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March 2016 Foreword

By Paul Robertson and Rouhollah Askari Bigdeli

Five papers of the current issue have addressed English language teaching and learning in two different contexts, i.e. language institutes and universities, in Iran. The first two studies have focused on the context of language teaching and learning in language institutes. In the first study, Behrouz Jamalvandi and Marzieh Pouresmaeil explored distribution of formulaic and creative language in the speech of Iranian EFL teachers teaching English in language institutes. Analyzing the audio-recorded data collected over one month from the classes of 12 EFL teachers, the researchers found that the high proportion of teachers' speech was composed of formulaic language (roughly 79 %). Creative language, however, constituted only 22 % of the teachers' speech. In the second study, Masoud Ahrabi Fakhr through reflection on his own teaching experience was motivated to conduct an action research study. After recognizing that his students showed apathy toward the supplementary listening materials, he replaced the given materials with TV series in order to investigate his students' perceptions of and responsiveness to the assignment of the new material, i.e. TV series. The findings revealed that the students developed positive perceptions of the new supplementary material and were highly responsive to it.

The other three studies were conducted in the university context. Mahmood Saadatnia, Saeed Ketabi, and Mansoor Tavakoli carried out a study to see whether inferential level of reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners was different in narrative and expository texts. Involving 180 upper-intermediate EFL learners in reading four expository texts and four narrative ones and answering the questions, the researchers found that there was no significant difference between the two text types regarding inferential comprehension. The researchers argued that teachers and material developers should not merely focus on readability of texts as the criteria for their inclusion in text books or for choosing them as learning tasks in classroom; rather, as they

argued, the factors such as the structure and type of texts should be taken into account. In the fourth study, Mina Rastegar and Mehrnaz Al-Sadat Fatemi by reviewing the literature on willingness to communicate (WTC), communication apprehension (CA), and introversion tendency (IT) were motivated to investigate the potential relationship among the variables. 91 Iranian undergraduate students (both male and female) majoring in English literature and English translation took part in the study. The data were gathered through three questionnaires. The results of the study indicated that there was a significant negative relationship between students' WTC and CA. Also, the students with higher IT were more willing to communicate in English. Additionally, it was found that the students with higher levels of IT had lower scores on CA. What is more, no significant difference was detected between freshman and senior students regarding their WTC, CA, and IT. In the fifth study, Fatemeh Mahdavirad investigated Iranian EFL students' learning styles and assessment techniques from a different perspective. Rather than trying to categorize learning styles and assessment techniques of Iranian EFL learners, she explored the most and the least favored learning styles and assessment techniques among 321 English students who were studying English literature, English translation, and English language teaching. The data were gathered through an adapted questionnaire. The researcher found that learning styles such as competing against other classmates, following a textbook during the course, using supplementary audiovisual aids, using dictionaries, being immediately corrected by the teacher, and using supplementary pictorial data were perceived as the most favored learning styles. As for the most favored assessment techniques, the study found that the students preferred multiple-choice exams to essay-type tests, liked to receive feedback on tests from their teacher rather than peers, preferred to answer questions quickly, and were eager to know more about test taking strategies.

It is hoped that the current issue helps Iranian EFL teachers to improve their teaching practices in these two contexts, i.e. language institutes and universities, and offers insights into international contexts where teachers are working with language learners. In the end, we would like to thank the reviewers who meticulously went through the papers and provided the authors with constructive comments and suggestions. Also, we would like to thank the authors who patiently revised the papers in several rounds.

Toward Identification of Patterns of Formulaic and Creative Language in the Speech of Iranian EFL Teachers

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Abstract

Having a marginal role over years at the mercy of rule-based speech, formulaic speech has recently regained considerable support from researchers. Yet, significance is attached to both systems of rule-based and formulaic speech. To examine this issue in the context of Iran, this study was carried out to evaluate a dual process in the speech of Iranian EFL teachers. To do so, 12 Iranian EFL teachers in non-state language centers were sampled during their holding conversation courses. Each session was audio recorded and transcribed, and two raters evaluated the recorded samples on the basis of a checklist. The checklist was composed of elements of formulaic and creative speech. The results revealed that the high proportion of the participants'

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speech was composed of formulaic language (78.13%). However, the distribution pattern of the categories under formulaic speech was found to be different. Further, with respect to creative use of language, the findings showed that almost one third of the participant's speech (31.17%) contained grammatical errors. The study ends with theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords: Dual-process speech, Creative speech, Formulaic speech, Speech of Iranian EFL teachers

1. Introduction

The speech of every individual is an amalgamation of both formulaic and creative utterances (Ellis, 2008; Wood, 2009). Formulaic speech is defined as "expressions which are learnt as unanalyzable wholes and employed on particular occasions" (Lyons, 1968, p. 177). By the same token, Ellis (2008) considers creative speech as something "constructed by stringing together individual lexical items, often by drawing on underlying abstract patterns or rules" (p.75).

The importance attached to the role of formulaic and creative language has waxed and waned over time due to the proliferation of theories of language learning and teaching. The popularity of formulaic expressions goes back to the 1960s when the audio-lingual method was commonly used in language learning and teaching. Based on this approach, language learning takes place through "mastering the elements or building blocks of the language" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 55). Yet, with the emergence of Chamsky's generative linguistics, attentions turned to creative speech at the expense of formulae (Brown, 2007). To Chomsky (1972), manipulation of large number of memorized sentences is not knowing a language, rather one should be able to produce and understand infinite number of utterances not produced or heard before.

Nevertheless, nativism failed to put an end to the crucial role of the exemplar-based system. When nativism was seriously challenged by emergenism and usage-based approaches, formulaic language revived to its heyday (Behrens, 2009; Corrigan, Moravcsik, Ouali, & Wheatley, 2009). Emergentists hold that language knowledge is not a set of rules (Ellis, 2008). As one of the illustrious researchers on emergentism and connectionism, N. Ellis (2005) maintains that

> The productive units of natural language cannot be defined in terms of a minimal set
> of rules, constraints, or principles, but rather need to be defined in terms of a large,

redundant set of previously experienced structures with virtually no restriction on size or complexity (p. 81).

According to N. Ellis (2002), fluent language use is not based on abstract knowledge of grammar; rather learners should be equipped with a large number of memorized chunks. As Fillmore (1976, p. 24-25) maintains "an enormously large amount of natural language is formulaic, automatic and rehearsed, rather than propositional, creative or freely generated". With reference to the fact that the most portion of speech production consists of formulae, formulaic expressions have received great attention and importance by researchers in this filed (Schmitt & Carter, 2004; Van Lancker-Sidtis, 2004; Van Lancker-Sidtis & Rallon, 2004; Wood, 2002).

Relying on these research studies, formulaic speech is deemed to serve as a database for creative use of language (Ellis, 2008; Fillmore, 1976; Girard & Sionis, 2003; Yu; 2013). That is, memorized chunks gradually are unpacked by learners during the stages of acquisition. On the other hand, processing of grammar is not always easy due to the complex nature of the language. However, opportunities are provided for learners to reduce the burden of language process using formulae (Wray, 2002).

Although more recently bulk of research has been carried out on the crucial role of formulaic speech, the rule- based system does not lose its value as creative speech accounts for almost the half portion of the speech of every speaker. According to Ellis (2008), "there are times when language users need to formulate precise and novel propositions" (p. 432). To him "a rule-based system makes creativity and flexibility in what is said possible" (p. 432). Indeed, accuracy can only be achieved on the base of rule-based system (Skehan, 1998). There are controversies on the interface of formulaic and creative speech. Krashen and Scarcella (1978) claim that formulaic and creative speeches do not interact with each other; rather, they differ widely. In contrast, many language scholars put finger on the mutual relationship between formulaic and creative speech and they confirm that they are highly interrelated and go hand in hand (Bolinger, 1979; Pawley & Syder, 1983; Skehan, 1998). Rescorla and Okuda (1987) find the dichotomy between formulaic and creative speech illusive. It is also evident from the history of language teaching that none of these two systems is ideal without the other. As an instance, the audio-lingual method failed to prepare learners to communicate in real situations by focusing highly on prefabricated patterns (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). On the other hand, relying solely on the rule-based system, learners might produce utterances which are grammatically correct but do not

make sense because they are not native-like structures (Pawley & Syder, 1983). Juxtaposing two systems of exemplar-based and rule-based, Skehan (1998) proposes a dual-mode system in which "language users can move between these systems, and do so quite naturally" (p. 54).

Unlike most studies which have tried to explore a dual process in the speech of learners (e.g., Fillmore, 1976; Hakuta, 1976; Hanania & Gradman, 1977; Hatch, 1972; Wagner-Gough, 1975), the current inquiry approached examining the dual process in Iranian EFL teachers' speech, having considered the theoretical and practical background on speech and creative and prefabricated issues.

2. Literature Review

Examining the speech of language learners, many researchers have run studies on the dual-process and formulaic use of language (e.g., Ellis, Simpson-vlach, & Maynard 2008; Girard & Sionis, 2003; Van Lancker-Sidtis, 2004; Van Lancker-Sidtis & Rallon, 2004; Wray, 1999; Wray & Fitzpatrick, 2010). To the best of theresearchers' knowledge, literature lacks research studies exploring the dual-process in the speech of non-native EFL teachers. So, what follows are some studies which have been carried out to explore the dual-process and/or formulaic language in the speech of language learners.

The role of formulaic speech has almost been ignored in teaching a language in classroom context (Wray, 1999). As Wray points out, it is assumed that ready-made chunks can be learned easily because they emerge from the early stages of acquisition. But the fact is that formulaic language is hard to be learned even by advanced learners and is also the final stage in mastering a language (Pawley & Syder, 1983).

