keywords: Focus-on-formS, Focus-on-form, conversational shadowing, oral performance.

Introduction

The organization of EFL courses and programs was based traditionally on the so-called focus-on-forms instructional approach, such as the Grammar Translation and Audiolingual Methods. In focus-on-formS instruction, the model linguistic forms-syntactic rules, vocabulary items, formulaic sentence structures and pronunciations were directly provided to the learners as isolated items (Long, 1991). The primary learning strategies included rote-memorization and the meta-linguistic explanation of grammatical rules. When it was pointed out that this mode of instruction did not facilitate learners' language acquisition (Krashen, 1982; Schmidt, 1990), ESL teachers started switching to communicative approaches, which gradually relegated focus-on-formS instruction to an auxiliary position, although the latter is still prevalent in Iranian EFL classrooms. However, I support the combined use of focus-on-form-oriented and focus-on-formS-oriented activities in EFL teaching for two reasons.

First, there is no known language teaching approach that effectively helps every individual learner or facilitates the acquisition of all language skills. Foreign language learning requires the acquisition of various sub-skills or different levels of cognitive processing, such as holistic comprehension, visual-phonological association, kinesthetic familiarity, rote learning, the effective use of working memory, organizational skills, and artistic sensibilities. It is my impression that the use of diverse teaching ap-

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proaches can facilitate learners' acquisition of target linguistic rules or exemplars by increasing their interest in language learning or encouraging various types of cognitive processing. Even the criticized focus-on-formS activities might be integrated with communicative tasks in foreign language curricula.

Second, Iranians, and particularly, conscientious students who strive to acquire advanced skills in academic, athletic, or artistic fields tend to have a predilection for formulating "good form" in the process of their learning. In foreign language acquisition, this includes correct grammatical usage, accurate translation, and native-like pronunciation. Repetitive practice involving using set forms is rooted in Iranian culture in one way or another.

Statement of the Problem

Wherever we are in the world, conversations are open-ended processes. Talk-in-interaction unfolds, dynamically, on a turn-by-turn basis (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). For decades, second language researchers have recognized that learners' engagement in interactive classroom tasks is important for their development as proficient language users. As early as 1980, Michael Canale and Merrill Swain, in outlining their communicative competence framework, called for classroom activities based in "sociocultural, interpersonal interaction" involving the "unpredictability and creativity" of utterances (p. 29).

Of all task types studied by interaction researchers, tasks such as the required information-exchange – designed to promote an interactional give and take as participants work towards a single outcome – have been advanced for their potential to elicit negotiation for meaning devices (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Pica, Kanagy, & Falodun, 1993; Pica, Kang, & Sauro, 2006). These modifications, conversational adjustments arising from communication trouble, have been posited to facilitate second language development (Long, 1983, 1996). Tasks such as the garden puzzle push participants to negotiate with one another as they share their given-portion of information-information they all need to arrive at the task solution. Other less bounded task types have been examined by interaction researchers, but have been described as less likely to generate negotiation mechanisms (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Long, 2007). While learners' need to engage in spontaneous communicative activity has been

voiced by second language acquisition researchers for decades, tasks that call for creative learner language have gone largely unexplored.

A growing body of research from sociocultural and conversation analysis traditions, however, has centered studies of learner language in real classrooms (Mondada & Pekarek Doehler, 2004; Mori, 2004; Ohta, 2001). This research brings a different understanding of the nature of the second language task than we have seen in interactionist investigation. A task is not viewed as a static construct – a "workplan" similarly realized from one experimental setting to another by one interactant to another – but rather a fluid "process," an activity that particular participants enact turn by turn within their classroom context (Coughlan & Duff, 1994; Seedhouse, 2004). Grounded in the view that development is at once fundamentally social and individualized, researchers do not predetermine in advance of analysis the particular linguistic mechanisms that will serve as evidence for promoting language acquisition. Participant language is viewed qualitatively, and turn by turn. Potential developmental foci emerge from, and remain situated within, their unique discourse contexts.

