

The Impact of Iranian EFL learners' Gender on their Vocabulary Retention

Mojtaba Maghsoudi, Farnaz Shamaei

Ph.D of Teaching English Language, Farhangiyen University, Arak, Iran.

MA of Teaching English Language, Islamic Azad University, Arak, Iran.

Abstract

The concept of gender, as we now use it came into common parlance during the early 1970s. It was used as an analytical category to draw a line of demarcation between biological sex differences and the way these are used to inform behaviours, which are then assigned as either masculine or feminine (Holmes and Meyerhoff 2003).

The main concern of the present study was to probe the probable differences between Iranian male/female learners of English vocabulary their retention. The subjects of this research included 253 Iranian female and male learners at five high school centres in Arak. At first a general English proficiency test were administered in order to homogenizing them and after that a background questionnaire, and a vocabulary test were administered to both groups. ANOVA was used for analysis the data and finally the results of this study indicated that Iranian EFL male learners surpassed their female peers in English vocabulary retention.

Keywords: Gender, Vocabulary Retention, EFL Learner

Introduction

Maghsoudi (2008) stated that "all of us know what language is, just like we know the palm of our hands. We all acquire a language early in life. There is no human being, ordinarily speaking, who does not "have" a language of his or her own. There are societies, which do not have a written language, but there is no society, which does not have a spoken language. Learning a language is always a complex activity. We may soon give up learning the other language, or feel satisfied with what we have accomplished and make no further progress. I would like to encourage our students that, learning another language is a great and rewarding experience. In other words, we can succeed in our efforts to learn another language"(p.28).

Conteh and Brock (2006) point out “that Language is all around us, we hear and see language in the home, in the media, in the street, as well as in the school environment. Language forms the essence of thought; it is the medium in which understanding occurs. Through language, we construct our understanding of the world and are able to communicate with others” (p.2).

Franken, May and Mccomish (2008) suggested that teachers need to begin with a knowledge of what constitutes language and language proficiency, whether that be in L1 or in L2. Language identification and planning for any group of learners includes: 1) what has been chosen as the items or skills to teach (objective needs), 2) some indication about the sequence of teaching these items and, 3) some indication about teaching approaches or methods to be used. Teachers involved in teaching a language need knowledge about aspects or levels of language. Included in the planning process and considered part of language are aspects of language use such as language functions or notions, language learning strategies, etc.

Theoretical basis of research

Ehrlich (1997) suggested that men and women in some communities often have different attitudes towards second languages and unequal opportunities to learn and use them, “depending on the particular way that gender identifies and gender relations are constituted in that community.”

Grass (1992) concluded that the girls’ speech ability in some materials such as social science studies and language learning is better in comparison than boys speech ability. He stated that females also in processing of understanding learning and fluency in foreign language are more successful than males.

In examining the connection between literacy, L2 learning, and gender among Latina immigrants in California, Rockhill (1993) suggested that while men in this community had more chances to speak English in the workplace, women did most of the English-language literacy work of the household. At the same time, many women were frustrated in their desire for further education in English due to family pressures, including domestic violence.

Research Background

Nunan (2010) pointed out that an adequate acquisition of vocabulary is necessary for successful language learning. Little vocabulary learning may seem in our student’s mind a sign of unsuccessful learning or poor communication skills.

According to Paivio (1986), being knowledgeable in vocabulary is an integral component of success in the language classroom. Moreover, vocabulary plays an important role in the success of foreign language learners.

The present study is to examine the effect of Iranian EFL learners' gender on vocabulary retention, for this purpose this null hypothesis is formulated: Iranian female EFL learners do not surpass their male peers in English vocabulary retention.

Research methodology

The subjects of the present study were 253 students randomly selected from several high schools, out of which 146 were female learners and the remainders were male learners. All the subjects were in third grade of high school in the age range of 17 to 18.

Research tools

In order to conduct this research, the following instruments were used:

The researcher used background questionnaire in order to elicit some information as: the participants' name, age and their gender.

Nelson English proficiency test (150 C) was investigated for determining the students' English proficiency level. The rationale behind the administration of this test was to screen the subject with nearly the same proficiency level.

It should be mentioned that Nelson Test has several types, for different proficiency level of learners. The investigator consulted with their high school English teacher and they decided this kind of proficiency test (150 C) is appropriate for their level. This test was composed of 50 questions about grammar and all of questions were in the form of Multiple-choice questions. For English proficiency test scores are presented out of 50, so each question had one score. In order to make sure of the reliable proficiency test at the piloting stage, the test was given to 15 students, who were selected randomly, and its reliability was estimated through the KR-21 formula as 0.73, therefore the test was found reliable for the purpose of this study.

This test was used to determine the ability of subjects in vocabulary retention. This test was made by the researchers and to ascertain validity of the test, the researchers asked some experienced teachers of high school to share their comments on the content of the test. As a result, some items were deleted and some were changed.

This test was consisted of 25 items with different forms as multiple choice, essay and matching types. In order to make sure of the reliability of this test at the piloting stage, this test was given to 15 students, who were selected randomly. Therefore, its reliability was estimated through the KR-21 formula as 0.87, therefore the test was found reliable for the purpose of this study. The investigators administered this test three times in form of pre-test, post-test and delayed post-test.

The Analysis of Data

We have used Descriptive statistics and Mauchly's Test of Sphericity and Bonferroni Test in order to analysing the data.

Research Findings

In the important assumption in ANOVA with repeated measure, the form of variance-covariance matrix should be sphericity. The results can be studied in table 1.

