



## The Effect of TV Commercials on Improving Iranian EFL Learners' L2 Speaking Ability

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### Abstract

Speaking is at the center of second language learning but has been rather overlooked in teaching and testing for some reasons. There is no doubt that authentic materials are of significant role in the, overall process of language learning. Thus, the present study aimed at finding the effect of TV commercials on Iranian EFL learners' speaking. Sixty female learners at intermediate level participated in this quasi-experimental study which lasted one academic term. A language PET test was administered before the program for assuring the proficiency level of the participants. The results of the study provided strong supports for the positive effect of TV commercials. The effect can be justified by the authenticity of ads, since ads almost always are designed for native speakers in real contexts of use.

**Keywords:** TV commercials, traditional instruction, speaking

### INTRODUCTION

Speaking is the productive skill in the oral form. Just like the other skills, it is more complex than it seems at first and entails more than just pronouncing words. Everyone might be involved in speaking English in different situations: chatting with friends, giving directions in the street, talking to a tourist and so on. To speak efficiently in another language we need various tools.

Conversation is an intricate activity, even in our first language, and might result in difficulties both for speaker or listener:

1. As a speaker you may not remember the exact word or expression for what you want to say. In this case, you need to adopt one of a set of communication strategies, which involve finding another way of expressing the desired meaning in a different form.

2. When you are listening, you may not understand - or hear - the speaker, so you have to signal that there is a problem, so that the speaker and you can negotiate a way of resolving it between you. We refer to this as conversational repair (Lynch & Anderson, 2012, p. 2).

Inspiring the notion of language proficiency are the “new national foreign language standards” systematized around five objective areas: communication, culture, connections, comparisons, and communities (Phillips, 1998). Lots of people suppose that informal everyday conversation is casual. Furthermore, unfortunately, most ELT course books do not cope with speaking by splitting it into micro- skills. Instead, they often have the vague aim of “promoting learner's fluency” (Sayer, 2005). On the other hand, a primary issue to appreciate the nature of speaking is to analyze it based on competencies, and underlying abilities that typify the speaking proficiency. It is commonly supposed that such underlying abilities have a few sorts of structures, made up of different constituents, with some sort of interaction and interrelationship between them. It is also deemed that diverse performances draw on these fundamental abilities in different but comprehensible manners (Bachman, 1990 & Widdowson, 1998). These issues on one hand and issues relating to authenticity on the other hand – a wide range of different factors- cause difficulties for language users to speak fruitfully.

It is a widespread statement that materials generally play a critical role in language learning and teaching, this justifies the fact that arguments about the positions of materials emerge in almost all books on course design (Nunan, 1991). Authentic materials are utilized more and more in language teaching in current decades in terms of speaking process. Harmer (2001) reveals that authentic materials are real texts exercised by native speakers, and have been intended for the speaker of the language. Another grammarian, Celce-Murcia (1996), advocates that the use of authentic materials has been revealed to cause better interest among students to learn and understand grammar evaluated to exclusively relying on books, and classified authentic materials as those materials are not employed for the objectives of language learning. Herron and Seay (1991) maintain that exposure to authentic materials recovers affectivity of teaching of the language and results in better presentation in English language use. Herron and Seay (1991) clarify that using these materials will engage students in real life. They are to communicate by means of a variety of types of authentic materials in the language classroom such as films, songs, newspapers. Moody (1984) emphasizes the preparation in the accomplishment of speaking may be done in a language classroom by teachers who are of a wide range of information in using authentic materials. Ur (1984) discusses that exposure to authentic speech influences second language students to learn in best that which has been arranged, taking to advance students’ ability in speaking. The use of videos, songs and newspapers and films will improve learners’ ability in the target language.