Bringing this social and dynamic perspective to the analysis of tasks for learners is vital to the field of second language acquisition. If we believe that interaction is central to language learning, then the tasks motivating interaction ought to be studied as unfolding events of authentic, relational settings.

The Development of Second Language Acquisition Theory

Until the late 1950s, it was generally believed that language learning grew out of mimicry. This behaviorist view saw the language in learners' environment as a resource for repetition (Gass, 1997). Second language instructional methods of the day reflected this perspective. Larsen-Freeman (1986) depicts how one such method, audiolingualism, embodied this emphasis on rote learning. In the example below, the teacher initiates a backward build-up drill, inviting the learners to model parts of the sentence "I'm going to the post office" until they are able to repeat the whole of it.

Teacher: Repeat after me: post office.

Class: Post office.

Teacher: To the post office.

Class: To the post office.

Teacher: Going to the post office.

Class: Going to the post office.

Teacher: I'm going to the post office.

Class: I'm going to the post office, (p. 33)

In the 1960s and 1970s, linguistic theory and pedagogy began to depart from a learning model based on habit formation. In a pivotal work, Evelyn Hatch (1978) discussed a need to examine learner language as it develops in interaction. Hypothesizing that a learner "learns how to do conversation" and through this conversation "syntactic structures are developed" (p. 404), Hatch's work underscored the role of authentic communicative contexts in both L2 production and L2 learning. At the same time, instructors were increasingly recognizing the faulty link between learners' ability to echo correct forms and their target language proficiency. Teachers began viewing themselves less as providers of linguistic stimuli and more as facilitators of learner activity and creativity (Lightbown, 1998).

Communicative Language Teaching (CUT) encapsulated this historical shift. Drawing a distinction between learners' knowledge of structural patterns and their ability to demonstrate these patterns "effectively and appropriately" in interaction (Nunan, 1989, p. 12), early CLT proponents viewed language teaching and learning as fundamentally asocio-cultural endeavor. In Breen and Candlin's (1980) influential work, the writers discuss how knowledge of a language involves understanding, not only linguistic meanings and their form-based expressions, but also how meanings are expressed in the behavioral conventions of a particular group. The communicative "task" emerged as the pedagogical unit capturing this perspective, aiming to target learners' real world needs (Skehan, 1996) and to focus their attention "principally ...on meaning" (Nunan, 1989, p. 10). This movement signified the need for language forms, not to be drilled and memorized, but to emerge authentically through interaction (Savignon, 2001).

This growing focus on language meanings de-emphasized the role of language forms in L2 learning. Long and Robinson (1998) describe this shift as one away from linguistic structures treated as "an object of study" – to a focus on meaning, with language used as "a medium of communication" (pp. 16–18). This view held that language used communicatively facilitates, not only a social and functional awareness of language in use, but grammatical competence – learners' bringing new rules into being through discourse (Widdowson, 1979).

During the 1980s and 1990s, a large body of

task-based studies sought to determine the role played by different communicative tasks in eliciting negotiated interaction. The view underlying this largely experimental body of research (Gass, Mackey, & Ross-Feldman, 2005) is that a higher quantity of conversational modifications is more beneficial to learners' acquisitional processes (Foster & Ohta, 2005). In order to conduct studies that examine how different tasks affect negotiation, researchers categorized task types according to their differing characteristics, while noting their common focus on outcomes (Skehan, 1996). A key distinction drawn by Pica *et al.* (1993) in their task typology is the number of "acceptable task outcomes" learners are working towards (p. 15), also characterized as "open" versus "closed" tasks (Long, 1989). Duff (1986) contrasts "convergent" tasks – those involving learners' arrival at "a mutually acceptable solution" with "divergent" tasks calling for conflicting student goals (e.g., a debate) (p. 150). Another task-type variable highlighted in the interactionist literature is communicative direction. Long (1989) distinguishes between "one-way" tasks in which a sole interactant supplies information needed to finish the task, and "two-way" tasks where information flow between participants is "required for completion to be possible at all" (p. 13).

