On The Role of Different Models of Dynamic Assessment on Promoting Speaking

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Abstract

In order to assess the viability of enjoying improvements in the world of language testing and the proposed approaches of alternative assessment in EFL contexts, the current research was an attempt to shed light on the role of interactionist and interventionist models of dynamic assessment (DA) on promoting speaking of Iranian language learners. Therefore, five students enrolling in intermediate language learning courses in Chabahar maritime university were selected randomly. Using an adopted typology for interactionist DA and an adopted regulatory scale for interventionist DA, the researcher found that interactionist DA help learners to gain mastery over speaking problems and perform better through negotiated interaction with the teacher. Besides, the results of t-test showed that students gained better scores on post-test following an interventionist mediatory session. On top of that, for learners and teachers to benefit from these findings, the most frequent interactionist strategies used by the researcher were transcribed and presented in a diagram. These findings have implication for language teachers, curriculum designers and test-developers.

Keywords: Dynamic Assessment, Interactionist, Interventionist, Mediation.

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1.1 Introduction

The tradition has taught us, the EFL (English as Foreign Language) teachers, to look at testing and teaching as a dichotomy. The same idea had clung to life until a decade ago, not only in the mind and practice of ordinary EFL teachers but also, according to Poehner (2005), in the writings of those who enjoy a considerable fame in the world of applied linguistics, language teaching and second language research including Shohamy, 2001; Moss 1996; McNamara 2001; Linn 2000 and Lynch 2001. In defiance of continuing improvements and creativities in the world of language testing and the proposed approaches of alternative assessment, the outcomes showed beyond doubt the efficiencies of these methods and approaches in a variety of contexts and situations (Fahmy, 2013). For the same reason, filled with a zest to give birth to a more productive approach to language testing and calm the concerns of stakeholders and decision makers, the researchers were striving very hard (Brown, 2009). For the same reason, bulks of studies were conducted to identify an approach of testing that would help students develop their skills rapidly to the highest proficiency level possible. Some of these studies found that integrating assessment into the process of language instruction can be effective amongst which those of Kinginger, 2002; Lantolf & Poehner, 2004; Poehner, 2005). The same idea was also put forward by Anton, 2009; Brown, 2009; Ellis, 2009a and many other researchers and theorist who are penning new concepts and conducting new studies to shed more light on this almost recently born approach. Despite these very facts, according to (Haywood and Lidz, 2007) the foundations of this seemingly new approach were laid many years ago in the works of Feuerstein and Hoffman (1979), Guthke and Wingenfeld (1992) and above all those of the Russian scientist Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory (1998) where he proposed that diagnoses may uncover abilities that have fully formed as well as those still in the process of developing. This insight, according to Poehner and Lantolf (2005) gave rise to new approaches in assessment that collectively is called dynamic assessment in the contemporary literature of language testing and assessment. Haywood and Lidz (2007) in the book, Dynamic Assessment in Practice, have supported this definition of dynamic assessment as “an interactive approach to conducting assessments within the domains of psychology, speech/language, or education that focuses on the ability of the learner to respond to intervention.” Different scholars have expounded the term differently but the common line of these different definitions is an active intervention by examiners and assessment of examinees’ response to intervention which is in sharp contrast with more traditional approaches of testing and assessment in which testing and teaching was seen as dichotomy and in more extreme versions oppositional. The view that assessment stands in opposition to instruction may be attributed to the political character of assessment as well as the ideology behind education in many countries. Policy makers, stake holders and educational officials impose on the teachers to administer standardized test and measure a static crystallized knowledge taught in a course or longer periods of time, the very fact that is frequently touched by Shohamy (2001) and other scholars. Even in many front-runner countries such as United States, the curriculum designers give major weight to measurement as amount of achievement as a result of which test preparation and measurement of achievement not only becomes an end in itself but also outruns other curricular goals and learning objectives (Johnson, Penny and Gordon, 2009). One more factor contributing to the chasm between assessment and instruction is teachers’ lack of
familiarity with the theory and principles underlying assessment practices (Poehner, 2008). This deficiency is more evident in EFL contexts especially among Iranian teachers which can be compensated through exercising reflectivity in teaching (Farokhipour, Yusefali, & Mustafapour, 2015). A bulk of research in last decade has submitted proof that dynamic assessment is a successful method for promoting second language acquisition and for measuring potential language learning the most famous of which are those by Anton, 2009; Lantolf & Poehner, 2009; and a series of writing by poehner (2004, 2005, 2008, 2009 and 2014). Notwithstanding these results there are some merits associated with previous standardized test and some weakness to newly practiced approach of dynamic assessment to none of which one can turn a blind eye. The reverse is also the case. According to Bulter (2000), although standardized tests met educational requirements in many contexts but there are some reasons based on which we should think of more flexible approaches not unlike those found in dynamic assessment. Considering the courses passed, static tests assume that all students have comparable experience and educational background the assumption that is proved to be far from correct in many settings (Poehner, 2005). Besides, the standardized static tests had been oblivious to emerging skills with the potential of being learned in favorable conditions, the idea that is the hallmark of findings based on ZPD concept of Vygotsky. Above all, according to Poehner (2005) the role of the teacher is shrugged off in achievement standardized test since no role is attributed to them in the most critical phase of learning, the testing phase. In spite of that, Bulter (2000) believes that dynamic assessment with all these values dragging behind might not be a one size fit all approach with the possibility of failure in some context. Considering these issues, the current research is an attempt to shed light on the application of this model in the EFL context of Iran and its possible effect on learning speaking of intermediate language learners. Pinned to the more static models of testing and assessment practices, it seems that Iranian language teachers are not familiar enough with dynamic models of assessment. Even those who believe in alternative approaches of assessment do not venture to try dynamic assessment in classroom. Besides, little research is done in our context that proves dynamic assessment productive. The current research, therefore, tries to light upon the theoretical foundations of dynamic assessment in brief, and investigate its efficiency and productivity in teaching speaking in detail. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of interactionist and interventionist models of dynamic assessment in ameliorating speaking of Iranian intermediate language learners. The results of such studies work as different parts of a picture which in its completed form can inform curriculum designers, material writers and educational decision makers and benefit teaching society, above all English teachers.