Table 1: Mauchly's Test of Sphericity

Measure: MEASURE_1

Within Subjects Effect	Mauchly's W	Approx. Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Time	.973	6.754	2	.034

As it is seen, sig is .034, it is concluded that sphericity assumption of form of variance-covariance matrix in dependent variables in error level of 5% is not confirmed. Therefore, the researchers were advised use Epsilon correction factor like Huynh-feldt. According to the reported amount of significance

level, if the given amount is less than 0.05, the effect of that independent variable on dependent variable is significant, otherwise it is not significant.

Table 2: Tests of Within-Subjects Effects

Measure: MEASURE_1

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Time	4497.542	1.971	2281.944	249.489	.000
Time * Gender	473.141	1.971	240.060	26.246	.000
Error(Ti me)	4524.779	494.702	9.146		

According to the small amount reported in statistics of F with Huynh-feldt degree of freedom correction in the first row (sig=.000), it is concluded that this effect in each error level is significant; it means, teaching vocabulary is 5% significant on vocabulary retention, in the first kind of error level, in the other words, the difference between average of pre-test vocabulary scores and average of post-test scores and also average of delayed post-test scores in the confidence level is 95% significant. Therefore teaching vocabulary is effective in Iranian EFL vocabulary retention (see the Bonferroni test).

Also according to the amount of significance level, the statistics of test F in the second row of the table 3.3 is for investigating the effect of Iranian EFL gender on vocabulary retention, it is concluded that this effect in each error level is significant. In the other words, the measure of vocabulary retention in Iranian EFL male and female learners are different. It means the second hypothesis " there is no significant difference between male and female Iranian EFL learners in vocabulary retention", in each error level is rejected. As regard to the descriptive statistic table, it is inducted that male learners are better than female learners in English vocabulary retention. For the better comprehension, there is a graphical figure.

Nematollahi and Maghsoudi (2015) in their research have tried to investigate the possible effect of Iranian EFL learners gender on their ability of vocabulary retention concerning authentic versus non-authentic texts and the findings indicated that the learners gender has no impact on EFL learners vocabulary retention ability in authentic and non-authentic texts.

3.4.Bonferroni Test

The table 3 demonstrate the results of Bonferroni test that are related to the effect of teaching vocabulary to the learners.

Table 3: Pairwise Comparisons

Measure: MEASURE_1

(I) Time	(J) Time	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
1	2	-2.403	.251	.000
	3	-5.996	.289	.000
2	3	-3.593	.269	.000

According to the significance level column in the table 3.4, it is considered that there is a significance level for investigating the difference between pre-test and post-test scores, pre-test and delayed post-test scores and also post-test and delayed post-test scores(sig=.000). so it is concluded that English learners acted difference in all tests.

Conclusion

Vocabulary has a main role in the performance of learning a foreign language, having extensive knowledge of vocabulary provides a lot of basis for learners to acquire other skills; speaking, listening, reading and writing. Vocabulary is so important, especially for EFL learners with little opportunity exposure of foreign language.

On the other hands, learners may learn the vocabulary but forget it easily. According to Nation and Gu (2007), Vocabulary learning requires memory, processing, storing and using L2 words productively. (2007, 85)

In this study in order to investigate relationship between Iranian EFL learners gender and their English vocabulary retention, 146 female and 107 male subjects with the age range of 16-18 randomly selected. All subjects were student on third grade at high school in Arak and Komijan-Iran.

To collect the data in the present study, Nelson English proficiency test, background questionnaire and vocabulary test were used. After taking proficiency test and homogenizing subjects who were assigned randomly, background questionnaire and vocabulary test were administered. The obtained data analyzed by ANOVA with repeated measure and Mann-Whitney test for the hypothesis administered. The results showed that male learners are better than female learners in English vocabulary retention.

Nematollahi and Maghsoudi (2015) investigated the possible effect of Iranian EFL learners gender on their ability of vocabulary retention concerning authentic versus non-authentic texts and the findings from repeated measurement test revealed that the learners gender has no impact on EFL learner's vocabulary retention ability in authentic and non-authentic texts.

Practical suggestions

The teachers in language institutes and high schools should be able to find the most suitable technique or method to be applied in the teaching English vocabulary to learners. It becomes the important point as the key of success for the subjects in learning English vocabulary. The teacher should make a supporting

classroom atmosphere as interesting as possible. It means that they can enjoy and relax in learning English without feeling reluctant to be involved into the lesson conducted.

For the further study, it is recommended that learners of different English level be investigated. Moreover, in further study, the group of participants might be included more participants in order to obtain the deeper correlation between the gender and English vocabulary retention.

A replication study is needed to find out whether this relationship holds true in other cities of Iran. Exploring the relationship between learners' gender and their English vocabulary retention at other grades may shed more light on the relationship.

Last but not least, it has to be said that further research should be done to examine the effect of gender at other language skills.

References

- Ehrlich, P.R (1997). The population explosion: why we should care and what we should do about it. *Environmental Law* 27: 1187-1208
- Holms, J. and Meyerhoff, M. (2003). *The handbook of language and gender*. Blackwell Handbooks in linguistics.
- Maghsoudi, M. (2008). Learning English as a third language: a comparative study between Iranian and Indian bilinguals. *South Asian language review*. VOL. XVIII. No. 1, January 2008.
- Nematollahi, S., and Maghsoudi, M. (2015). The effect of authentic versus non-authentic texts on upper intermediate Iranian EFL learners vocabulary retention. *English language teaching journal*, 8(12), 112-123. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v8n12p112>
- Nunan, D. (2010). *Second language teaching & learning*. Boston, Mass: Heinle & Heinle.
- Paivio, A. (1986). *Mental representations: A dual-coding approach*. New York: Oxford University Press.