Results from interaction research have consistently shown that the more structured the task, the greater the number of negotiation devices generated by its performers (Gass *et al.*, 2005; Long & Porter, 1985). As we have seen, negotiation for meaning stems from the temporary breakdown of communication as participants visibly work to comprehend, clarify or confirm the utterances expressed by one another. Of the five communicative task types analyzed by Pica *et al.* (1993) – jigsaw, information gap, problem-solving, decision-making, and opinion exchange – the highly controlled jigsaw task is promoted as the task type most likely to provide negotiation opportunities. It is not difficult to see why. Requirements for the jigsaw involve participants' mandatory exchange of given information, in their mutual interest of arriving at the task solution. The task is designed to ensure that learners interact with one another to solve the puzzle. Because more than one participant is given information that is needed to arrive at this outcome, learners are pushed to resolve communication troubles as it arises.

Beginning in the early 1990s, interaction researchers have emphasized the pedagogical value of directing learners' attention to language forms

as well as meanings (e.g., Doughty & Williams, 1998). This advocacy of focus on form instruction has been driven in part by studies of educational settings in which learners are immersed in purely communicative methods (Doughty & Williams, *ibid*). Studies of such settings have convincingly shown that, despite learners' participation in communicative activities, they are still not able to demonstrate native-like control of the forms of their target language (Swain, 1998). In calling for a focus on form instructional approach, however, investigators have underscored the importance of maintaining a communicative focus in L2 pedagogy (Long, 1991, 2007; Long & Robinson, 1998). Thus, Long (1991) proposes that focus on form instruction "overtly draw students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning, or communication" (p. 46). The role of negotiating for meaning in this instructional paradigm has been highlighted-viewed as a critical communicative mechanism through which learners' attention to language form and meaning can co-occur. As Long and Robinson (*ibid*) discuss, negotiating for meaning may expose learners to new lexicosyntactic items, and the particular functions served by these items, as they emerge interactionally.

Conversational Shadowing

Shadowing is a technique in which a person wishing to learn a skill (student) accompanies, observes and collaborates with another (mentor), while that person is employing their expertise on a value-producing assignment. Shadowing is a multi-stage process that offers the student the freedom to create his or her own success story. It uses job-specific situations as the practice fields and rehearsal halls for learning complex skills. The student has an opportunity to talk with others, develop work scenarios that are effective and productive, and solicit feedback about improving his or her skills and knowledge. Ongoing conversations about the work help the student better appreciate the roles others play in their success. It also helps them strengthen their own judgment and stretch their thinking skills.

The learning process involves three stages:

1. Preparation for an event (i.e., meeting, customer contact, presentation, project or the like).
2. Participation in the event.
3. Post-event learning, including a debriefing session designed to capture the lessons of the experience.

Participation in all three phases is important if the experience is to be fully developmental. Participation in the event represents involvement in a learning opportunity as well as a work action. Mentors and students approach this event with a shared purpose, and with a commitment to give and take. Both offer observations, thoughts, and opinions. In a true learning experience, both benefit from the process making their student/teacher roles interchangeable as the event unfolds. When others are involved, they may contribute by offering feedback about what was left out, misunderstood or simply underdeveloped in the thinking of the designated student. They ask questions, engage the student, and work to share their tacit knowledge. Vital data is aggregated into information, which becomes bundled into knowledge through vigorous dialogue and serious reflection. This is the essence of a thought partnership; creating additional value through the deliberate focus on collaboration.

Shadowing has also long been used explicitly as an exercise to enhance simultaneous interpreters' timing, listening, and short-term memory skills before they even start translating (Kurz, 1992). While one person speaks, the 'shadower' repeats what is said a fraction of a second after the speaker. Interpreters do this first in just one language and then later while translating.