Formulaic speech is ubiquitous in the speech of L2 learners, especially in the early stages of acquisition (Ellis, 2008). To Ellis, each formula is served to perform a specific function. According to Hakuta (1976) and Ellis (1982), formulaic speech helps learners to perform functions which are beyond their grammatical knowledge. A case study by Hakuta (1976) showed that, Uguisu, a five-year-old Japanese girl who acquired English as a second language used formulae to perform functions which would not be realized relying on her grammatical knowledge. Essentially, using ready-made chunks can be a motivational strategy which gives learners the illusion of rapid progress. Based on Hukata (1976), "if learners always have to wait

until they acquire the constructional rules for forming an utterance before using it, they may run into serious motivational difficulties" (p. 333). Thus, considerable attention needs to be pied to teach formulae in classrooms since they play a psychological role in the learning process. In fact, the absence of formulaic speech specially in the early stages of acquisition when learners are unable to produce utterances due to their limited rule-governed system would lead learners to feel frustrated and they even might give up.

2.1. Formulaic Speech and Creative Use of Language: Two Sides of the Same Coin

Fillmore (1976) ran a study to examine the effect of formulae on creative speech in the speech of five L2 English learners. He observed that learners highly relied on formulaic use of language to facilitate communication. However, examining subjects' speech, Fillmore came to the findings which were dissimilar to what Hatch (1972) found. He suggested that the bases for creative language are provided through learning formulae. In actual fact, learners slowly unpack the internal structure of formulaic sequences.

Additionally, to recognize if formulae memorization would leave any effect on creative language, Myles, Hooper, and Mitchell (1998) carried out a longitudinal study with 16 L2 French learners. In the course of conversations with the participants, the researchers elicited the date through unplanned language use. In this study, first, three prefabricated patterns were identified in learners' language and then frequency of using them was calculated. After that, researchers examined how learners analyzed and used these three chunks actively over 2 years. The results showed that holistic utterances were analyzed over time and were used to create new utterances by the participants. So, a great deal of interaction between formulaic and creative speech was confirmed. Moreover, in a study by Taguchi (2007) the effect of instruction of grammatical chunks on the development of spoken discourse was investigated. The data were elicited through conversational and narrative tasks. Also, the speech of every individual was recorded and transcribed. The results revealed that the accurate use of language increased in the speech of the participants in their early stages of acquisition due to the fact that their speech was not as a result of generating grammatical rules; rather, their utterances were the production of learning memorized chunks. Indeed, the increase in using grammatical utterances in the speech of the participants was evident. The findings of this study led the researcher to conclude that what provides a data base for creative use of language is memorized chunks.

Likewise, the frequency of using prefabs in spoken and written texts was worked out in a study by Erman and Warren (2000). Analyzing the written text, the researchers disclosed that 52.3% portion accounted for using prefabs. However, with respect to the spoken text, formulaic language made up 58.6% of the speech production of English speakers. In any case, more than half of the measured discourse was made up of prefabs. In a counterexample study, Van Lancker-Sidtis and Rallon (2014) ran a study to find out what portion of speech is occupied by formulae. To do so, a screen play was selected for the analysis. The frequency of formulaic speech in a screen play was examined by two raters. Based on the results, only 25% of the text was recognized as formulae.

2.2. Formulaic Language and Fluency

Indeed, results from a great deal of research have highlighted the significant role of formulaic speech in fluency of speech production (Wood, 2009). McGuire (2009) carried out an experimental study to explore if explicit teaching of formulaic language leaves any effect on fluent use of language by learners. The instructions involved listening-task which contained the conversations of native speakers. To collect the required data, the participants were given a pre-test and post-test. In both tests, a topic was given to two participants for conversation. Then, their conversation were audio recorded. 16 native speaker judges evaluated the audio recorded data. The result showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in using more formulae and fluent use of language after the treatment. Therefore, the effect of instruction of formulaic speech on language fluency was approved. With respect to the theoretical and empirical foundations on the patterns of speech as cited above, this study made an attempt to unveil how Iranian EFL teachers' dual speech is distributed in terms of formulaic and creative dimensions. Hence, the following questions were raised in the current study:

1. How are creative and formulaic speeches distributed in Iranian EFL teachers' speech in the classroom setting?

2. What is the highly used component of formulaic speech of Iranian EFL teachers?

3. How much of Iranian EFL teachers' creative speech is formed by correct and incorrect sentences?

3. Method

3.1. Design and Procedure

This study relied on classroom ethnography to collect the required data. The data were gathered through audiorecording. The researcher personally participated in 12 English classes in private institutions in early 2015. To accumulate more natural samples and avoid intervening variables, a cellphone was used instead of a camcorder. Indeed, in order not to give the goal of the study away, the researcher joined classes as a teacher who aimed at receiving some teaching experiences, not as a researcher.

The process of collecting the required data lasted for over a month. Following the collection of the required data, these researchers transcribed the audio-recorded samples. Then, two judges rated the transcribed samples on the basis of the predefined criteria. To guarantee the reliability of rating process, inter-rater reliability was run.

3.2. Participants

The participants of this study were composed of 12 EFL teachers teaching in private language institutes in Ilam, Iran. This sample consisted of 6 males and 6 females with the age range of 28 to 43. Out of sample, 4 teachers had B.A. and 8 held M.A. and their length of teaching experience varied between 2 to 21 years. Further, the courses they were teaching included beginner and intermediate levels.

3.3. Instruments

Exploring how frequently subjects use formulae and creative utterances, as the major thrust of the current study, the researchers made an attempt to provide a checklist. The final checklist came after reviewing some criteria proposed by Myles et al. (1998) and a group of elements presented in a framework by Van Lancker-Sidtis (2004). According to this checklist, the formulaic speech was composed of idioms, proverbs, collocations, slangs, pause fillers, serial speech, clichés, song lyric/poems/literature(memorized chunks), conventional expressions, expletives, repetition of sentences, repetition of words, indirect requests, and code-switching (See Appendix A for the checklist). To avoid any misunderstanding, some of the categories are defined here. Clishes refers to a word or expression which has lost its originality or effectiveness because it has been used too often. Conventional expressions are fixed expressions normally used in formal situations, acquaintances or other similar situations (example: Nice to meet you). By definition, an expletive is a word, especially an offensive word, that you use when you are

angry or in pain (Oxford advanced American Dictionary, 2011). And, serial speech deals with overlearned speech involving a series of words such as counting of days of the week (See Van Lancker, 2004).

4. Results

As previously mentioned, this study was conducted with the aim of evaluating the dual process (in terms of formulaic and creative dimensions) in the speech of Iranian EFL teachers. To illustrate what portion of the Iranian EFL teachers' speech was due to formulaic or creative use of language, a pie chart was provided. As Figure 1 shows, a high proportion of the speech production of Iranian EFL teachers was formed from formulae (78.13%), and only 21.87% was the result of creative speech.
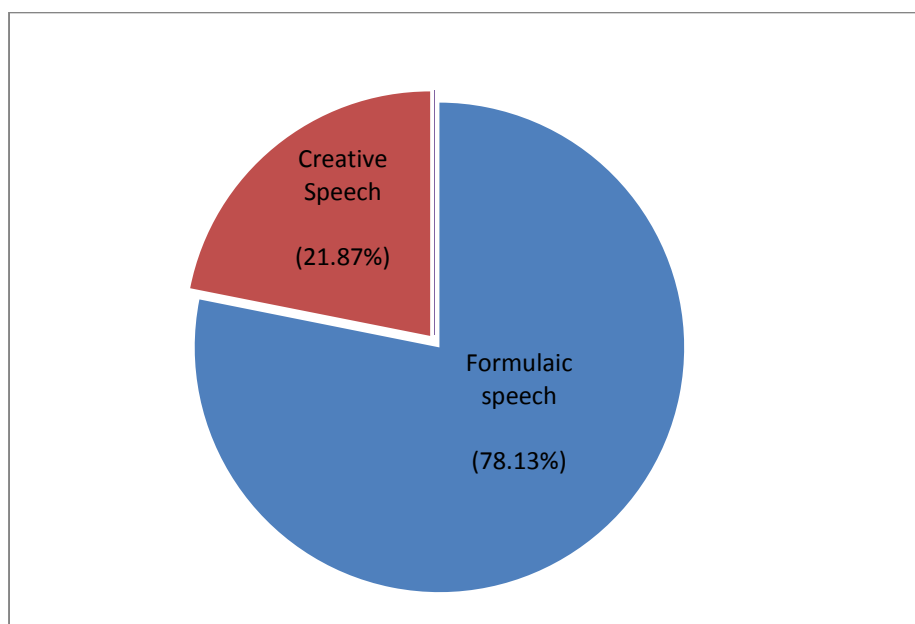
Figure 1. Pattern of Distribution of Iranian EFL Teachers' Speech

