Transactional and Interactional Strategies on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Spoken Language Performance

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Abstract
This study investigated the effect of transactional and interactional strategies on developing Iranian intermediate EFL learners' spoken language performance. First of all, to homogenize the participants, the researcher administered IELTS speaking tests to 50 participants as the pre-test in order to select the main sample of the study which were 30 students. That is, those participants whose scores fell between one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean were selected and randomly divided into two groups of 15 at intermediate level of proficiency. These groups were taught through transactional and interactional strategies using *Speak Now* books. After the treatment period and as the post-test, some IELTS speaking tests, which covered all the materials, were administered to these groups. After collecting the data, to test the research hypothesis and to answer the research questions, the researchers used t-test to investigate the effects of interactional and transactional strategies on spoken language performance of Iranian EFL learners. The findings showed that although the speaking performance of the learners improved, the differences among the groups were not statistically significant.

Key words: Transactional, Interactional, EFL learners, Spoken language performance

Introduction

Language is a means of thinking and transferring culture from one generation to another as well as from one nation to another. It is also a means of communication among people. Over the last three decades, English has become the most important foreign language in the world. At present, English is the language for international communication, science, commerce, advertising, diplomacy, and transmitting advanced technology. It has also become a "lingua franca" among speakers of languages that are not mutually intelligible (Willis, 1996 & Coury & Carlos, 2001). Furthermore, in the age of globalism we live nowadays; the interdependence of nations and countries creates a need for a global language and no language qualifies for this better than English (Abousenna, 1995, P .15).

Speaking as one of the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) is the means through which learners can communicate with others to achieve certain goals or to express their opinions, intentions, hopes and viewpoints. In addition, in almost any setting, speaking is the most frequently used language skill. As Rivers (1981) argues, speaking is used twice as much as reading and writing in our communication.

Developing speaking skills is of vital importance in EFL programs. Nunan (1999), Burkart and Sheppard (2004) argue that success in learning a language is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the (target) language. Therefore, speaking is probably a priority for most learners of English (Florez, 1999).The ability to speak well is a very complicated task for EFL learners because they have to be master of speaking skills. Furthermore, if the right speaking activities are taught in the classroom, speaking can raise learners' general motivation and make the English language classroom a fun and dynamic place to be (Nunan, 1999 & Celce-Murcia , 2001). In addition, speaking can support other language skills. Recent research has considered oral interaction as an important factor in the shaping of the learner's developing language (Gass & Varionis, 1994). For instance, it was proved that learning speaking can help the development of reading competence (Hilferty, 2005)**,** the development of writing **(**Trachsel & Severino, 2004) as well as the development of listening skills (Regina, 1997).

Taking into account the importance of developing EFL speaking skills, it is vital to determine the speaking skills FL learners have to acquire in order to converse with native language speakers. According to Richards (1990), "the mastery of speaking skills in English is a priority for many second or foreign language learners"(p.1). There are two main strategies, interactional and transactional, which help the learners to improve and develop their speaking skills and communicate effectively with other learners or even native speakers. Brown and Yule (1983) described that interactional speech refers to conversation and it has a social function. The focus is more on the speakers and how they wish to present themselves to each other and transactional speech pays attention to what is said or done. The main focus is on making oneself understood. Interactional language is language for maintaining social relationship and transactional language is message-oriented.

The present study sheds light on some issues regarding the effect of speaking strategies, transactional and interactional, on improving and developing students' speaking skills. The current study is, hence, an attempt to overcome the shortcomings in teaching the speaking strategies to students at intermediate and advanced level of proficiency. Besides, it emphasizes the importance of providing EFL students with activities and opportunities to raise their awareness of speaking strategies and speaking skills. The current study, also, may suggest some strategies to help the students understand how to plan for speaking, monitor their speaking performance, perform publicly in front of their peers and analyze spoken discourse characteristics.