Shadowing can be done in many ways. The following three sample passages are parts of longer passages that we will look at later. They are provided here to acquaint the reader with the different types of shadowing that I have labeled complete, selective, and interactive.

First of all, complete shadowing in conversation refers to listeners shadowing everything speakers say. For example:

Ali : Boston is in America, in the north east part of America.

Reza: Boston is in America in the north east part of America.

Selective shadowing refers to listeners selecting only certain words and phrases to shadow, such as in the following:

Afshin: I'd like to tell you about two places. The first one is Boston.

Mohammad: Two places. Boston.

Afshin: Do you know where the Boston is? Boston is in the north east north east

Mohammad: north east

Interactive shadowing, which includes selective shadowing, adds questions and comments from the

listener into the conversation making it more natural and showing more involvement on the part of the listener. For example,

Ali: They um? they ah he is a member of basket club. Yes

Reza: ah really basketball club

Ali: basketball club So he is tired in home yes so in home at home

Reza: aha okay oh, really at home aha

Ali: ah, yeah there is no sound yes it's quiet, so

Reza: oh, really! it's very quiet?

The kind of shadowing which has been considered for the purpose of this study is selective shadowing.

Studies related to Focus-on-Forms

Regarding the studies done in this area, we can mention the followings:

First, Williams and Evans (1998) conducted a multi-level focus-on-form study and empirically investigated whether or not some target forms were more amenable to focus-on-form than others and whether or not "drawing attention" to form was enough to facilitate L2 acquisition. The participants in their study were 33 ESL students from a variety of L1 backgrounds, enrolled in writing courses at the University of Illinois which met twice for two hours per week over a period of 15 weeks. The results of a factorial ANOVA showed that, on both tests for the participle adjectives, the instruction group performed better than the flood group and the control group to a statistically significant degree, whereas the difference between the flood group and the control group was not significant. As regards the tests for the passive participle, which was assumed to be the more difficult linguistic item, the instruction group performed significantly better than the control group on the narrative task, but the difference between the two experimental groups was not statistically significant. Williams and Evans concluded that passive adjectives were significantly more difficult to learn than participle adjectives and that the administration of multiple focus-on-form treatments had statistically significant, positive effects on the learners' performance. They also added that the explicit instruction was more effective for the more difficult linguistic form.

In another study, Muranoi (2000) investigated the extent to which the language-focused debriefing reinforced the effects of the focus-on-form instruction. His study is particularly interesting in that both focus-on-form and focus-on-formS treat-

ments were administered to one of his experimental groups. Muranoi recruited 91 Japanese university students as participants, divided them into one contrast group and two experimental groups, and administered corrective feedback to the two experimental groups as part of his efforts to teach them the English article system. The results of one-way ANOVAs showed that, as far as the indefinite article was concerned, EG1 (treated with focus-on-formS-debriefing) scored significantly higher than EG2 (treated with meaning-focused debriefing) and the CG on both the immediate and delayed posttests.

Regarding the studies related to shadowing, Ran and Seon-Yoo (2011) examined effects of shadowing practice on listening comprehension and was conducted with 58 participating freshmen at a university in Daejeon area. All participants were taught an intensive course for TOEIC listening for 15 days in the winter of 2010. 36 students out of the 58 practiced shadowing and was classified as the shadowing group. The non-shadowing group consisted of 22 students and didn't practiced shadowing. Both groups were given two simulated tests of TOEIC before and after the instruction, and only listening comprehension scores were used for the study. At the end of the instruction, questionnaire survey was carried out only for the shadowing group to find out their perception on shadowing. Results of the post-test showed that shadowing students performed better than non-shadowing students, demonstrating that shadowing practice contributed to improving listening comprehension.