## TV Commercials

Watching TV is the most widespread activity. It is the medium of which people spend the most of their attentive time. Numerous studies report regular daily television

viewing time five to seven hours. Generally speaking advertising can be defined as any form of communication to current or potential clients in which a registrant is promoting her/his business. The authors added to that definition as: mediated communication "is "communication which is conveyed to an audience through print, electronics, or any method other than person-to-person contact" (Richards & Curran, 2002, p. 74). Applying TV commercials as supply for foreign language teaching has been endorsed since the mid-seventies (e.g. Berwald, 1976). TV commercials have many benefits as instructional resource (Hatakeyama, 2009).

As cited in Hatakeyama & Yasuhara 2012 TV commercials are (1) short (Davis, 1997; Etienne & Vanbaelen, 2006; Martínez-Gibson, 1998; Smith & Rawley, 1997) and can be shown multiple times in class<sup>1</sup> even when only limited amount of time can be spent, which was the case for the elementary course in this study; (2) abundant with cultural elements (Davis, 1997; McGee & Fujita, 2000; Smith & Rawley, 1997; Tuzi, Mori, & Young, 2008); (3) rich in contextual cues (Aoki, Kurokawa, & Watanabe, 2006; Davis, 1997; Wildner-Bassett, 1990) which helps learners with comprehension and retention; (4) authentic (Davis, 1997; Lawrence, 1987; Martinez-Gibson, 1998; Smith & Rawley, 1997); (5) current (Lawrence, 1987; Muramatsu, 1997) reflecting the changes in the broader society; (6) diverse in situations with wide range of characters (Aoki, et al., 2006; Smith & Rawley, 1997); (7) entertaining and intriguing (Berwald, 1976); (8) may become a catalyst for learners' self-expression (Sakakibara, 2006) such as description, story-telling, or even supporting an opinion thereby achieving the upward spiral<sup>2</sup> use of content to move towards higher proficiency level functions; (9) often use grammar items compatible with those introduced in the beginning Japanese course (Yonezawa, 1999). Furthermore, (10) TV commercials can potentially be used as a practice in critical pedagogy (Fischer, 2000; McGee & Fujita, 2000; Ohara, Saft, & Crookes, 2001) and according to Kadokura, 2003; Muramatsu, 1997; Nakagawa, Fukazawa, & Hamada, 2003 are media literacy.

TV commercial researchers have been advocating commercials as language learning means for years; on the other hand, this resource never really took root in the L2 classroom (Erkaya, 2005). The majority of current studies on the impact and efficiency of TV commercials in English as a foreign language comprises classroom research and educators' individual skills (Davis, 1997; Goldthorpe, 1993; Katchen, 1993). One supportive result is that students provided with these commercials in the classroom improve their listening skills or that their motivation to listen increases at a faster rate than that of students who only experience listening to audio (Davis, 1997). Harben (1999) declares that visual context offered by elements such as setting; body language and facial expressions would assist comprehension besides activate learners' background knowledge of the social and cultural facets of language.

The current study tried to find out answer to the following question and test the hypothesis accordingly:

- **RQ.** Does TV Commercials result in improving Iranian EFL learners' speaking?

- **H<sub>0</sub>.** There are no significant differences in the effect of TV Commercials on Iranian EFL learners' speaking.

## METHODOLOGY

### Design of the study

The design of the study is quasi-experimental. The Independent variable of the study is TV commercials and dependent variable is speaking.

### Participants

A total of 60 language learners (all female) with an age range of 10-16 took part in this study. The participants were from Turkish background. The participants were chosen from 8 classes. Before starting the program, a language proficiency test of listening, speaking, reading, and writing was conducted in order for assuring their proficiency levels. A pre-test of speaking knowledge was carried out to the both groups for their comparability. After that the program was begun.

### Context of the Study

The members of the study were selected from one of the institutes of *Tabriz, Iran*. In that organization a course consists of 15 sessions which meet three times a week. In that center the course consists of teaching new topics and active interaction. Communication is one of the most important points of L2 teaching in this organization. The programs of the organization are for enhancing the speaking skill of the learners.