Review of literature

Speaking is a highly challenging essential skill for most learners to acquire. Learners need to speak to carry out the most basic social transactions. They also need to develop their speaking skills to fulfill more sophisticated needs. So teaching speaking skill has become popular in the area of second language education in recent years. Many definitions about speaking have been proposed by language experts. According to Johnson and Morrow (1981, p.70), speaking which is popular with the term 'oral communication', is an activity involving two or more people in which hearers and speakers have to react to what they hear and make their contributions at a high-level speed. In this definition, the essential components mentioned to exist in speaking are the speakers, the hearers, the message and the response. Both the speakers and the hearers should agree on the message and/or meaning being talked through acceptable language.

Reviewing previous research related to defining speaking, the researchers noticed that two main approaches have been adopted to define speaking, the bottom-up and the top down approach. Explaining the bottom up view, Bygate (1987, pp. 5-6) points out that traditionally the focus of speaking was on motor perceptive skills. Within this context, speaking is defined as the production of auditory signals designed to produce differential verbal responses in a listener. It is considered as combining sounds in a systematic way, according to language specific principles, to form meaningful utterances. This approach is adopted by audio-lingualism. Eventually, in terms of teaching speaking, the bottom-up approach suggests that we should start with teaching the smallest units- sounds and move through mastery of words and sentences to discourse (Cornbleet & Carter, 2001, p.18).

Actually, the problem with this approach is that it overlooks the interactive and social aspect of speaking, restricting it only to its psychomotor sense. Moreover, it is hard to ensure a satisfactory transition from supposed learning in the classroom to real life use of the skill. Alternatively, Bygate (1998) advocates adopting a definition of speaking based on interactional skills which involve making decision about communication. This is considered a top- down view of speaking. Adopting this view, Eckard and Kearny (1981), Florez (1999) and Howarth (2001) define speaking as a two–way process involving a true communication of ideas, information or feelings. This top-down view considers the spoken texts the product of cooperation between two or more interactants in shared time, and a shared physical context. Thus, proponents of this view suggest that, rather than teaching learners to make well-formed sentences and then -putting these to use in discourse we should encourage learners to take part in spoken discourse from the beginning and then they will acquire the smaller units (Nunan, 1989, p.32).

Attempting to elaborate more on the interactive nature of speaking**,** Burns and Joyce (1997) and Luoma (2004, p. 2) define speaking as an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information. Its form and meaning are dependent on the context in which it occurs, including the participants themselves, the physical environment, and the purposes for speaking. It is often spontaneous, open-ended, and evolving. However, speech is not always unpredictable. Language functions (or patterns) that tend to recur in certain discourse situations can be identified.

It is this latter approach that is adopted in the current study; speaking is defined as the learner's ability to express himself/herself orally, coherently, fluently and appropriately in a given meaningful context. From a communicative, pragmatic view of the language classroom, speaking and listening skills are closely intertwined. The interaction between these two modes of performance applies especially strongly to conversation. In a classroom, students will respond to the teacher after listening to some information (Brown, 2001, p. 267). In addition, (Chaney,1998, as cited in Kayi, 2006) adds that speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols in a variety of contexts. Speaking is much more complex. It involves both a command of certain skills and several different types of knowledge.

Canale and Swain(1980, as cited in Richards& Renandya ,2002, pp. 206-207) suggest that in order to be able to communicate meaningfully, speakers need to know the knowledge of communicative competence consisting of grammatical, discourse, strategic, and sociolinguistic competence.

Grammatical competence is an umbrella concept including grammar (morphology, syntax), vocabulary, and mechanics. With regards to speaking, the term mechanics refers to basic sounds of letters and syllables, pronunciation of words, intonation, and stress. Grammatical competence enables speakers to use and understand English-language structures contributing to students' fluency. Discourse competence is concerned with speakers' relationships, formal or informal occasion, the rules of cohesion and coherence etc. Discourse competence contributes in turn taking in conversation (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992, as cited in Richards & Renandya, 2002, p.207).