Research Questions

With respect to the above description of unsuccessful teaching methods in general and the discussion of learners' lower achievement in English standardized tests in Iran in particular, it is apparent that Iranian needs to seek better teaching approaches such as Focus on Form for pedagogical implementation. To investigate the effects of FonF instruction using some problematic linguistic features that most Iranian learners may have been encountering, the research question is formulated as follows:

1. *Does conversational shadowing effect Iranian adult foreign language learners' oral Performance in terms of accuracy?*

Research Hypotheses

By taking the above research question into account, the following null hypotheses was proposed:

H01. There is no statistically significant differ-

ence Iranian EFL learners' use of simple past tense before and after performing conversational shadowing in the classroom.

Methodology

Participants

Participants in this study were consisted of 40 students studying English in an English institute in Tehran at intermediate level in Iranian EFL contexts. All of the participants were studying English because of their job promotion and were enrolled at intermediate level. Regarding the subjects included in this study, the students' ages ranged from 9 to 16, with mean of 12, and there were 18 males and 22 females in the sample.

In addition, all the subjects had completed 8 years of schooling, some of them were studying at high school grade one, some at guidance school. In order to determine the level of proficiency of the subjects, the same Nelson proficiency test. Then, based on the normal probability curve, those participants standing between -1 and +1 SD were regarded as the main group. It should be pointed out that this selection happened after some of the entire subjects were dropped from the study due to their absence in some treatment sessions or due to incomplete data.

Instruments

Taking the hypotheses of this study into account, the following instruments were implemented:

General English Proficiency Test: The Nelson proficiency test was used to assess the subjects' level of proficiency in English. The researcher did a pilot test with 8 students with the same level and similar characteristics to those of the subjects of this study. An item analysis was done to calculate the level of difficulty of all items. Then, based on the results of this analysis, some items were modified, deleted, or replaced by some new ones.

Simple Past Tense Pre- and Posttest: This test has been adopted from *Interchange Book 2*, developed by Jack C. Richards. This test, which was used for pre- and posttest, tests different uses of simple past tense in different contexts. The format of this test is multiple-choice questions. The content validity of the test was established through the expert opinion of the supervisor and English instructors.

Reliability and Validity of the Instruments

In order to ensure the reliability of the pretest, the

researcher used coefficient Alpha reliability analysis to compute the reliability and to determine if they could be employed in English institutes in Iranian EFL context. According to KR-21 formulae, the reliability was .68, which is highly significant. However, some of the items in original pretest were modified or changed after the results of the tests were analyzed.

In order to determine the validity of the tools utilized in the study, the researcher asked four university teachers and teachers teaching at different institutes to offer an unbiased judgment as to whether the tests have content validity (Hughes, 1989, p. 27). All of them had at least 5 years of teaching experience in institutes. In addition, the researcher asked some other teachers to express their comments and suggestions with regard to the tests which had been considered as the main instruments of this study. The modification was made to reflect a reasonable domain of the content before the study was formally conducted.

Procedure

In order to do the present study, first, two intact classes were selected as the participants in this study. One of them was randomly selected as the experimental group and another one was selected as control group. The second step was to determine the level of proficiency of the participants of both groups by a General English Proficiency Test (Nelson) in order to select the homogeneous subjects. Then, the subjects in both experimental and control group were given the simple past tense test as pretest in order to determine their level of knowledge about simple past tense. In the next procedure, the subjects in experimental group were taught how to silently shadow their utterances during their conversation with teacher and how to do conversational shadowing. The emphasis was on shadowing in order to let partners know what was understood and what was problematic. After the first day's demonstration, students were told that they could continue shadowing all the time while the instructor was focusing on simple past tense during shadowing process without informing the students. In other words, they were taught implicitly by focusing on form and meaning at the same time. Familiar topics were chosen for conversation in hopes of facilitating more talk so that speakers would not have to think too long in silence.

All participants were instructed at the beginning to shadow each other. They had been given a

brief introduction to shadowing with a demonstration by the researcher and told that it had been known to facilitate the language learning of partners. They were asked to do complete shadowing. The following is an example of complete shadowing between teacher and students:

Teacher: where did you go last vacation?

Student 1: I go with my family to Tehran.

Teacher: please repeat again. You go?