To provide an answer to the second question of this inquiry, the share of each of the categories under formulaic speech was computed. As Figure 2 illustrates, the most portion of the Iranian EFL teachers' speech was occupied by the repetition of words which hits 42.29%. Repetition of sentences (18.74%), code-switching (16.49%), pause fillers (13.12%), collocations (6.80%), idioms (1.28%), conversational expressions (0.75%), serial speech (0.43%) and slang and clichés (0.05%) accounted for the rest of formulaic use of language in the participants'

speech, respectively. Additionally, no application of using proverbs, indirect requests, memorized chunks, and expletives was reported.
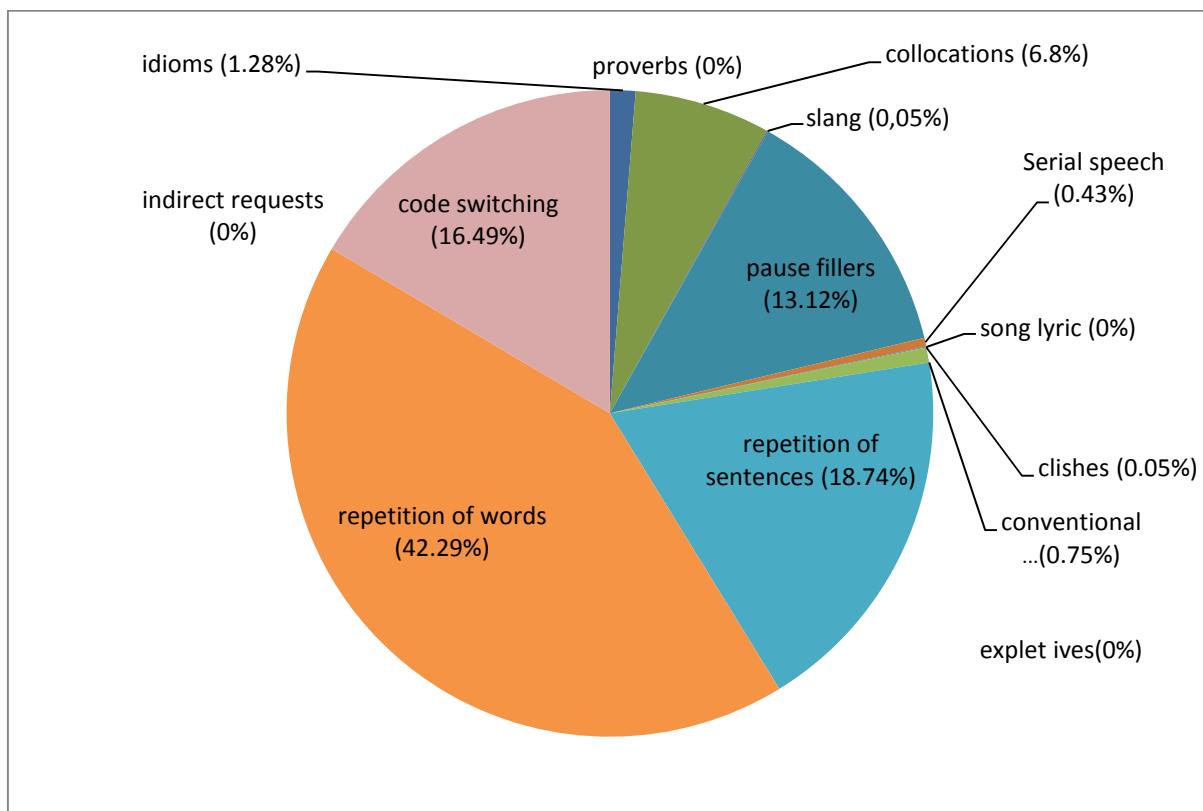
Figure 2. Pattern of Distribution of Categories Included in Formulaic Speech of Iranian EFL Teachers

As mentioned before, well-formedness is a feature which is used to distinguish formulaic from creative speech. Actually, structural errors are rarely seen in formulaic speech in comparison with the creative use of language. To answer the last question in this study, the nature of the distribution of correct and incorrect sentences in the participant's creative speech was computed and the result is shown in Figure 3. As observable from Figure 3, 68.83% of Iranian EFL teachers' creative speech was uttered with no grammatical errors while 31.17% of their speech was found to carry incorrect grammatical structures.
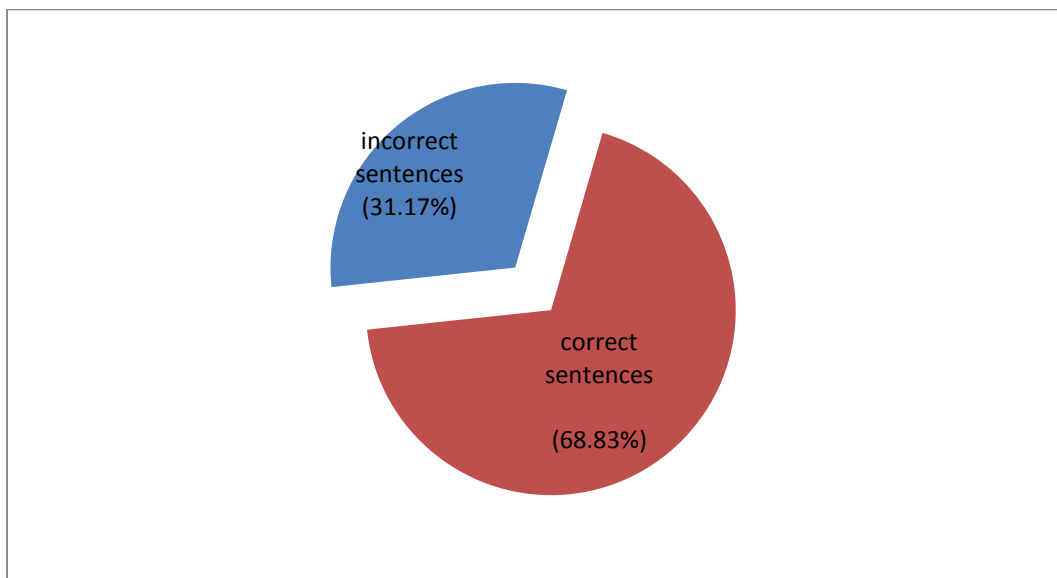
Figure 3. Pattern of Correct and Incorrect Creative Speech of Iranian EFL Teachers

In a nutshell, the results of this study showed that a considerable share of Iranian EFL teachers' speech was composed of formulae (roughly 79 %) while about 22 % of their speech was formed by creative speech. Further, with regard to the nature of distribution of components under formulaic speech, the study exhibited repetition of words (42.29 %) and slang and clichés (0.05%) as respectively the most and the least used categories applied by the participants. Finally, as to the pattern of sentences in the participants' creative speech, the study demonstrated that approximately 69 % of their speech was made up of correct sentences and the rest was found to comprise incorrect sentences (31.17 %).

5. Discussion

As put forth previously, formulaic speech accounted for the most part of Iranian EFL teachers' speech (78.13%). And the rest (21.87%) was the creative use of language on the part of the participants. The general result of this study is in line with Erman and Warren's (2000) inquiry. Analyzing the speech of English language users, they found out that formulaic language hold more than half portion of speech production hitting 58.6%. Indeed, Altenberg (1998) pointed out that formulaic language might make up 80% of the language of an adult native speaker. However, the result of this study diverges from Van Lancker-Sidtis and Rallon's (2004). They found that just 25% of the analyzed speech of non-native speakers was made up of formulaic utterances. The incongruence existing between the results of this study and some studies

conducted on the same aspect suggests that this could be due to different criteria researchers have applied in appraising formulaic speech of their samples. Another point to account for Iranian EFL teachers' considerable application of formulaic speech in comparison to creative one is likely to reside in the fact that these teachers are still of low levels of proficiency, hence relying excessively on formulae when they speak English.

According to Figure 2 (See previous section) which was provided to answer the second question, the rate of each category under formulaic speech was calculated. As a result, the first most frequent category used by Iranian EFL teachers was shown to be repetition of the words (42.29%). This finding can suggest that the shortage of word knowledge was most likely the reason why the participants were repeating the same words several times which sometimes became so boring for the learners. In some case the teachers might have used too much repetition to simplify their speech and this way make it more intelligible for the learners. Repetition of the same structures proved to be the second frequently used category in the speech of the participants (18.74%). For instance one of the teachers asked students to paraphrase a story. She said, "tell the story once more again." But the students were unable to understand what the teacher meant. However, the difficulty in understanding the meaning arose when the teacher tried to make it clear for students through repeating the same sentence. It might have resulted from the teacher's inability to provide learners with alternative sentences to make them understand.

Code-switching phenomenon was the third frequent category which made up 16.49 % of the formulaic language used by the teachers. The examples *"we should protect ourselves in front of disasters"* or *"we have a guest today. We should "aberodari"* (the teacher said "aberodari" instead of "saving one's face")" clearly illustrate this phenomenon in the speech of the participants. It shows that the teacher might have had no target equivalent for the word *"aberodari"*. However, code-switching can also occur around creative speech when students ask for more explanation and obligatory occasion for creative use of language is created. The examples can be *"they have hotdog in the menu or they have i don't know L1"* Or *"no, before reading i mean a "help note" L1"*.

Thus, it can be said that the participants turned to their mother tongue when no formula was available or when they were not competent enough linguistically. The next frequent category in the speech of the participants was pause fillers (13.12%). Pause fillers are the natural feature of

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daily conversation of native speakers. However, non-native speakers are more likely to use many more fillers in comparison with native ones (Erten, 2014). The reason behind this finding could be the fact that by resorting to fillers, non-native speakers intend to buy much more time to plan their speech. Low use of pause fillers by the participants could mean that too much repetition has given rise to artificial speech. In fact, a natural and creative speech calls for appropriate inclusion of pause fillers.