1.2 Research Questions:

Considering the aforesaid issues, the following research questions are put forward to study:

1- To what extent can the interactionist model of dynamic assessment promote speaking ability of Iranian EFL learners?
2- Does interventionist dynamic assessment have any significant effect on the betterment of Iranian EFL learners’ speaking?
3- Which interactionist mediation strategies work better for promoting speaking ability of Iranian EFL learners?
2.1 Literature Review

Due to some insufficiencies in product views of language testing the attempt for alternatives ways of language testing that go further on than limits of pure measurement of static learning came into view many years ago. As a pioneer in this new thinking, Dearborn (1921) stated that measurement of the actual progress of learning can test the intelligence in more reliably. Bringing evidence to his claim, he asserted that common practices of language testing are tests of achievements and they cannot allow for new learning or new capacity for learning therefore. Decades later, in the same line of research Daniel (1997) provided evidence for the productivity of language testing followed by an intervention phase. These current laid the framework of whatever we call dynamic assessment although the term was originated in the domain of children with learning disabilities and abnormal behavior (Feuerstein et al., 1979), children with hearing impairment (Keane, 1987), or children with learning disabilities (Samuels, 2000; Moore-Brown and his colleagues, 2006). In a new phase of research in this field, however, scholars such as Lantolf & Poehner added to the use of dynamic assessment practices to education and above all second language assessment and pedagogy.

According to Gindis and Lidz (2003), dynamic assessment concerns for individual differences and based on this new shift in understanding, blends instruction with testing and assessment. As it is also touched above, dynamic assessment is contrasted with traditional, or static, approaches to assessment. Deeply rooted in the Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory and its proposed ZPD, the terms static and dynamic posit a clear dichotomy between assessments that include intervention by more significant others with the aim of development and those that do not (Poehner, 2005). According to Chaiklin, 2003 (as cited in Poehner, 2005), Vygotsky’s work, and particularly his writings on the ZPD, is interpreted in various ways by those who are involved and interested in developing procedures that realize the concept of dynamic assessment in best possible way. That is why different models of dynamic assessment have come on the scene in the last decade amongst which the interactionist – interventionist classification is the best known and most practiced classification (Poehner, 2005). The current study, too, is an attempt to shed more light on the effectiveness of these two models on promoting speaking of Iranian EFL learners. Interventionist and interactionist, two general kinds of dynamic assessments, distinguishable through the type of mediation used, first were thought up by Lantolf and Poehner (2004). According to Poehner (2005), Interactionist dynamic assessment, as the most sensitive model to ZPD, treads on the heels of Vygotsky’s suggested option for cooperative dialoging between independent user and a dependent one where assistance emerges from the interaction and helps the dependent to develop. Interventionist dynamic assessment, on the other hand, remains closer to psychometric concerns of many static forms of assessment. In other words it uses standardized administration procedures and forms of assistance to produce easily quantifiable results that can be used to make comparisons between and within groups, and can be contrasted with other measures and used to make predictions about performance on future tests.