Brown (1994, in Richards& Renandya,2002, p.207) states that sociolinguistic competence means knowing what is expected socially and culturally by users of target language. Learners must acquire the rules and norms governing the appropriate timing and realization of speech acts. Understanding the sociolinguistic side of language helps learners to know what comments are appropriate, how to ask questions during interaction, and how to respond nonverbally according to the purpose of the talk.

In addition, Brown (2004, p.102) also asserts that strategic competence is the way learners manipulate language in order to meet the communicative goals. It is perhaps the most important communicative competence element of all. This argument is highlighted by Berns (1990, in Richards& Renandya,2002, p.208) who suggests that strategic competence is the ability to compensate for imperfect knowledge of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse rules. With reference to speaking, strategic competence refers to the ability to know when and how to take the flow, how to keep the conversation going on, how to terminate the conversation, and how to clear up communication breakdown as well as comprehension problems.

2.1. Aspects of speaking

Eventually, aspects of the speaking skill need to be closely scrutinized and put into consideration. These aspects pose some challenges and identify some guidelines for understanding this skill and hence design instructional activities to prepare learners to communicate effectively in real life situations.

a. Speaking is face to face:

Most conversations take place face to face which allows speakers to get immediate feedback, i.e. "Do listeners understand? Are they in agreement? Do they sympathize" (Cornbleet &Carter, 2001, p.16). Thus communication through speaking has many assets, such as facial expressions, gestures and even body movements. Speaking also occurs, most of the time, in situations where participants or interlocutors are present. Such factors facilitate communication (Widdowson & Burns, 1998).

b. Speaking is interactive

Whether we are speaking face-to -face or over the telephone, to one person or a small group, the wheels of conversation usually turn smoothly, with participants offering contributions at appropriate moments, with no undue gaps or everyone talking over each other (Bygate, 1998, p. 30; Cornbleet & Carter, 2001, p. 27).

Turn taking, a main feature in interaction, is a subconscious part of normal conversation. Turn takings are handled and signaled differently across different cultures, thus causing possible

communication difficulties in conversation between people of different cultures and languages (Mc Donough & Mackey, 2000, p. 84).

c. Speaking happens in real time

During conversations, responses are unplanned and spontaneous and the speakers think on their feet, producing language which reflects this (Foster et al., 2000, p.368).

These time constraints affect the speaker's ability to plan, to organize the message, and to control the language being used. Speakers often start to say something and change their mind midway, which is termed a false start. The speaker's sentences also cannot be as long or as complex as in writing. Similarly, speakers occasionally forget things they intended to say; or they may even forget what they have already said, and so they repeat themselves (Miller, 2001, p.27).

This implies that the production of speech in real time not only imposes pressures, but also allows freedoms in terms of compensating for these difficulties**.** The use of formulaic expressions, hesitation devices, self-correction, rephrasing and repetition can help speakers become more fluent and cope with real time demands (Bygate, 1987, Foster et al., 2000 & Hughes, 2002). Actually, exposing students to these spoken discourse features facilitates their oral production and helps them compensate for the problems they encounter. It also helps them sound normal in their use of the foreign language.

2.2. Aspects of speaking skills

Fluency is natural language use occurring when a speaker engages in meaningful interaction and maintains comprehensible and ongoing communication despite limitations in his or her communicative competence.

Accuracy means that the speakers are required to use the correct vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Fluency is developed by creating classroom activities in which students must negotiate meaning, use communication strategies, correct misunderstandings, and work to avoid communication breakdowns (Richards, 2006, p.14).

In addition, Nunan (1999) states that fluency means that the speakers are required to be able to keep going when speaking spontaneously. However, it does not mean that the speakers speak so fast because sometimes pausing is important. That pause is an aspect of fluency which may be long but not frequent. Moreover, when speaking fluently, speakers should be able to get the message across with whatever resources and abilities they have got and regardless of any grammatical and other mistakes.

Nunan (1999) also asserts that accuracy means that the speakers are required to use the correct vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. It uses correct example of language use.