Moreover, collocations as uttered by the participants constituted only 6.80% out of the whole formulaic speech. In contrast to the result of this study, collocations make the biggest part in the speech of native speakers. Hill (2000) points out that 70% of native speakers' speech is the production of using collocations. Although comparing the speech of the participants of the present study with that of native speakers might be taken as a comparative fallacy, this comparison at least indicates how far the Iranian EFL teachers' speech production is from the normal speech articulated by native speakers. Indeed, the high frequency of using collocations by native speakers could be as sign of how important it is to learn and use them. In fact, the lack of sufficient knowledge of collocations might be the reason behind the poor performance of the participants in this section. Additionally, idioms are known as the important and integral part of any language that fluent speakers mostly use in their daily conversations (McDevitt, 1993). Also, native speakers are equipped with a large number of idioms (Simpson & Mendis, 2003). Yet, only 1.28% of the Iranian EFL teachers' formulaic speech was shaped by idioms. Actually, having less use of idioms, the participants might be unable to provide learners with normal or fluent speech. As observed from the collected data, transfer would occur due to the lack of their idioms' knowledge. For instance one of the students said, *"oh teacher, you are very beautiful today"*. Having no idiom at hand, the teacher replied, *"it was a big watermelon"*. Putting watermelons under someone's armpits is a Persian idiom which the teacher used instead of an English equivalent *"to play up to someone"*. Considering the place of idiomatic expressions as a segment of a natural language and that it has been highlighted by different researchers in the field, one can draw the conclusion that poor utilization of this category in the speech of the participants could be an indicator that their speech is not as natural as it needs to be. As far as other categories included in formulaic speech are concerned, the participants used less than 1% of conventional expressions (0.75%), serial speech (0.43%), cliché (0.05%), and slang (0.05%) in their speech. They even made no use of proverbs, indirect requests, expletives, and song lyric/

poems/literature (memorized chunks). Although many researchers in the field have accentuated the use of categories including idioms, proverbs, expletive, cliché, slang, saying, and other types of collocations (Alexander, 1978; Cermak, 1994; Cutting & Bock, 1997; Gibbs, 1994; Tannen, 1989; Taylor, 1931;Van Lancker, 1975), the result of the present inquiry pointed out that those categories had a very minor share in the speech of Iranian EFL teachers. In fact, formulae in the speech of Iranian EFL teachers were distributed quite differently from native speakers' speech.

As mentioned before, grammatical errors mostly occur around creative use of language. For instance in a case study which was conducted by Wanger-Gough(1975), his subject was able to say *"my name is Homer"* correctly because it was learned as the memorized chunks. However,introducing his friend, he said *"he Fred"* based on his grammatical Knowledge. Wanger-Gough's (1975) result goes in line with that of the current investigation. The findings of this study also revealed that one third of the participant's creative speech included wrong grammatical structures. The examples *"just foreign countries has middle name?", "do you know what does 'be verbs' mean?", or "you change to your"* indicate this fact. Thus, based on this finding, Iranian EFL teachers are demanded to pay more serious attention to improving their grammatical knowledge so as to shun any possible errors in their creative speech.

6. Conclusion

This study sought to assess what pattern of formulaic and creative use of language Iranian EFL teachers presents in their speech. As far as the nature of the formulaic and creative speech are concerned, the Iranian EFL teachers made use of formulaic speech more frequently in comparison with creative use of language. As to the formulaic speech, it was found that the most frequent category Iranian EFL teachers used was repetition of words. Ranked based on frequency, repetition of sentences, code switching, pause fillers, collocations, idioms, conventional expressions, serial speech, clichés and slangs made up the rest of the participants' formulaic speech, respectively. Moreover, in terms of using proverbs, indirect requests, song lyric/ poems/literature (memorized chunks), and expletives no usage was reported. To explore how correctly the participants produced their creative speech, this study showed that about two thirds of the participants' creative speech was grammatically correct while almost one third of their creative speech contained grammatical errors.

Although, the findings of this study cannot be generalizable widely as the size of the population was not adequate, they could help us to pinpoint the areas the EFL teachers have serious problems with or they need to improve. Actually, what promotes natural and normal speech is the combination of formulaic and creative use of language. So, the instruction of these two kinds of speech is of great importance. Moreover, the progress in the speaking of language learners would be impossible without having knowledgeable teachers. A reference to the findings of this study made it clear that the participants of this study had a poor performance in some categories of formulaic speech. Teaching formulaic and idiomatic expression plays a significant role in language learning and mastering a language. Indeed, while learning idiomatic expressions, learners might experience difficulty understanding them because their meaning is not mostly derived from their components. So, teachers should try to enhance their knowledge of formulaic speech to be able to transfer this knowledge to their students. Further, to ameliorate excessive repetition in their speech, EFL teachers are recommended to enrich their vocabulary knowledge. Based on the findings of this study, almost one third of the teachers' creative speech was grammatically wrong although the participants mostly made use of simple sentences. So, teachers are recommended to improve their grammatical knowledge to provide learners with accurate forms of sentences.

As held true with any research study, this enquiry is not immune from shortcomings. One of the limitations of this study concerned the number of participants. Although the researcher participated in more than 12 classes, the EFL teachers' using no English, and playing jokes with students to waste the time led the researcher to ignore invalid samples, hence it led to shrinking the sample. As another obstacle, the researcher encountered restriction to participate in more classes, as some language institutes did not allow any outsider to participate in their classes. The limited number of English classes was another limitation for covering more samples. Indeed, due to the shortage of time, it was impossible for the researcher to collect samples within a wider context and the collected samples were restricted to the context of Ilam city. Pursuing the same research tradition, further attempts would cover a larger sample in a wider context. In addition, owing to the constraints, only beginner and intermediate classes were sampled by this study. It is therefore hoped that advanced levels could also be included in the future studies.

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APPENDIX

Evaluation Sheet

Teacher…..			
Gender: Age: Degree:			
Course level: Length of teaching:			
A) Criteria for evaluating formulaic speech	Frequency		Percentage
	Rater A	Rater B	
Idioms			
Proverbs			
Collocations			
Slangs			
Pause fillers			
Serial speech			

Clichés			
Song lyric/ poems/literature (memorized chunks)			
Conventional expressions			
Expletives			
Repetition of sentences			
Repetition of words			
Indirect requests			
Code-switching			
B) Creativity			
Incorrect sentences			

Using Authentic TV Series as EFL Supplementary Material: An Action Research Study

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Abstract

Many language institutes and teachers are skeptical about exploiting authentic audio-visual materials on grounds of their assumed unsuitability for learners as well as a dearth of activities and guidelines for working on them. This action research study aimed to explore EFL learners' perceptions of and responsiveness to the assignment of TV series in comparison with the assignment of conventional listening material. To this end, 20 Iranian intermediate English students took part in this study and received either conventional listening material or TV series as their assignment. The analysis of the focus group interview and written class assessments displayed how the students with the TV series were interested in and appreciated their assignment. Moreover, the comparison of the students' completed assignments indicated a significantly higher responsiveness to the assignment of TV series. It is hoped that the rationale and procedures employed in assigning and working on TV series and the practical suggestions that this study provides can pave the way for those who wish to incorporate such materials into their syllabi.

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1. Introduction

Using supplementary listening materials alongside the main course books has been widely practiced in language institutes in Iran. Most course designers and teachers find the sole assignment of the workbook that accompanies the course book insufficient for students' homework. They reasonably feel that students need more practice of and exposure to the language they are learning in a foreign language context. Subsequently, listening comprehension books and CDs have been included as supplementary materials in the syllabi of many language classes (Eftekhary & Mirzaaghaee, 2013; Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011).

Emphasis on listening has been popular in language learning classes since the 1980s when Krashen proposed his ideas about meaningful and comprehensible input (Nunan, 1999). Similarly, in Iran, although listening has yet to find its proper place in schools, it is an indispensable tool in EFL courses in language institutes. Lack of listening practice in Iranian schools can in effect be the reason why particular attention has been paid to this skill in language institutes. As a result, created and graded listening materials are widely employed by language institutes to be used inside classes or to be assigned to students for homework.

However, in the past few years, with the availability and popularity, as well as the interesting content of American motion pictures and series, some teachers have started assigning these authentic audiovisual materials to their intermediate or advanced EFL students for the same purpose. Nonetheless, making use of such authentic materials is not warmly welcomed by many other teachers for two main reasons. First, much of the opposition concerns the unsuitability of authentic audio-visual materials in terms of their language features (Ghafar Samar & Hooshmand, 2012). Very often teachers fear that these materials may be beyond learners' language abilities and contain difficult language; as a result, they shy away from using them in favor of purpose-made recordings (Bilsborough, 2009). Second, teachers consider using authentic audio-visual materials a burden since locating suitable sources for materials and creating activities and exercises take a considerable amount of time and expertise (Richards, 2001).

Thus, in this paper, I have first presented a background concerning appropriateness of using authentic audio-visual materials, and then, have investigated students' perceptions of and responsiveness to assignment of TV series compared with conventional listening materials. Through recounting my experience of assigning TV series to students, I have attempted to pave the way for any reflective teachers who seek to improve their practice and maximize students' satisfaction.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Input Authenticity

Research in the realm of authenticity of language input has been popular in the field of language learning for decades. Many scholars have advocated the usage of authentic materials primarily created for non-pedagogical purposes in language learning (Mishan, 2005; Nunan, 1999; Shea, 1995). Authentic materials here refer to any material which according to Nunan (1989) "has not been specifically produced for the purpose of language teaching" (p. 54). Nunan (1999) believes authentic listening materials contribute to bringing content to life, ultimately leading to meaningful language learning, and thus, making learning easier for students. Melvin and Stout (1987) underline the fact that authentic input helps language learners practice the skills that are required outside the classroom setting and also learn about the target culture by themselves. Rogers and Medley (1988) remind us of the objective of language learning which is to communicate effectively in the real world, proposing that for this purpose, learners have to be exposed to the language that is used for genuine communication among its speakers. This is consistent with the beliefs of scholars such as Little et al. (1989, as cited in Mishan, 2005) who speak of "bombarding" students with authentic texts in order to recreate the complete immersion conditions in which the first language is acquired.