Thouësny (2010) has shed more light on the difference between these two models which is
brief and to the point. According to Thouësny, in interactionist, the analysis is qualitative and in smaller scale in which mediation is finely tuned with the responsivity of students. Besides, the psychometric measures are not viable and it is used in spoken language in a human-based assessment environment. In interventionist, however, the analysis is quantitative in a larger scale with mediations established in advance, hints ranging from implicit to explicit. It can be used in group or individual settings for both spoken and written language and enjoys an acceptable psychometric reliability and validity. In addition, it is more in line with computer-based assessments.

In a study with a plan in mind to investigate the usability of dynamic assessment in Iranian context, Jarrahzade and Tabatabaei (2014) studied the impact of Dynamic Assessment (DA) on promoting reading comprehension ability of Iranian male and female EFL learners. The researchers used DA which unifies instruction with assessment to provide learners with mediation to promote their hidden potential during assessment employing Guthke's Lerntest approach to develop the reading comprehension skill classes that integrated mediation with assessment to support 60 Iranian EFL learners' reading skill. The participants' reading scores were presented to show the effect of Guthke's Lerntest approach on promoting Iranian EFL learners' reading performance. In addition, the participants' pre and post-test scores were compared to determine whether the participants revealed significant progress after receiving Guthke's Lerntest approach in reading comprehension setting. The findings showed that participants of experimental group significantly outperformed the one in the static way. In conclusion, the results of the study revealed that employing the Guthke's Lerntest approach can offer a new condition to enhance the EFL learners' reading comprehension ability and that doing research in this field can be beneficial for EFL learners, English instructors and other researchers in other fields.

Aimed at investigating the effect of dynamic assessment on EFL learners’ reading comprehension in different proficiency levels in Iran, Ajideh and Nourdad (2012) studied 197 Iranian university students who participated in six groups. The design of the research was quasi-experimental. The results of MANOVA test revealed that while dynamic assessment had improving immediate and delayed effect on reading comprehension of learners in all proficiency levels, the proficiency groups did not differ significantly in their taking advantage of this kind of assessment.

Studying the effect of dynamic assessment on one more skill, Alavi, Kavianpanah and Shabani (2012) investigated the effect of this approach on promoting listening. The study aimed at testing the applicability of group dynamic assessment in identifying the mediational strategies offered by a mediator during interactions with a group of L2 learners. Moreover, it sought to unravel the effects of group-based dynamic assessment instruction on the co-construction of knowledge among L2 listeners. The participants included a group of L2 learners ranging in age from 20 to 25. The materials used in the assessment sessions were authentic texts selected from the normal VOA broadcasts. The qualitative analysis of the protocols led to the development of an inventory of mediational strategies consisting of different forms of implicit and explicit
feedback. The analysis also showed how collective scaffolding could pave the way for establishing distributed help among learners within the social space of the class in the course of which secondary and primary interactants mutually benefit from each other's contributions.

Considering the fact that little is done on the role of dynamic assessment on promoting speaking in Iranian EFL context, if at all, the present study has three main objectives in design; to study the role of interactionist model of dynamic assessment on promoting speaking, to study the effect of interventionist model on promoting speaking and last but not the least to light upon the most practical mediational strategies that help promoting speaking in Iranian context.

3. Method
3.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of different models of dynamic assessment on promoting speaking ability of Iranian EFL learners. The second aim is to explore those interventionist and interactionist mediatory strategies which best nurture growth of speaking ability in the subjects mentioned before. Research designs in studies are vitally important because they, in large part, dictate the type of research design used, the sample size and sampling scheme employed, and the type of instruments administered as well as the data analysis techniques (i.e., statistical or qualitative) used (Mackey and Gass, 2006). Therefore, considering the questions of the research, and the literature review of the study, a mixed method design is put to use by the researcher with qualitative one to investigate the role of interactionist model on promoting speaking and a quantitative one to study the effect of the mediatory interventionist strategies on fostering speaking of the participants.

3.2 Participants

The participants were five intermediate female students that were studying English as a foreign language at Chabahar Maritime University in Iran. Since both interventionist and interactionist models of dynamic assessment can be carried out in a small-scale, five participants meet requirements of the study. All of these students were selected based on simple random sampling procedure in a class with 24 students.