The differences between activities that focus on fluency and those that focus on accuracy can be summarized as follows:

1. Activities focusing on fluency

a) Reflect natural use of language

b) Focus on achieving communication

c) Require meaningful use of language

d) Require the use of communication strategies
e) Produce language that may not be predictable
f) Seek to link language use to context
2. Activities focusing on accuracy
a) Reflect classroom use of language
b) Focus on the formation of correct examples of language
c) Practice language out of context
d) Practice small samples of language
e) Do not require meaningful communication
f) Control choice of language (Richards, 2006, pp.13-14).

M'mbone, Kemboi and Andiema (2008-2011) carried out a research in Trans Nzoia West District of Kenya in order to investigate on interactive teaching methods in developing oral communicative competence in learners of English. The study adopted a descriptive research design under the qualitative approach. The data revealed that interactive teaching methods are crucial in the development of oral communication skills in learners. These methods provide opportunities for language use, accuracy, proficiency and immediate feedback.

Besides considering the importance of fluency and accuracy in speaking, teachers should also pay attention to an essential of language performance. Richards and Renandya (2002, p. 204) say that learning to speak a foreign language is more than knowing its grammatical and semantic rules. Learners must also acquire the knowledge of how native speakers use the language in the context of structured interpersonal exchange in which many factors interact.

Harmer (2001, pp. 24-25) suggests a number of variables which govern learners' choice in order to meet the appropriacy during the conversation such as setting, participants, gender, channel and topic. Setting is related to the place where the conversations take place. People speak differently at office and night clubs. Participants refer to people involved in an exchange. The language forms students use will be different when they speak with their friends and teachers. Gender represents how women and men use language in conversations. Women have frequently use more concessive language than men for example, and crucially often talk less than men in mix-sex conversations. Channel represents how people communicate whether they will use spoken or written grammar. Speaking face to face and giving speech at the hall will generate different uses of language. Finally, the topic affects the grammatical and lexical choices (Harmer, 2001, pp. 24-25).

Furthermore, Harmer (2001, pp. 269-270) also proposes four language features that are necessary for spoken production. They are connected speech, expressive devices, lexis and grammar, and negotiation meaning.

The first feature is the use of connected speech. Effective speakers of English need to be able not only to produce the individual phoneme of English but also to use fluent connected speech. In connected speech, sounds are modified (assimilation), omitted (elision), added (linking verb), or weakened (through contractions and stress patterning). Due to the complexity of the connected speech, therefore, English teachers should involve the students in activities which are designed to improve their connected speech.

The second feature is the use of expressive devices. Some native speakers of English use expressive devices in speaking through some ways, such as changing the pitch and stress of particular parts of utterances, varying volume and speed, and using facial expressions. The use of these devices can contribute to the ability to convey meanings. Therefore, in order to be fully effective communicators, students should be able to employ those devices. The third feature is the use of lexis and grammar. The use of common lexical and grammatical features can be found in spontaneous speech when performing certain language functions. The last feature is the use of negotiation. The negotiation is used to seek for clarification. The speakers need to ask for clarification when they are listening to someone else especially when they know that their talks are not being understood. Students choose language forms provided to ask for clarification.

2.3. Purpose of speaking

It was argued that the purpose of speaking can be either transactional or interactional. Apparently, there are some differences between the spoken language used in both transactional and interactional discourse.

In transactional discourse**,** language is used primarily for communicating information. Language serving this purpose is 'message' oriented rather than 'listener' oriented (Nunan, 1989, p. 27). Clearly, in this type of interaction, accurate and coherent communication of the message is important, as well as confirmation that the message has been understood. Examples of language being used primarily for a transactional purpose are: news broadcasts, descriptions, narrations and instructions (Richards, 1990, pp. 54- 55). Speaking turns serving this purpose tend to be long and involve some prior organization of content and use of linguistic devices to signal either the organization or type of information that will be given (Basturkmen, 2002, p.26).