On the other hand, some scholars like Ur (1984) and Dunkel (1991) claim the use of unedited and non-pedagogical materials is problematic and neither good nor suitable for language learners and their particular aims. Moreover, there are longstanding research and theories which legitimize modification and selection of input in accordance with students' level of language proficiency. In his input hypothesis, Krashen maintains that learners make progress toward

higher language ability when they are exposed to language input that is slightly more advanced than their current level. Krashen names this level of input "i+1", where "i" is previously acquired language competence and "+1" is the next stage of language acquisition. Following this theory, authentic input is only comprehensible for advanced enough learners.

Based on the above paragraph, it is plausible to consider listening book series such as *Tactics for Listening* (Richards, 2011) more suitable for language learners as the content of such books is carefully selected and adapted to correspond to the level of students. However, Guariento and Morley (2001) make an interesting case for comprehensibility of authentic texts by arguing "partial comprehension of text is no longer considered to be problematic since this occurs in real life" (p. 348).

2.2. Students' Motivation and Interests

Interest or motivation of learners in the type of input they are exposed to must not be neglected. Motivation provides "the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process" (*Routledge Encyclopedia*, as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p. 39). In his study, Peacock (1997) defines motivation as "interest in and enthusiasm for the materials used in class; persistence with the learning task, as indicated by levels of attention or action for an extended duration; and levels of concentration and enjoyment" (p.145). Drawing on this definition, Peacock suggests that authentic learning materials appear to be the ideal motivators.

The factor of motivation is one of the key justifications of assigning authentic audio-visual materials. Widodo and Cirocki (2015) highlight six pedagogical benefits for using videos in language classrooms, which can be summarized as below:

(1) They expose students to a wide array of spoken texts.
(2) They provide students with an opportunity to observe real people using the target language in real situations.
(3) They can serve as input for classroom discussions.
(4) They aid students' comprehension.
(5) They spark students' interest and motivation.
(6) They raise students' awareness of the target language appropriate use.

Interest is undoubtedly one of the main elements of motivation. "Students' goals and interests must be the starting point if motivation is to be high and developmental progress to occur" (Oxford & Shearin, 1994, p. 23). Casanave and Freedman (1995) assert that well-chosen films

are more interesting to many young students than are books. "They are also interesting to teachers, as lively lunch room conversations on our campus on the topic of films have demonstrated" (p. 28). Mishan (2005) indicates that films provide both implicit and explicit cultural information, as well as the affective engagement which, when balanced in language learning and enjoyment, have an enormous potential for exploitation in second and foreign language learning.

To conclude, although devised listening materials attempt to include high-interest topics and engaging activities to motivate students, authentic listening materials such as films are markedly superior when it comes to the level of engagement, interest, and motivation of learners in using them.

2.3. Empirical Studies

There have been empirical studies in the literature confirming positive results of listening to authentic materials. In his experimental study on authentic listening input, Nunan (1987, as cited in Nunan, 1999) reported students who were systematically exposed to such materials outperformed the ones who were solely exposed to non-authentic data. Similarly, in a research conducted with intermediate students, Herron and Seay (1991) discovered that learners who listened to authentic listening tapes considerably improved their listening performance, outperforming the other group whose syllabus lacked listening to authentic radio programs.

Holden (2000) stated how freshman Japanese students responded to watching two English movies per month as their assignment and keeping film review journals. He reported increased motivation and tendency of students to complete their homework, maintaining that film response journals were found to be a powerful and engaging way to present language input and improve students' listening as well as their communication skills.

In a study conducted in the context of Iran, the researchers used a series of authentic listening materials in a class of students majoring in English Translation. By collecting data through a survey, they revealed these materials helped students to enhance their English listening comprehension, listening strategies, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011).

In another article, Ghafar Samar and Hooshmand (2012) investigated input of authentic materials by means of developing and analyzing a corpus of 100,000 words for two chief genres of information and entertainment. Through this analysis, they stressed the usability of authentic audio-visual materials, advising the teachers to use movies and series in pre-intermediate and

intermediate levels due to prevalence of simple verbal interactions and simple sentences found mainly in entertainment genre, while recommending news and documentaries for advanced learners as a result of their higher structural complexity, as well as their formality and vocabulary richness.

Although the literature clearly displays that audio-visual materials can be suitable for language learners and superior in terms of students' level of engagement and interest, it seems that guidelines on and examples of working on these materials are lacking in the literature. Thus, since giving such materials to students as their homework assignment is a relatively new trend, this study attempted to address the niche in the literature and provide an example of utilizing TV series as a supplementary material. Furthermore, to present a fuller picture of the study, the students' perceptions of and responsiveness to the assignment of TV series compared with conventional listening materials were also explored and presented. The study, in fact, was mainly organized around the following question:

1. How do Iranian intermediate EFL learners perceive and respond to the assignment of TV series as homework compared with the assignment of conventional listening material?

3. Method

3.1. Action Research Model

Action research "is centered on real problems, puzzles, or challenges teachers face in their daily work. It can therefore carry immediate benefits and tangible improvements to practice" (Nunan & Bailey, 2009, p. 249). This study, having the same purpose, adopted the action research model of Susman (1983) (see figure 1). This model specifies a research cycle of five phases. A problem is identified and a potential solution is planned and implemented to address the problem. Then the data on the result of the intervention is studied and evaluated to see how successful the plan has been. The Problem is later reassessed and the cycle starts again and evolves until an adequate solution is found.
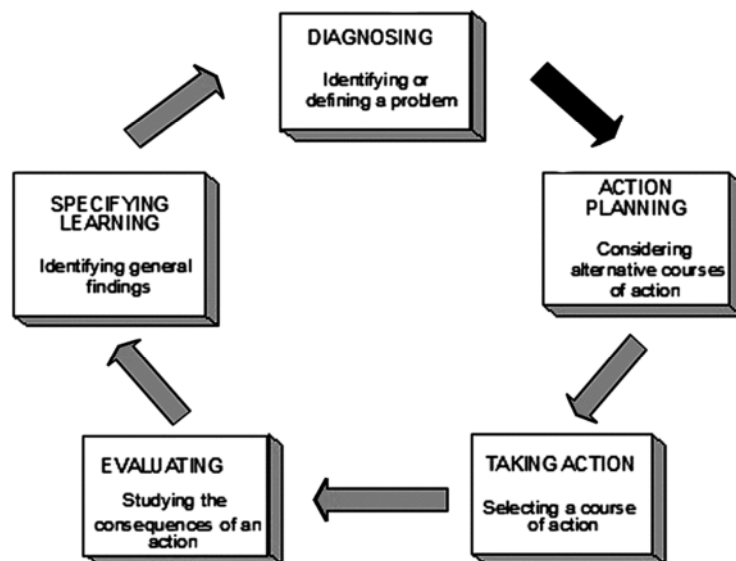
Figure 1. Susman's Action Research Model (1983)

3.2. Participants

This study was conducted with two classes of students studying English at the University of Tehran language center. The first course was comprised of 13 intermediate students of both genders, one of whom dropped out in the middle of the course and was excluded from the data. Thus, the participants of the first course were six males and six females. The second course, which started one month after the end of the first one, consisted of 10 intermediate male and female students at the start, but continued with eight students. Consequently, the two dropouts were excluded from the data, and three males and five females constituted the participants of the second course. Students in both courses were either university students or had university degrees in varying fields of study. They were all native speakers of Farsi and came from different parts of Iran (e.g. Tehran, Ahvaz, Shiraz, and Tabriz). They were considered eligible for entering the courses either by successfully passing the previous course or by taking part in the placement interview of the institute.

3.3. Materials

Book 3a of the *Top Notch* (Saslow & Ascher, 2011) series was the main book of both courses. For supplementary materials, which were the main focus of this study, *Expanding Tactics for Listening* (Richards, 2011) was utilized in the first course. In the second course, however, the students democratically chose to watch *Friends* series as their supplementary assignment, that is, *Friends* was put to the vote in order to determine whether or not it appealed to the students. Selection of a series for this course was in line with the findings of Ghafar Samar and

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Hooshmand (2012) who reported greater suitability of series for intermediate language learners, as reviewed previously.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were exploited in this study. To explore responsiveness of the students to assignments of the listening book and series, the total numbers of the submitted assignments in each course were counted and compared through a chi-square test. In addition, the students in the class with *Friends* assignment turned in a written class assessment at the end of the course which was analyzed to demonstrate their perceptions of working with TV series. Throughout the course, the teacher/researcher observed all the sessions and took field notes to record the events and processes that unfolded in the classroom. Moreover, three of the students who were accessible to the teacher/researcher and willing to take part in the study participated in an audio-taped focus group interview six months after the course and discussed their experience of watching *Friends* and the related classroom procedures in an informal gathering. The translated excerpts of the interview, which was conducted in the participants' first language to facilitate stress-free and easy expression of ideas, were drawn upon in the description of the course. The participants' names used in the study are pseudonyms to protect their real identities.

4. Research Phases

In this part, the story of my action research is presented phase by phase. The phases are described in a chronological order since in action research, according to Smith (2015), only after the completion of a first phase "are teachers guided to consider trying to resolve emerging issues by implementing and evaluating new actions, which themselves are grounded in and justified by findings from the first, exploratory phase" (p.39). Accordingly, to illustrate the line of logic behind the latter phases of the research, the findings of and reflections on each phase are presented before moving on to the description of the subsequent actions.