Student 1: oh sorry, I went to Tehran.

Teacher: ok, everybody should repeat, Ali went to Tehran with his family last year.

Students: Ali went to Tehran with his family last year

Teacher: who was with his father at work last month?

Student 2: I am with my father at work last month.

Teacher: I was.....

Student 2: Oh, I was with my father at work last month.

Teacher: ok, everybody should repeat, I was with my father at work last month.

Students: I was with my father at work last month.

Teacher: did you go to the beach last month?

Student 3: Yes, I go to the beach last month.

Teacher: Oh, I went to the beach last month.

Student 3: I went to the beach last month.

Teacher: ok, everybody should repeat, I went to the beach last month.

Students: I went to the beach last month.

Then, after the subjects in the experimental group practiced a lot of conversations based on the above model, the same simple past tense posttest was administered after the training program came to an end in order to see the effect of conversational shadowing

intervention program. The training program took two sessions.

As far as the control group in this study is concerned, they were taught simple past tense based on the method in their book without any repetition on the part of the subjects. In other words, they were not taught by conversational shadowing model.

Finally, the subjects in control group responded again to the same simple past tense test as the posttest in order to see whether there was any significant difference between the students' level of knowledge about simple past tense before and after teaching.

After all subjects answered all the above-mentioned questionnaires and tests, their performance was compared to see whether there was any significant difference between them or not by considering the hypotheses.

Results and Discussion

In order to answer the research question raised before, data were analyzed and the following tables were elicited.

As it is clear from Table 1, paired sample 't' test revealed a significant difference from pretest to posttest session, where 't' value was 4.890 and P value was .000, which shows the effectiveness of conversational shadowing in enhancing grammatical knowledge of students about simple past tense. In addition, by looking at Table 2, the selected samples had mean scores of 14.62 in pretest, which was increased to 16.57 in posttest. By considering the results of these two tables, we can conclude that conversational shadowing can play a significant role in increasing oral performance of learners in terms of using simple past tense during their conversation.

Table 1. Mean pre- and posttest of Simple Past Tense for experimental group.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	21	14.62	3.471	.757
Posttest	21	16.57	2.561	.559

Table 2. Paired sample test for pre- and posttest simple past tense for experimental group.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Pre- and posttest	-1.952	1.830	.399	-4.890	20	.000

Table 3. Mean pre- and posttest of Simple Past Tense for control group.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	21	14.62	3.471	.757
Posttest	21	14.38	3.232	.705

Table 4. Paired sample test for pre- and posttest simple past tense for control group.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Pre- and posttest	.238	1.179	.257	.925	20	.366

As Table 3 indicates, in the pretest, the subjects had a mean score of 14.62 which increased to 14.38 in the posttest. However, paired sample 't' test did not reveal a significant difference from pre- to posttest session ($t=.925$; $P=.366$). In other words, teaching grammar based on the method which has been introduced in Interchange Book 2 could not cause students to have a better performance in answering simple past tense tests.

By considering the results of experimental and control group, we can result that, in experimental group, conversational shadowing can have an influence on the students' oral performance as far as accuracy (simple past tense, in this case) is concerned while it is not the case when the subjects in the control group were taught simple past tense as it has been demonstrated in their book.

As with this current study, Long (1983) found that interactive conversational shadowing gives rise to the types of conversational adjustments and negotiations that are thought to positively affect language acquisition. Long (1996), too, suggests the importance of classroom activities which 'stimulate negotiation for meaning . . . for they may be one of the easiest ways to facilitate a learner's focus on form without losing sight of a lesson's (or conversation's) predominant focus on meaning' (p. 454). Shadowing, because it gets listeners to reveal what they are understand, encourages just this kind of negotiation for meaning and focus on form through attention being drawn to form - meaning incongruities.

Similarly, Murphy (1990) obtained different learning advantages for the non-native speakers (NNSs) when shadowing native speakers (NSs) and when being shadowed by NSs.