On the other hand, some conversations are interactional with the purpose of establishing or maintaining a relationship. This latter kind is sometimes called the interpersonal use of language. It plays an important social role in oiling the wheels of social intercourse (Yule, 1989, p.169). Examples of interactional uses of language are greetings, small talks, and compliments.

Apparently, the language used in the interactional mode is listener oriented. Speakers' talk in this type tends to be limited to quite short turns (Dornyei & Thurrell, 1994, p.43 & Richards, 1990, pp. 54-55).

However, in spite of the distinctions between the two types, in most circumstances, interactional language is combined with transactional language. This helps to ease the transactional tasks to be done by keeping good social relations with others. In, other words, we can say that speakers do one thing by doing another (Brazil, 1995, p.29). So both purposes can be viewed as two dimensions of spoken interaction.

Analyzing speaking purposes more precisely, Kingen (2000, p.218) combines both the transactional and interpersonal purposes of speaking into an extensive list of twelve categories as follows:

1. Personal : expressing personal feelings, opinions, beliefs and ideas.

2. Descriptive: describing someone or something, real or imagined.

3. Narrative: creating and telling stories or chronologically sequenced events.
4. Instructive: giving instructions or providing directions designed to produce an outcome.
5. Questioning: asking questions to obtain information.
6. Comparative: comparing two or more objects, people, ideas, or opinions to make judgments about them.
7. Imaginative: expressing mental images of people, places, events, and objects.
8. Predictive: predicting possible future events.
9. Interpretative: exploring meanings, creating hypothetical deductions, and considering inferences.
10. Persuasive: changing others' opinions, attitudes, or points of view, or influencing the behavior of others in some way.
11. Explanatory: explaining, clarifying, and supporting ideas and opinions.
12. Informative: sharing information with others
This list correspond closely to the language functions explained by Halliday (1975).

2.4. Functions of speaking

Numerous attempts have been made to classify the functions of speaking in human interaction. Richards (2008, pp. 21-28) distinguishes three functions of speaking which are different in terms of the form, function, and teaching approaches. The functions of speaking are talk as interaction, talk as transaction, and talk as performance.

2.4.1. Talk as interaction

Talk as interaction refers to conversation and describes interaction that serves a primarily social function. Brown (2004, p.142) uses a different term to refer to talk as interaction. He uses the term of interpersonal exchange. Richards also promotes some skills involved in using talk as interaction. They are opening and closing conversations, choosing topics, making a small talk, joking, recounting personal incidents and experiences, turn taking, using adjacency pairs, interrupting, reacting to others, and using an appropriate style of speaking (Richards, 2008, p.23). These ideas are supported by Brown (2004, p.142) saying that interpersonal exchanges can become pragmatically complex with the need to speak in a casual register and use colloquial language, ellipsis, slang, humor, and other sociolinguistic conventions. Talking with some friends in a party and chatting with companions during the coffee break are the examples of talk as interaction.

2.4.2. Talk as transaction

Talk as a transaction refers to situations where the focus is on what is said or done. The message and making oneself understood is the central focus rather than the participants and how they interact socially with each other are not considered (Richards, 2008, p.24). Meanwhile, to refer to the same thing, Brown (2004, p. 142) uses another term, transactional language. He promotes that the purpose of transactional language is to exchange specific information.

Burns (1998) distinguishes between two different types of talk as transaction. The first type involves situations where the focus is on giving and receiving information and where the participants focus primarily on what is said or achieved (e.g., asking someone for directions). Accuracy may not be a priority, as long as information is successfully communicated or understood. The second type is transactions that focus on obtaining goods or services, such as checking into a hotel or ordering food in a restaurant.

2.5. Teaching talk as interaction

Talk as interaction is perhaps the most difficult skill to teach since interactional talk is a very complex and subtle phenomenon that takes place under the control of unspoken rules. These are best taught by providing examples embedded in naturalistic dialogs that model features such as opening and closing conversations, making small talk, recounting personal incidents and experiences, and reacting to what others say. One rule for making small talk is to initiate interactions with a comment concerning something in the immediate vicinity or that both participants have knowledge of. The comment should elicit agreement, since agreement is face-preserving and non-threatening. Hence, safe topics, such as the weather, traffic, and so on, must be chosen. (Richards, 2008, p.29).