### Instruments and Materials

For the sake of gathering quantifiable data to get the results of the study, the researcher employed the following instruments and materials: so as to assuring the homogeneity of proficiency level of the participants, a language proficiency test was performed. The *Flyers* listening test consists of five sections with 25 questions. The reading and writing has 6 parts, and there are 40 questions and *Flyers* speaking is of four parts. A pre-test was administered in order to guarantee the comparability of both groups, on their speaking skill. After finishing the sessions, the researcher administered a post-test for measuring the efficiency of the treatment.

### Procedure

Prior to the study in order to support the proficiency level of the participants, one language proficiency test was administered, and 60 subjects of approximately the same level, have been selected for the study. After that one pre-test on learners' speaking ability was performed then the program was established. In the experimental group the researcher provided learners with TV commercials, while in the control group the participants were asked to speak on the same topics without any particular treatment. At the end of the program one post-test was administered to both groups. The collected

data has been analyzed by SPSS; since there were two groups the researcher applied t-test.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It should be noted that both groups were more or less at the same level of the speaking skill at the beginning of the study, it can be deduced from the means of both groups in pre-test for experimental group 12.40 and for control group it was 12.24 while in post-test that of experimental group enhanced to 17.34 with SD of 0.74, while in control group it remained approximately the same e.g. 12.33 with SD of .95.

**Table 1.** Paired Samples Statistics-Experimental Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Posttest	17.0744	30	.740511	.14500
	Pretest	12.4022	30	1.15122	.21466

**Table 2.** Paired Samples Statistics-Control Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 2	Posttest	12.3311	30	.954222	.16611
	Pretest	12.2444	30	1.06420	.19477

In the following table it is fairly obvious that the experimental group unlike control group, high scored in the post-test.

**Table 3.** Paired Samples Test-Experimental Group

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Posttest - Pretest	4.71444	1.00541	.18224	4.11171	4.75222	27.455	29	.000

Table3 symbolizes that the mean increase in speaking scores was 4.71 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 4.11 to 4.74. It is also specified that the mean enhancement in the vocabulary posttest was statistically significant ( $t = (29) = 27.45$ ,  $P = .000$ ). Therefore, the Null Hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is supported. In this study the researchers tried to examine the effectiveness of the TV ads on speaking. Since there was no study on the effects of TV ads on speaking, we are to compare the results from different perspectives, *i.e.* from the view point of "authenticity of materials". The findings of the study are in agreement with the investigations that reported strong supports for the efficacy of the authentic materials in language learning. For example the findings of the study provide support for the claims of the Herron and Seay (1991) who argue that more contact with authentic materials develops the teaching of the language and leads to better performance in English. Ur (1984) also is of the same beliefs on the effectiveness of the authentic materials. Moody (1984) also has the same ideas regarding the role authentic materials in teaching speaking. Stempleski

and Tomalin (1990) also do agree with the positive effectiveness of the authentic materials in teaching programs, all of which are also supported in the current study.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the current research suggest some points which are to be taken into consideration by text book writers, syllabus designers and teachers. TV commercials have some positive points over other teaching instruments. TV ads are various and fascinating enough for attracting the learners to acquire a second/foreign. They are designed for actual use in real contexts, so the communications are naturalistic. The spoken language is standard one and is comprehensible enough. The shortness of dialogues is strength of them. The authentic character of the ads in general and interesting and fascinating nature of them in particular builds flourishing and efficient instructional tools. Stempleski and Tomalin (1990) also deem that people's interest is endorsed when language is presented in vigorous way through television and video. They persisted on their claims and affirmed that, "this combination of moving picture and sound can present language more comprehensively than any other teaching medium and more realistically too. A video sequence watched in class, makes students more ready to communicate in the target language" (p. 3). Like any other work this also suffered from some limitations of which put constraint on the generalizing of the results. The first one surely was that of time on making use of wide range of TV ads. The second point obviously was the number of the subjects, since "sixty" is not an acceptable number for generalizing of the outcomes to the target population. The last point is the gender of the participants which as female, extra studies on males are also required to enhance the generalizability of the results.

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