3.3 Instruments and Materials

To put the objectives of the study into practice, two different instruments are used. Adopting from Poehner (2005), a mediation typology was used as a baseline to carry out the interventionist dynamic assessment in the study. This typology includes 15 different type of mediation that teacher can use to deal with the difficulties encountered in speaking of students. These scaffold mediated serves as support during assessing speaking with the aim of nurturing growth. The second instrument which is used the answer the needs for the second question of the research, is a regulatory scale adopted from Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) which includes 12 different mediatory steps from most implicit to most explicit ones. The materials which are used
for assessing speaking are selected from Top Notch and Four Corners series (intermediate levels). The kinds of tests used in the class are teacher developed ones seeking assistance from progress checks and exercises used in the books mentioned above.

3.4 Procedure

To answer the first question, the researchers conducted a tutorial session for each subject three separate times (with one week interval) and audio-taped the whole stretches for the sake of being transcribed later. The students were required to perform a task in the materials prepared in advance. In the first session, the students performed the task and spoke about 10 minutes based on the duties predetermined in task while receiving no feedback or mediation from the teacher. In the first session the researchers were taking notes of the main problems in the performance of students. Using the adopted inventory of mediations, in the second session, students were asked to perform the same task a second time while receiving mediation and feedback from the teachers. The mediation were mainly concerned with problematic issues touched in the first phase besides those recently occurred in the second phase. In the third session, students were asked to perform the same task a third time while again receiving no mediation. Transcribing the audio of the whole sessions and qualitative analysis of the tasks threw light on the role of interactionist dynamic assessment in fostering speaking of the learners the results of which are presented below.

To answer the second question, the same task not unlike the one used in the interactionist model was employed. The only difference is that the second task (two parallel forms of a teacher developed speaking test) was selected from Four Corners series while the first task was selected from Top Notch series. In the first phase of the interventionist session, the test was administered to the subject setting our sights on using it as the pretest. Scoring the test and recognizing the problematic areas, in the second phase of the session, the researcher used the adopted regulatory scale to provide mediations ranging from most implicit ones to most explicit ones. Then, in the third phase of the interventionist session, a parallel test of the same task was administered to the subjects. The difference between pre and post-tests submits proof for the productivity of intervention. To reliability of these two parallel tests was already proved in a pilot study in a class of 24 students.

To come back to the final question, a reduced form of poehner (2005) is used in a way that the frequency of the mediations and feedback used is determined.

4. Results and Discussion

In order to find answer to the first question, as mentioned above, a more straightforward and more manageable version of poehner study (2005) was adopted and used. For that reason, three different sessions of a speaking test was audio-taped and transcribed by the teacher. In the first session that was conducted as the pre-test of the study, a traditional and established form of a
speaking task, selected from Top Notch text books (intermediate level), was administered. All the dialogues and responses were audio taped and transcribed by the teacher. All problematic areas were diagnosed and treated in the second session of the study (dynamic assessment session). Too, all dialogues and interactions (mediations) of the teachers and responses of students were transcribed and the result of mediation were observed and transcribed by the teacher. Besides, using the adopted typology, new encountered problems in the second session were also mediated by the teacher. To observe the results of mediations in the second, the third session was also conducted as a post test. The results of the study are summarized in the following table. The results of this phase of study showed that mediations helped students to outperform in the post test session. After one week interval (between second (mediated) session and third (posttest) sessions), students submitted evidences of avoiding previous problems and internalization of mediations. To check internalization of learning through mediations, teacher asked students to provide explanation for previously problematic areas which were got back to correct in posttest as the result of mediations in dynamic assessment.

Table 1. results of dynamic assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Traditional assessment / Independent performance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dynamic Assessment/ Mediated Performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Main Types of Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mediation</strong></td>
<td>1- Using wrong Tense (ex: “saw” for “see”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2- Using similar but wrong words (ex: “number “for “time”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3- Using irregular preposition or post-position ( ex:” in long time” for “ for long time”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4- Using wrong adjective (ex: “as best as we can” for “ as good as we can”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5- Using wrong determiner( ex:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“some and any + singular noun”

repetition, verification/
specifying specific site of
error/ metalinguistic clues/
providing
examples/offering a choice/
providing correct response/
providing explanation