4.1. The Problem

In winter 2014, I had a class at the language institute of the University of Tehran with intermediate students to whom I had assigned *Expanding Tactics for Listening* as a

supplementary book according to their level. The course lasted for 10 weeks, and the classes were held once a week for three hours. According to my field notes, more than half of the students did not complete the assignments in most sessions, although I checked them every session and made it clear that they influenced their final scores. They had to do the tasks and exercises of a three-page unit, a piece of homework that mostly entailed answering to multiple choice listening comprehension questions and merely took around one hour of their time. This amount of time seemed perfectly reasonable for a whole week. I had also allotted approximately 15 minutes of each session to working on the book and checking students' answers and replying to their questions. Nonetheless, by the end of the semester, out of 96 assignments that should have been completed by the students (one for each of the 12 students for eight weeks, excluding the first and the last ones), only 46 assignments had been completed, which made up less than half of the total number (47.91%). Even though the students' excuse for not completing their assignments was for the most part being busy, it occurred to me that if they had been sufficiently interested in their assignment, they would have spared some time for doing it.

4.2. Planning and Taking Action

I decided to pay special attention to students' interest in the next semester. Since the students already had a main course book to work on, the supplementary material would have to be something absorbing to keep them motivated enough to devote some time to it. Drawing upon the related literature and my personal experience as a language learner, I decided that authentic audio-visual materials could best serve the purpose of motivating learners.

My spring class was with intermediate students at the same institute. According to Ghafar Samar and Hooshmand (2012), movies and series are the most suitable authentic listening materials for pre-intermediate and intermediate levels. However, they recommend using series for self-study purposes due to the increased probability of repetition of items in them which promotes incidental vocabulary learning. It is not just the vocabulary items that are repeated in series; since the main characters are the same in different episodes, learners gradually get accustomed to the rate of speech, tone, body language, and mentality of each character of the authentic materials.

Although having the idea of working on a TV series in mind, I decided to put it to the vote to ascertain if it interests the students: negotiation of materials guarantees maximum learner engagement, enhances their motivation, and develops their sense of responsibility and autonomy

(Sadeghi, 2008). In the first session of the class, I wrote the names of commonly used supplementary materials on the board in addition to series and asked the students to select one of them as their supplementary material. Not surprisingly, seven out of the eight students of the class chose the series and we chose them as the supplementary material of our course democratically. The following extracts from the interview shows how my students thought about selecting the series democratically:

> Well, I think voting was the best possible method (Mahsa).
>
> I think the fact that the teacher made having a supplementary material compulsory but let us select the material that we liked the most among various options was really good and different (Fereshteh).

With a short discussion with the students, especially those who were already familiar with American TV series, we selected *Friends* as our material. Similar to most other situation comedies, the noise level is low, the speech is clear, and the daily life of the characters is the central situation in *Friends*, all of which makes it a wise choice for language learning.

As for the type of assignment, I required the students to watch two episodes of *Friends* (each lasting around 22 minutes) every week and record at least 20 sentences which they judged to have useful and relevant language (whether it was a word, phrase, idiom, or a language function or structure). If they intended to write a sentence containing a new vocabulary item, they had to look up and copy its meaning as well. Although the students could acquire some language items solely from multiple exposures in series, I added this assignment to include learning through explicit attempt and raise their language consciousness as well. A balanced approach in which explicit learning is provided together with an appropriate context for incidental learning is what is required in a well-structured vocabulary program (DeCarrico, 2001). In addition, the minimum level for recording language used in the series was sentence to encourage learning both grammatical and lexical collocations that co-occur with vocabulary items. The students' perceptions of their experience with recording *Friends*' sentences are manifested in the following excerpts:

> It was very good, because I had watched *Friends* before, but I had never written down its sentences. When I started watching it this time, it was as if I were watching something new; I had never paid attention to some [of its] words and structures (Fereshteh).

Maybe since we had to write down the sentences, we have retained them in our memory for a longer time (Mahsa).

Another issue was whether the students could use Persian or English subtitles with the series. I banned L1 subtitles and, in effect, recommended watching the series with L2 subtitles. This decision was in line with my personal experience as a language learner and the fact that I was aware of at least two studies that supported the decision of using L2 subtitles. An Iranian study had reported that using English video programs with English subtitles enhanced verbal message and helped intermediate EFL learners improve their listening comprehension more than doing so without subtitles or with L1 subtitles (Hayati & Mohmedi, 2011). Similarly, another study had remarked how reading while listening to the same text raised students' attention and made the stories more interesting and the listening tasks easier (Chang, 2009). This has been approved in a thorough literature review of a more recent study as well, where the authors affirm that previous studies note that "subtitles are able to help EFL students learn new vocabularies, practice their listening skills, and increase their comprehension and understanding of film contents" (Ching & Tchong, 2015, p. 49).

Similar to the time allotted to supplementary material in the previous semester, I specified 15 minutes of each week to discussing *Friends* inside the classroom. Since "the quality of learning depends on the quality of use of previously unknown vocabulary during the communicative task" (Joe, as cited in Nation, 2002, p. 269), discussion tasks were provided for the students to encourage them to activate the language items used in the series, negotiate the content of the series, and share their experience of watching them with their classmates. It could usually start with the question "What happened in episode x?", and the collaborative presentation of the summary could act as a springboard for a discussion related to a specific part of the episode. As the teacher, whereas I encouraged the students to think of and raise topics for discussion based on the covered episodes themselves, I felt it incumbent on me as well to prepare a topic for each session that could engage the students in a heated conversation in case they had not picked one. For instance, in the session before which the first two episodes had been watched, I could direct students' summary to the decision made by one of the characters, *Rachel,* to leave her fiancé on the wedding day since she had suddenly realized that she did not love him, and ask the students a question such as "Do you approve of her sudden decision?"; next, I could continue to personalize

the issue by asking "Would you do the same thing if you were in her shoes?", and "Have you ever had such a sudden realization?, and if yes, what did you do afterward?".

As mentioned, in the first session we collectively decided to work on *Friends* as our supplementary material. It was the second session when I provided them with the first season of *Friends* (I had asked them to bring memory cards) and explained how to work with it.

4.3. Evaluation and Specifying Learning

In the third week, the students had watched the first two episodes of *Friends* and were ready to discuss their experience and explain the summaries. Most students reported they had enjoyed their assignment. Nonetheless, some of them felt insecure about their ability to understand the series, saying that they were not able to understand most parts of it. In giving the summaries, however, the same students proved rather successful in explaining the gist of each episode. It occurred to me that these students were paying too much attention to unknown language items and thus showing ambiguity intolerance in their learning tendencies. This assumption was supported by the analysis of these students' assignments, in which they had unduly focused on the most difficult and at times colloquial vocabulary items used in the series, and, in turn, ignored recording the already known words to activate them or learn their collocations. They had also recorded few sentences for their overall structures. The participants talked about this habit of theirs in the interview as well:

> In my first work, I had solely focused on bombastic words… Maybe I wanted to write words which were attractive to you (Arman).
> I think I was like that too. I used to only pay attention to the difficult words (Mahsa).

The other drawback of their assignments was that some of them had not provided meanings of the new vocabulary items they had recorded, a fact that made me wonder whether they had looked up these words, and if so, whether they could remember how to use them afterwards without having their definitions.

Furthermore, one of the students voiced his concern about whether watching series with their difficult language is worth spending time. What I realized in the discussion and after analyzing their assignments was that I had not given my students enough instruction about the type of language parts I expected them to focus on, and the potential benefits they could derive from working on series.

The exchange of ideas about the assignment took rather longer in this session since I intended to let the students share their first experience with watching series so that I could evaluate the payoffs and pitfalls of my action and plan for further improvements.

On the other hand, the discussion about the covered episodes subsequent to the summaries went rather smoothly and satisfactorily. Selecting the controversial subjects of the series and relating them to the personal lives of the students proved to guarantee a heated class or group discussion. As a result, I followed the same procedure for the rest of the course. The following examples illustrate some points that my students made about our classroom discussions in the interview:

> The fact that we discussed the episode in the class was really helpful. For example, we talked about monogamy … I still remember this word because we had an interesting discussion on it (Arman).
>
> We used to imagine being in their situation and considering what we would do and how we would use words and sentences in that situation had a positive effect on our learning (Fereshteh).

4.4. Further Action

On the basis of observation of students' performance, discussion of the matter with them, and evaluation of their assignments, I noticed that most students needed additional guide and scaffolding regarding the strategies they could employ to learn the most from authentic audio-visual materials. Moreover, further clarification on the rationale behind watching series as a learning activity could sway the hesitant and illustrate how it has more dimensions than sheer fun.

To this end, I decided to write a short explanation and offer it to my students instead of an oral explanation. A written text could be more elaborate and could be referred to at any time. As a self-study material, it would not take the valuable class time as well. In the text, I started with the significance of listening comprehension and continued to contributions of authentic listening materials. I then listed the advantages of watching audio-visual materials based on the previous literature. In the next section, I tried to equip learners with enough strategies and guidelines as to how to benefit most from watching TV series based on both my planned action and the problems that emerged in evaluation (see Appendix for the complete version).

Moreover, I started to provide the students with written feedback on their assignments. In addition to positive feedback on their assignments, I most often reminded them to add definition

of new words, neglect infrequent words, and shift their attention from words to larger chunks and collocations. In contrast to providing the learners with the written guide, which was a one-time event, I gave feedback on students' assignments on most of the sessions; especially the first ones when the students had yet to learn the ropes and required more scaffolding before being able to do the activity autonomously.