Later, students can be given situations in which small talk might be appropriate (e.g., meeting someone at a movie, running into a friend in the cafeteria, or waiting at a bus stop). They can then be asked to think of small talk topic comments and responses.

Giving feedback (or back channeling) is another important aspect of talk as interaction. It involves responding to a conversational partner with expressions that indicate interest and a wish for the speaker to continue, such as "That's interesting," "yeah," "really," and so on. To practice using back channeling in this way, students can examine dialogs from which feedback expressions have been omitted. They can consider suitable ways of providing them and then practice using them.

Another technique to practice the use of conversation starters and narratives about personal experiences involves giving conversation starters that students respond to by asking one or two follow-up questions. For example: "I didn't sleep very well last night." "Look what I bought on Sunday. How do you like it?" "Did that thunderstorm last night wake you?" Two simple activities that are used to practice topic management are "in the hot seat" and "question time." In the first activity, a student sits on a chair in front of the class and makes a statement about something he or she did recently (e.g., "I saw a good movie on Sunday"). The other members of the class ask three or more questions about the topic, which the student has to answer quickly. The "question time" activity, introduces students to a lesson on a new theme. Up to 15 questions can be prepared related to the theme and put them on a handout. For example, if the next unit covers sports, the students' handout would include questions such as "What sports do you play?" "How often do you play sports?" "What sports are popular in your country?" "What sport have you never tried?" I first ask students around the class to answer the questions quickly. Then students practice asking and answering the questions in pairs. (Richards, 2008, p.30).

2.6. Teaching talk as transaction

Talk as transaction is more easily planned since current communicative materials are a rich resource of group activities, information-gap activities, and role plays that can provide a source for practicing how to use talk for sharing and obtaining information, as well as for carrying out real-world transactions. These activities include ranking, values clarification, brainstorming, and simulations (Richards, 2008, p.31).

Group discussion activities can be initiated by having students work in groups to prepare a short list of controversial statements for others to think about. Groups exchange statements and discuss them, for example: "Schools should do away with exams." "Vegetarianism is the only

healthy lifestyle." "The Olympic games are a waste of money." Role-play activities are another familiar technique for practicing real-world transactions and typically involve the following steps:

- Preparing: Reviewing vocabulary, real-world knowledge related to the content, and context of the role play (e.g., returning a faulty item to a store).
- Modeling and eliciting: Demonstrating the stages that are typically involved in the transaction, eliciting suggestions for how each stage can be carried out, and teaching the functional language needed for each stage.
- Practicing and reviewing: Assigning students roles and practicing a role play using cue cards or realia to provide language and other support.

An issue that arises in practicing talk as transaction using different kinds of communicative tasks is the level of linguistic accuracy that students achieve when carrying out these tasks. One assumption is that form will largely look after itself with incidental support from the teacher. Grammar has a mediating role, rather than serving as an end in itself (Thornbury,1998, p.112). "The teacher and the learner have a remarkable degree of flexibility, for they are presented with a set of general learning objectives and problem-solving tasks" (Kumaravadivelu,1991, p.99). As students carry out communicative tasks, the assumption is that they engage in the process of negotiation of meaning, employing strategies such as comprehension checks, confirmation checks, and clarification requests. These are believed to lead to a gradual modification of learners' language output, which over time takes on more and more target-like forms.

Richards (2008, pp. 32-33) continues to explain several methods that can be used to address the issue of language accuracy when students are practicing transactional use of language as quoted below:

1. By pre-teaching certain linguistic forms that can be used while completing a task.
2. By reducing the complexity of the task (e.g., by familiarizing students with the demands of the activity by showing them a similar activity on video or as a dialog).
3. By giving adequate time to plan the task.
4. By repeated performance of the task.