Further investigations into this topic may pro-

vide evidence that not only can conversational shadowing be used for teaching different tenses in English, but that it can be used for other areas of grammar.

Conclusions

Shadowing at its simplest description is the repetition of an utterance by a listener. This, in effect, allows the listener to hear everything twice, providing more neural weight to the utterance from hearing it, producing it, and again hearing it from one's self. The involvement and awareness to do this demand more effort. Thus, it is reasonable to assume it makes a more lasting impression on the mind which may very well augment further processing through noticing and focus on form (Schmidt, 1990; Doughty & Williams, 1998), increased private speech (de Guerrero, 1994), and involuntary rehearsal in the mind (Murphey, 1990; Krashen, 1994). As Long (1996) so aptly puts it, in SLA 'The search is for those features of input and the linguistic environment that best interact with learner-internal factors to facilitate subsequent language development' (p. 454). What conversational shadowing shows us is that the learner is an integral part of that environment and can to a great extent influence the input by exteriorizing their internal constructions.

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is 'the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with peers' (Vygotsky, 1986). In conversational shadowing, the teacher has a heightened awareness of the learners' level because of more am-

ple feedback and can potentially fine-tune the input while at the same time stretch the learner's limits.

Teaching shadowing may also be an effective way to generate private speech in a foreign language. While some researchers may have assumed that private speech in a foreign language had to spring forth naturally (Lantolf & Yafiez, 2003), it could be that the exercise of silent and out loud shadowing might 'push' this internal private speech to realization much more quickly and nudge this foreign language internal dialogue into existence.

As far as our own experiences as an adult second language learner is concerned, we could not forget how we struggled with the fear of sounding like a fool if we exposed my faulty grammar and flawed accent. After we became EFL teacher, we recognized that respecting my adult students by giving them space to speak on their own terms, while at the same time encouraging them to speak out, was a complex balancing act - a skill and an art that we needed to develop. As we began to study some research on tasks for second language learners, we discovered that my real pedagogical concerns went largely unaddressed. Investigations were primarily laboratory based and cross-sectionally implemented. Particular utterance types identified in advance were quantitatively analyzed. Highly structured tasks with predetermined outcomes were largely promoted over task types designed to give learners space to speak openly and creatively. Among them, using conversational shadowing was regarded as a panacea. It appeared that these studies were addressing different questions from the ones that tugged at me most as a teacher - questions that stemmed from my understanding of classroom participants as relational beings and language as an expressive social tool.

Finally, the learner-centered nature of the dialogue was highlighted in this study. Students were not only working to comprehend the literal lexical meanings expressed by others in prior turns, but were playing a central role as initiators of ambiguous utterances and holders of the knowledge needed to clarify them.

Imitation was apparent when learners drew upon others' linguistic activity as a model for their own. In their imitative utterances, we saw evidence of learners' active efforts to gain internal control over language that was rooted in the intersubjective spaces of their task setting. The learners' own voices were shown to be a tool they actively employed to transform social activity into cognitive activity (Vy-

gotsky, 1978). One finding of this study is the extent to which imitation in the conversational shadowing task corpus was evidenced in private at lowered volume, on the classroom floor with the teacher present, and during peer group work.

Theoretical implications

Conversational shadowing with more emphasis on accuracy has been researched within the particulars of its social context. This investigative approach is grounded in a different set of beliefs about language learning than the perspective taken in the majority of task-based studies to date. This section will address the findings of this study as they contribute to the fields of second language acquisition and pedagogy. The implications of studying classroom discourse from a sociocultural perspective will be examined.