4.5. Final Findings and Discussion

In the winter semester, the students collectively carried out 51 assignments out of a total of 56 (one for each of the eight students for seven weeks, excluding the first two sessions in which the material was negotiated and distributed, and the last one which was the exam session). Therefore, the students with the series carried out 91.07 percent of their assignments, a proportion that, according to the result of the chi-square test, shows a highly significant (p <.01) development compared with the students with the listening book who carried out only 47.91 percent (46 out of 96) of their assignments.

In addition, the quality of students' assignments, which was far from satisfactory at first, seemed to improve after they were provided with the written guide and regular feedback. They learned to work with series more independently toward the end of semester, and were expected to be able to continue employing this strategy without any help later on. This improvement was observable in the students' works and was corroborated in the interview as well:

> In effect, the text you had given us together with the points you wrote for us on our first assignments taught us how to work with series up to the end of semester and even after that (Fereshteh).

> The text and the instructions we received made me overcome my fear of watching videos. I used to dread not comprehending its words and not understanding the movie… (Mahsa).

Inside the class, the students used to give summaries actively and collaboratively. At times, while giving summaries, the students remembered a funny or amusing part of the series and stopped to laugh at or talk about it. Many students also were observed to frequently employ the language learned from the series in giving summaries and discussions, and consequently activate the items through this activity.

One challenge to watching American situation comedies that students sometimes complained about during the course and also in the interview was the fact that they could not always

understand the jokes in the series. This is how one student talks about his struggling with the jokes in *Friends*:

> As I had also told you in class, it was really difficult for me to understand some parts. Many times the audience in *Friends* would laugh but I couldn't understand why. I would even check all words in dictionary but still couldn't get the joke…this could really get on my nerves especially in the beginning (Arman).

As Leah (2014) puts it, "culture-bound humor may be understood only by people of certain cultural background or experience". The only thing I could do was to assure students that it was normal not to understand some jokes, especially the cultural ones, as their comprehension required background knowledge of American culture.

At the end of the semester, I asked the students to write an assessment of the course and address both positive and negative aspects of it. Although I did not specifically require them to write about series assignment, six learners, out of the seven ones who submitted assessments, mentioned their experience with series and unanimously accounted it among the positive aspects of the course. They noted:

- I liked my experience in this class, we talked together a lot, we watched films and after it discussion, all of them were so great.
- Your suggestion for watching friends was great. I was forced to watch each episode 2 times, and this homework helped my listening.
- Friends prescription! I welcomed it and think it was very useful for me.
- Friends movie was the best idea for us, that was a new experience for me and thank you for this good suggestion.
- Friends series is the best assignment to progress our listening skill that I have ever done.
- Since I am watching friends in this class I feel that my listening and speaking skills are improving and it is a good point for this class.

The assessments elucidated how the students appreciated what we had done with watching series and were satisfied with their improvement. This, as well as the findings from the focus group interview, supports the body of literature that has argued for the enhancement of language learners' interest and satisfaction level through exploiting authentic audio-visual materials (Holden, 2000; Peacock, 1997; Widodo & Cirocki, 2015). Moreover, as observed by the teacher and reported by the students, the assignment of series improved students' language proficiency, especially their listening comprehension skill. As reviewed previously, other studies in the

literature have also supported the beneficial effects of authentic audio-visual materials on listening comprehension (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Holden, 2000; Widodo & Cirocki, 2015). Nevertheless, unlike the present study, other studies supporting the use of authentic audio-visual materials have predominantly reported studies on movies rather than series.

5. Conclusion

I started to assign series to my students based on an unpromising experience with listening books. My winter course students showed apathy toward their supplementary listening material; they did not show genuine interest while working on it inside the classroom and failed to hand in more than half of their assignments. With TV series, however, my spring course students showed greater interest and motivation in both quantitative and qualitative data. As revealed through the number of students' completed assignments and their statements in the written class assessment and the focus group interview, the findings of this study indicated that the students had positive perceptions about the assignment of TV series as supplementary material and were highly responsive to it.

Although action researchers initially seek local understanding and hope to improve the quality of their own practice (Nunan & Bailey, 2009), their practice can indeed have implications for others. The principal objective of this study was to find and present a successful way of working with TV series from which students can derive the most benefit. This has been done in this study by drawing upon personal experience, the previous literature, and the emerged problems of the actual practice with students. In short, this study suggests the following points about employing TV series in a language class:

- ✓ Students usually appreciate and respond well to TV series assignment.
- ✓ Students' interests should be taken into account when choosing a series, and democratic selection can be an effective technique for this purpose.
- ✓ Students should have a clear idea about how they can benefit from watching TV series for language improvement, and the written guide in this study (see Appendix) can be helpful in this regard.
- ✓ An assignment of recording at least 10 sentences for each episode seems to work.
- ✓ Teachers should monitor students and give them regular feedback on their assignments.

- ✓ Some time should be allotted in the class to the discussion of the covered episodes so that students can negotiate the content and language of the series with the support of their teacher.
- ✓ Selecting the controversial subjects of the series and relating them to the lives of the students can trigger a heated discussion where students can activate the language items used in the series.

It is hoped that the reported actions and the guidelines for working on series can be employed by any language institutes or teachers who wish to incorporate authentic audio-visual materials into their syllabi.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix

Watching TV Series to Learn English

The significance of listening comprehension in second or foreign language learning can hardly be overestimated as it plays a substantial role in the development of other language skills and components. Through reception, we learn and internalize linguistic information without which we are unable to produce language (Brown, 2007). Making initial contact with a language and its culture is also made possible through listening.

Authentic listening materials contribute to bringing content to life, ultimately leading to meaningful language learning, and thus, making learning easier for students. In addition, authentic input helps language learners practice skills that are required outside the classroom setting and also learn about target culture by themselves.

Here I have listed some advantages of using authentic films in L2 instruction (Stempleski, 1994):

- Enjoyable and entertaining
- Increase learners' interest
- Learners control material, level of input, length of viewing session
- Inherently more memorable than listening tapes or 'educational' videos
- A springboard to conversations about 'real-life' topics and shared experience
- Context provokes emotional response, promotes listener involvement
- Not intended to elicit specific responses or 'the answer', thus removing pressure to 'get it right'
- learners are encouraged to find and watch films which they find personally relevant, worthwhile and comprehensible

How to Use Series to Learn English?

- **Use English subtitles**: Reading subtitles does improve one's listening skills. You are able to hear the words and phrases and read them simultaneously to make the connection between

how it's written and how it's said. After some time, you can begin to rely less on the subtitles and look at them sparingly.

- **Pause and repeat some sentences:** Just like what we do in the class, try to imitate the sentence just like it is uttered by the speaker. You can also try saying it together with the movie character**.**

- **It's not just the language:** You can learn a lot about target language culture, their communication strategies, facial expressions, body language, etc.

- **There is no need to know every word or structure:** Try to get the gist. It's OK to guess or even ignore some parts. You don't have to stop and look up every word. The best time to learn a word (or a words' collocation, a phrase, an idiom, etc.) is when it is really interesting to you or when you have heard it several times and still don't know its meaning.

- **Don't overlook the already known words:** Notice how they are used in a sentence, what words co-occur with them, in what context they are used, and whether you can use them in your own speaking or writing.

- **Record the sentence (or even the context) of the intended material:** Provide the definition if it contains a new vocabulary item. You can also copy extra examples from a dictionary. For instance:

    Friends, season 1, episode 1:

Rachel is talking <u>on</u> the phone. (I know the meaning of the sentence. I just want to remember the preposition.)

    Daddy I can't <u>marry him</u>. (I'm learning the structure. I used to say marry with someone.)

    Please don't <u>spoil</u> all this fun. (A new word)

    Definition: to destroy or reduce the pleasure, interest or beauty of something.

    Dictionary example: *He tried not to let the bad news spoil his evening.*

- **Don't forget to review and use whatever you have recorded:** Review the recorded items regularly and seize every opportunity to use them in your speaking or writing, otherwise it would be likely that you forget them in the long run.

Reading between the Lines: Inferential Comprehension of Iranian EFL Learners in Expository and Narrative Texts

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate inferential level of reading comprehension of narrative and expository texts in Iranian EFL learners. The elicitation instruments were four

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expository texts and four narrative ones. One hundred eighty upper-intermediate EFL learners were assigned the reading passages, having similar readability measures, each followed by three inferential multiple-choice items. A number of paired-samples *t*-tests were run to provide answer to the research question of this study. The results indicated that there was no significant difference between the two text types regarding inferential comprehension. Implications were also made for L2 materials developers, language teachers, and language testers regarding the consideration of text typical features in their practice.

1. Introduction

In the realm of research on reading comprehension, much attention has been paid to the impact of reader characteristics on discourse processing (e.g., working memory, reading ability, need for cognition, background knowledge, etc.), factors which are important in specifying the construct of reading. However, less research is conducted on the impact of the features of text. Therefore, to decipher the underlying mechanisms of L2 reading comprehension, numerous researchers (Camiciottoli, 2003; Carrell, 1985; Geva, 1992; Marzban & Seifi, 2013) have emphasized the need to study the differential contribution of text-based characteristics such as genre, text structure, rhetorical features, and textual markers.

Texts are different inasmuch as they fulfill different functions (Cope & Kalantis, 1993). They are typically of two basic types: expository and narrative. Expository texts are mainly aimed at informing or describing. Authors who write expository texts explore the topic to attain information. On the other hand, the primary objective of a narrative text is to tell a story. A narrative text has beginning, middle and ending, characters, plot or conflict, and setting (Marzban & Seifi, 2013). Narration "recounts events in sequence" whereas exposition "explains, classifies, makes clear ideas, terms, or propositions" (Smith, 2003, p. 40). Based on a rational model of text type, text characteristics are hypothesized to differ between narrative and expository text types, and this can determine whether such factors influence reader's comprehension of text or not (Landers, 2010). The possible characteristics identified in this regard include content, word frequency, causality, and structure, or organization.