Zareie, Gorjian, and Pazhakh (2014) conducted a study to compare the effectiveness of interactional and transactional speaking strategies by using the technique which comes from the Audio Lingual Method (ALM) and Total Physical Response (TPR) method on teaching speaking skills to Iranian English as foreign language (EFL) learners in senior high school. In doing the research, 60 female learners were selected in a senior high school in Gachsaran, Iran. Results showed that transactional group outperformed both interactional and control. The study suggests that the use of transactional activities in speaking skill could be more beneficial activities since it is the use of contextual speech in a meaningful way.

Research question

Is there a significant difference in speaking performance of Iranian intermediate EFL learners who were taught transactional and interactional strategies?

Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 30 EFL students at intermediate level of proficiency. All of the participants were native speakers of Persian studying English in Iranmehr language Institute in Karaj, Iran. They ranged from 20 to 30 in terms of age. Randomly, they were divided into two groups. Each group contained 15 participants who received treatment through interactional and transactional strategies in a classroom setting.

3.2. Instruments and materials

In the present study, in order to homogenize the participants in terms of their level of proficiency the researcher used an *IELTS* speaking test. It contained three parts: in part one, the candidates answered questions about themselves or their family. In part two, the candidates spoke about a topic. In part three, the candidates had a discussion about the topic introduced with a certified examiner. The discussion was interactive and as close to a real- life situation as a test can get. The Speaking test is the same for both *IELTS* academic and *IELTS* general training tests. The course book used to present interactional and transactional speaking strategies and activities was *" Speak Now"* by Jack C. Richards(2012). The book was published by Oxford University Press. *Speak now* is a four- level speaking course which develops students' communication skills both in and out of the classroom. Every activity in *Speak Now* includes a speaking component. Video activities were integrated every four lessons, providing real-life language models for students.

Indeed, this book was chosen as a course book because it contained lots of activities of appropriate difficulty level to roughly match the learners' ability. That is, it was neither too difficult nor too easy. For the purpose of this study, all the units were taught through interactional and transactional speaking strategies.

3.3. Procedure

In order to achieve the aim of the study, the following procedures were followed. First of all, to homogenize the participants, the researchers administered an IELTS speaking test as the pre-test to 50 participants in order to select 30 participants. Each oral interview was recorded by mp3 player and then was scored according to *IELTS* speaking band descriptors. The recordings were evaluated by two raters. Those participants whose scores fell between one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean were selected and randomly divided into two groups of 15 at advanced level of proficiency.

After selecting and dividing the participants, the instruction phase started. Two classes were required to be treated through interactional speaking strategies by using *Speak Now* books, while the others learn the same lessons through transactional speaking strategies. The treatment lasted 20 sessions, 90 minutes a session, three times a week. During the treatment in the experimental groups, in each session, the researcher devoted the same time to teach the lessons, practicing speaking through interactional and transactional strategies. After the treatment period, a post-test of speaking achievement which covered all the materials were administered to these groups. Finally, the results of the tests were compared to each other to find out which one works better in teaching speaking skills.

3.4. Data analysis

After all the tests were administered and the data were collected, to answer the research questions, the researchers used a *t-test* to investigate the effects of interactional and transactional strategies on spoken language performance of Iranian EFL learners at intermediate level of proficiency.

Results and discussion

The research question sought to investigate whether or not there is a significant difference in spoken language performance of Iranian intermediate EFL learners who were taught transactional and interactional strategies. To do so, an independent *t- test* was used. To this end, a t-test was used. *Table 1* contains the descriptive statistics:

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for post- test in intermediate groups

factor	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
transactional	15	4.0667	.70373	.18170
interactional	15	3.7333	.59362	.15327

As it is shown in *Table 1*, we can observed that the higher mean on the IELTS speaking test belongs to the transactional group rather than the interactional group .To see whether or not the differences among the groups are statistically significant, an independent *t-test* was used. The obtained results are presented in *Table 2*.