| Post-test | Traditional Assessment/Independent performance |

The results of findings on question one shows that interactionist model of dynamic assessment not only paves the way for tackling course-related language difficulties of students but also helps the class to interact more. This condition, in turn, brings about a mutually enhanced atmosphere of learning in language classes in which teacher wins a chance to teach further and interact more. These findings are in line with (Anton, 2009; Thouësny, 2010; Alavi, Kavianpanah & Shabani, 2012 and Fahmy, 2013) which shows beyond doubt the efficiency and facilitative role of dynamic assessment in language learning conditions, on top of it, in EFL contexts. Also, increase in chance of interaction, as a result of dynamic assessment can improve the quality of teacher talk in the classroom and provide teachers with more options for interaction which, in turn, boosts learning. In sum, interactionist dynamic assessment submitted proofs of gain in learning of grammar, syntax, structural control and coherence and accuracy in speaking of all five students. These findings are in line with (Brown, 2009; Lantolf & Poehner, 2011; Poehner, 2005 and Poehner & Lantolf, 2004).

Also, in order to find an answer to the second question, considering the procedure mentioned above, a teacher-developed speaking test was administered among subjects on three different occasions. The first one was served as pre-test, the second one as intervention (dynamic assessment) and the last one as a post-test. Then, using a repeated measure t-test (paired t-test), the researcher investigated the change in scores from pre-test to post-test. SPSS software version 22 was employed to compare mean scores of the group on pre-test and post-test. The result of the analysis is reported below:
Table 2. Paired sample statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1: pretest-posttest</td>
<td>15.4000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.81659</td>
<td>.81240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.2000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.92354</td>
<td>.86023</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Paired sample tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired differences</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% confidence interval of the difference</th>
<th>d.f</th>
<th>Sig. (two-tailed)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1(pretest-posttest)</td>
<td>-1.80000</td>
<td>.44721</td>
<td>.720000</td>
<td>-2.35529</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>.001</td>
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</table>

The result of this test shows that \( p \) value is < .05. This indicates that scores on post-test are significantly different from those on post-test. In other words, the intervention has added to the scores of Iranian EFL students and helped to out-perform on the post-test. Considering the inventory of mediations as a continuum, the more explicit end of continuum was used in mediation.

Also, the analysis of the results obtained from the second question of the research showed that interventionist model of dynamic assessment is in keeping with psychometric measures. Too, deeply rooted in socio-cultural theories of learning and those of ZPD, the interventionist model of dynamic assessment proved to be a facilitative assessment tool complementary to static assessment tools in Iranian EFL context. These results are in line with those in the research of Fahmy (2009). Besides, the results of the study showed that interventionist dynamic assessment is qualified in diagnosing program-related language difficulties and getting them back into normal reliably during dynamic intervention. Not unlike interactionist model, the interventionist model of dynamic assessment demonstrated gain in learning of grammar, syntax, coherence and speaking ability of all five students. Finally, the results of the second question showed that Iranian EFL students enjoy explicit end of interventions’ continuum more.

Besides, in order to investigate which interactionist mediation strategies works better for promoting speaking ability of Iranian EFL learners, the researcher calculated the frequency of each strategy. The result of these findings is reported in following diagram (the frequency of 15th
strategy “asking for explanation” is 85 because the researcher verified the internalization of learning through this strategy.

Finally, the results of the third question showed that request for repetition and verification, specifying error, explanation and metalinguistic clues are among most frequent interactions strategies during assessment which brought about learning and tackling speaking difficulties. These findings can help teacher to adopt most efficient strategies in speaking classes prior to final assessment and or during dynamic assessment. It also can form a repertoire of most appropriate feedback strategies in speaking classrooms.

5. Conclusion

Not unlike a variety of researches in which the results produced evidence on superiority of dynamic assessment over normative and static alternatives, the results of the current study stood firm behind this superiority. Rather than helping test takers to learn more and outperform, both approaches of dynamic assessment proved productive in finding obstacles of courses and those of learning and curriculum. On top of that, the results obtained through dynamic assessment lay the ground works for teachers to incorporate the principles of action research, teacher development and reflective thinking into language testing, an issue that is not directly touched in the literature on dynamic assessment. In other words, it is not far from correct if one claim that dynamic assessment helps teachers to a great extent. Teachers, too, can enjoy feedback obtained from the mediation phase of dynamic assessment and put these results into use to raise their knowledge on teacher talk strategies and reflect on their own performance in other speaking classes. The results, also, can be of service in curriculum design of speaking courses through feeding the syllabus designers with enough information on possible deficiencies encountered in mediation phase.
Finally, the results of this study suggest that dynamic assessment can be employed in formative model in the whole course in speaking classes. In other words, blending teacher talk strategies with the principles of dynamic assessment in formative manner can put forward a new approach of dynamic assessment in teaching speaking which is an option to be considered in future researches.
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