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) movement of the 1970s and 1980s emphasized the need for language forms to grow out of real communicative contexts rather than drill and memorization. Early advocates of communicative instructional approaches called for deepening learners' knowledge of how language forms and meanings are expressed in authentic communicative behaviors (Breen & Candlin, 1980; Widdowson, 1979). Since the birth of the CLT movement, mainstream research on productive second language learning activity has been based upon these tenets. Interaction has been understood to play an essential role in the types of pedagogical tasks viewed as beneficial for second language learners. However, the view of communication underlying this body of task-based studies has often been a restrictive one. Inherent in this view is the message model of communication, with successful interaction understood to involve information transfer from one individual mind to another (Donato, 1994). As a result of this view, aspects of the communicative authenticity called for in the early days of the CLT movement has been lost. By promoting the use of highly structured tasks for second language learners and studying brief interactive sequences arising from such tasks, interaction is not treated as it is in authentic conversation—a dynamic, creative, and unfolding process (Sacks *et al.*, 1974).

One major purpose of the present study was to support the optimal combination of both focus-on-form-oriented and focus-on-forms-oriented strategies in the belief that both strategies contribute to certain aspects of language acquisition. This was

based on Ellis' observation (2005) that neither of the two global instructional methods is superior to the other. The quantitative results produced evidence supporting a limited function for oral repetition as we call it conversational shadowing in the present study; it helps learners retain correct form of syntax for a short period of time. This finding indicates that conversational shadowing can be a useful part of the integrated, multiple form-focused language activities.

In addition, learners should also be given repeated chances to retrieve, use, and recycle the target forms as far as syntax or semantics is concerned. The administration of a variety of productive language activities that requires learners to repeatedly use target expressions contributes to their long-term retention. Incommunicative language activities, the target linguistic forms are parts of meaningful messages - not a set of unrelated words - and the finding that strong interest in certain discussion topics influences language use positively demonstrates one way to implement efficient output-prompting focus-on-form language activities.

Lastly, Krashen's (1994) statement that the opportunities for producing output or receiving corrective feedback are scarcer than possible exposure to comprehensible input in language learning contexts deserves special attention. On one hand, his idea that comprehensible input is the only important factor for language acquisition can no longer be strongly supported: As many ESL scholars (Long, 1996; Pica, 1987; Schmidt, 1990; Swain, 1985, 1991; Swain & Lapkin, 1995) have confirmed, it is imperative to provide learners with opportunities to produce output, so that they can better notice the gaps between their interlanguage and the target form and reformulate their output. The present study also indicated that creating some opportunities for learners to use exemplars are an indispensable part of acquiring the target forms, especially within the area of grammar. On the other hand, Krashen's observation resonates with this study in a unique, indirect way. He stated that comprehensible input is the only linguistic data that can be provided to learners abundantly in an ESL environment. In ESL contexts, however, opportunities for producing spoken or written comprehensible output are more plentiful than in EFL contexts. In EFL contexts such as Iranian classrooms, opportunities to receive a substantial amount of comprehensible input and then produce comprehensible output are extremely limited because of the continuing predominance of the

Grammar-Translation Method. Therefore, it is the EFL teacher's responsibility to make a special effort to help their students produce reasonably large amounts of output, given that interactive speaking and writing activities in which students use and recycle target phrases with a focus on accuracy creatively can help them acquire the target forms and structures somewhat naturally.

Pedagogical Implications

The first pedagogical implication concerns the limited functions of conversational shadowing as a kind of oral repetition. The instructional policy of requiring students to make use of useful and correct grammatical structures in the task-based and oral-repetition activities appears useful. Nonetheless, focus-on-form instruction involving conversational shadowing must be implemented cautiously. The teachers themselves should be instructed in advance in order to be able to practice conversational shadowing carefully in their EFL classrooms. Consequently, for students without any strong intrinsic motivation or self-regulation, oral repetition or conversational shadowing of linguistic exemplars should be used in the service of more important and interesting communicative activities.

Finally, as above mentioned, one practical plan for teaching grammatical structures is to present the target forms repeatedly during the lesson and at regular intervals throughout the semester. Language enhancement through oral repetition is useful when administered with moderate intensity in each class session. The teacher's responsibility is to design a course that continually exposes learners to target grammatical structures and that encourages them to retrieve, use, and recycle those structures in different language activities and in different class sessions until they internalize the target forms.

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