Table 2. Independent samples test for post- test in intermediate groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower Upper

Equal variances assumed	.004	.952	1.402	28	.172	.33333	.23771	-.15360	.82027
Equal variances not assumed			1.402	27.27	.172	.33333	.23771	-.15423	.82089

The results of *Table 2* show that there is no significant difference (t(28)= 1.402, p=.17) in spoken language performance of Iranian intermediate EFL learners who were taught transactional and interactional strategies. This means that the learners at intermediate level of proficiency could learn equally using both interactional and transactional strategies and they could also improve their knowledge of speaking skills using either interactional strategies or transactional.

Discussion

The research question will be brought up again here and based on the results obtained, the main issues will be discussed. The goal of this research was to study if there is a significant difference in spoken language performance of Iranian intermediate EFL learners who were taught transactional and interactional strategies. A pre-test was administered to the participants at the beginning of the treatment for the purpose of homogenization of the groups and indicating their proficiency levels and a post-test was administered to the participants after they finished the treatment to check their speaking competence. This test was an *IELTS* speaking test. A *t-test* was run to indicate the differences between these two groups. The experimental results revealed that the differences among the two intermediate groups were not statistically significant but students' progress was totally observable and both groups showed improvements in their speaking performance in comparison with their status at the beginning of the study but there was no significant difference in spoken language performance of Iranian intermediate EFL learners who were taught through transactional and interactional strategies. It is to be mentioned that English teachers and instructors can use both interactional and transactional strategies in order to help and encourage their students at intermediate level of proficiency to learn better and provide them with opportunities to assert themselves.

The findings may seem controversial because it is not consistent with Zareie, Gorjan and Pazhakhet (2014) who pointed out that transactional group outperformed the control group and interactional group on the post-test. They also believed that transactional strategy training had a crucial impact on promoting speaking ability of Iranian EFL learners. In transactional and interactional group, students were able to communicate information efficiently as Brown and Yule suggested in 1983. These techniques helped the learners to use evidence skillfully and impartially in their interactions with their classmates during the treatment. These techniques motivated the learners to organize their thoughts and to articulate them concisely and coherently in their oral productions.

In fact, Transactional and interactional strategies helped the learners consider all the characteristics of a good conversation when they were talking in the classroom. The students were totally attentive to what other students said and to what themselves wanted to say in the interactions. We must use teaching techniques and speaking strategies to help students internalize the newly taught materials in better ways. And with regard to the findings of the present study, we

must pay attention that the integration of both interactional and transactional speaking strategies can be effective. In addition to these techniques and strategies that teachers use, there should be extra instruction for the students to become independent learners. Finally, one should consider that there are many factors to be taken into account in the success or failure of these strategies. Therefore, there may be several factors which affect the results of the study.

Conclusion

The present study was an attempt to answer the question of whether or not there is significant difference in spoken language performance of Iranian EFL learners who were taught transactional and interactional strategies at intermediate level of proficiency. The findings showed that although the speaking performance of the learners improved, the differences among the four groups were not statistically significant.

The same results were observed on post- test of intermediate learners. So, it can be concluded that, these speaking strategies have the same effect on improving speaking performance of Iranian EFL learners. So, we can claim that teachers and learners can benefit from both interactional and transactional strategies.

Given that participants of the present study were successful in using these strategies, one might conclude that it is best for the teachers to adopt and use these strategies in the classrooms. They need to integrate different techniques according to their learners' needs and wants. It should be taken into account that in foreign language learning contexts (FLL) such as Iran where learners do not have sufficient amount of contact with the native speakers of a target language, both transactional and interactional strategies seem to be adequate and appropriate. These strategies give the instructors the opportunity to include as much information as they feel necessary for the whole class and minimize the anxiety of students. Considering instructors' role in the class, it should be mentioned that, their roles should be as facilitators. They should study the participants all the time and direct them to a correct path, rather than getting a group to the end and leaving the rest alone to find their way out.

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