Besides text type, reading comprehension can also be envisaged from an assessment-oriented perspective. In his discussion on variables affecting reading and reading assessment, Alderson (2000) categorizes them as the following: a) reader variable (background and general knowledge, motivation, and language proficiency), b) text variable (genre and text-type, lexical density, and topic), and c) task variable (language and types of questions). Although these factors have often been studied in isolation, it is their interactions and interdependencies that yield true insight into naturalistic text comprehension (Rapp & van den Broek, 2005). In the current investigation, language proficiency, types of questions, and background knowledge relevant to the topic of the text, as extraneous variables, were, to the extent possible, controlled to minimize their potential interfering effect. The specific aim this study follows was the investigation of the inferential level of L2 reading comprehension of narrative and expository texts in Iranian EFL learners.

In the context of the present research, i.e. the Iranian EFL context, systematic English learning in general and developing L2 reading in particular are commonly limited to the formal settings of private language institutes and university classes due to the fact that learners virtually do not enjoy the chance of being exposed to the target language outside classes in real life situations. Within this context, reading comprehension tests are usually constructed by groups of language teachers/testers who adopt them mostly from standard proficiency tests such as TOEFL, i.e. test of English as a Foreign Language. Keeping this in mind, the researchers used as instrument a selection of TOEFL reading comprehension narrative and expository passages each followed by inferential multiple-choice items.

2. Literature Review

A bulky volume of research on text type examines comprehension and processing of expository and narrative texts (Alderson, 2000); and much of this research has been conducted specifically on reading comprehension. Comprehension has been shown to vary between different text types (Best, Floyd, & McNamara, 2008; Diakidoy, Stylianou, Karefillidou, & Papageorgiou, 2005; Tun, 1989; Weaver & Bryant, 1995). For example, Weaver and Bryant (1995) assigned participants to read either four expository passages or four narrative ones. The passages were screened on computer and reading was self-paced. After completing the passages, the participants answered a series of questions designed to measure their comprehension.

Analysis showed that the participants had greater comprehension scores after reading the narrative texts than after reading the expository texts.

Previous research has generally identified content, word frequency, causality, and structure as the possible characteristics differing between expository and narrative text types (Landers, 2010). For example, McCormick (2007) listed some factors that make expository texts difficult to read, namely, text structure, new information, specialized vocabulary, readability level of the text, abstract concepts, and the expectation that information should be retained by the reader.

Content can be defined as the topic and all information contained within a text, and has been hypothesized to vary between text types. Narrative texts are thought to focus more on topics that may be of general interest. In contrast, expository texts are thought to contain information that may appeal to only a subset of readers (Diakidoy et al., 2005; Gardner, 2004). The content of narrative texts has also been described as more familiar than that of expository texts (Gardner, 2004). Most learners find narratives more familiar as they are likely to be exposed to these texts beginning at a young age (Diakidoy et al, 2005; Hall, Sabey, & McClellan, 2005). More specifically, young readers typically possess background knowledge required for narrative comprehension (Graesser, McNamara, & Louwerse, 2003).

The second factor, word frequency, refers to an estimate of how often a word appears in everyday usage. The ability to recognize words in a text is an essential part of the reading process, and word frequency is thought to be a key factor in word recognition (Gough, 1984). It has been suggested that full understanding of a text can only occur when a reader is familiar with 95% of the words in the text (Gardner, 2004). In light of this, then, expository texts are at a disadvantage as they are hypothesized to contain more low frequency, topic-specific vocabulary than narratives, which are thought to contain more high frequency words. This makes sense when we consider that most narratives are believed to concentrate on more common topics or authentic scenarios, which would likely use words that are frequently found in everyday life (Gardner, 2004). They are often written in a language that is closer to oral language (Snow, 2010).

Causality, as the third factor in differentiating text types, refers to the relationship between events in a text. Texts that are highly causal have a clear chain of events, making it easy to determine the relationship between different events or ideas in a text. Causality has been hypothesized to differ between different text types. Narratives are thought to be highly causal.

That is, it is easier to determine what events influence or cause other events in a narrative text. Many narrative texts are based on a goal or a problem that needs to be solved by the main character. Therefore, each event within the story can often be viewed as related to that initial goal or problem. This allows readers to easily create causal links between different events in the text, as it is apparent how one event relates to another within the context of the goal (Bower & Morrow, 1990). In expository texts, on the other hand, these causal relationships are thought to be more difficult to determine (Zabrucky & Moore, 1999). Expository texts have causal connections too, but these are more difficult for a reader to detect. One potential reason for this is because expository texts may present causal relationships that readers do not have enough background knowledge for (Tapiero, van den Broek, & Quintana, 2002).

The last factor is text structure, which can be defined as the elements within a text and their organization. An understanding of text structure can help identify the common elements of a text, how these elements go together, and what constitutes a typical organization of a specific text type (Rumelhart, 1980). There is convincing evidence that knowledge of text organization influences the comprehension of the text. Competent readers with the knowledge of text structure are able to construct mental models of the main ideas, as well as learn and remember the information presented in the text (Meyer, Brandt, & Bluth, 1980). In addition, knowledge of text structure enables the readers to construct more elaborate mental models of the text being read (Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983).

Narrative texts are often described as more predictable than expository texts, potentially due in part to the structural consistencies typically found in them (Landers, 2010). This predictability may also be partly accounted by the fact that most people are exposed to narratives from a very early age, starting with fairy tales and story books and moving on to the narrative texts favored in early education, whereas expository texts are typically encountered much later through school years (Diakidoy et al, 2005; Hall et al., 2005). This repeated exposure to narratives may allow readers to develop a general schema, for narratives more easily than for expository texts (Voss & Bisanz, 1985). In contrast to narratives expository texts may open with topic paragraphs that introduce the subject of the text through generalities; then proceed to explore the topic in greater depth with specific examples as the text continues (Berman & Katzenberger, 2004; Voss & Bisanz, 1985). Despite this generalization, however, many researchers have suggested that expository pieces have more varied structures that may change drastically from one text to the

next, thus making their structures less predictable (Hall et al., 2005; Voss & Bisanz, 1985). Moreover, as Stein and Trabasso (1981) maintain, in terms of structure, expository texts often contain abstract and logical relations, which can be difficult to interpret. In addition, researchers have found that the expository texts used in the classroom are often poorly written and lack a clear structure that could fail to facilitate the use of a genre appropriate schema (Hall et al., 2005).

Research has found expository texts to pose more difficulties for readers since they take longer to read and are more difficult to recall and comprehend in comparison with narrative texts (Saenz & Fuchs, 2002; Zabrucky & Moore, 1999). Moreover, research has proved that the strength of the relationship between reading comprehension and specific predictors depends on text type. Specifically, decoding has been shown to correlate more strongly with narrative reading comprehension than with expository reading comprehension, whereas prior knowledge has been shown to exhibit the reverse pattern (Best et al., 2008). Alvermann, Hynd, and Qian (1995) found that expository texts elicited better performance on short answer questions designed to test memory for text content. Roller and Schreiner (1985), however, found no differences between narrative and expository texts on performance on a multiple choice test or on the quality of summaries written after comprehension.

In a more recent study, Şahin (2013) investigated the effect of narrative and informative text types on reading comprehension levels of 4th and 5th grade students. The results of the study indicated that students understand narrative texts more conveniently than informative texts. Furthermore, it was found that there is a significant difference, in favor of female students, between the narrative texts reading comprehension marks of male and female students for all tests.

In another research, Marzban & Seifi (2013) examined the effect of text structure instruction on reading comprehension of narrative and expository texts. Eighty students were assigned to four groups. EG1 and CG1 were given a narrative pretest. Subsequently, EG1 received instruction of narrative structures and CG1 were exposed to example of narrative text devoid instruction. After five sessions the posttests were given. EG2 and CG2 participated in an expository pretest. The EG1 received the instruction of expository structure in five sessions but control group did not receive any instruction. Then expository posttests were given. The results indicated that the instruction of narrative structure affected reading comprehension ability of

learners. However, the expository text structure did not significantly affect reading comprehension ability of the students.

2.1. Research on Levels of Reading Comprehension

The idea that there are different levels of reading comprehension, each requiring the reader to interact with the text in varying levels, is not unprecedented (Herber, 1970; McCormick, 1992; Pearson & Johnson, 1978; Pettit & Cockriel, 1974). Its prevalence is evidenced by the way in which the theory of levels of comprehension underpins many recommended teaching procedures and educational materials over the last five decades (Carnine, Silbert, Kame'enui & Tarver, 2010; Herber, 1970; Lapp & Flood, 1983; Vacca et al., 2009). This theory proposes a continuum of reading comprehension skills in which a student must first proficiently engage in tasks of literal comprehension before engaging in deeper interactions with the text, such as those prompted by inferential and evaluative understanding (Herber, 1970).

Literal comprehension, or reading on the lines, requires that a student be able to extract information that is explicitly stated in a passage (Carnine et al., 2010). This level of understanding is dependent upon students' word-level processing skills, or their ability to accurately identify individual words and understand the meaning created by the combination of words into propositions and sentences (Perfetti, Landi, & Oakhill, 2005).

In inferential comprehension, or reading between the lines, on the other hand, readers go beyond the literal meaning of the text to understand what the text implies through knowledge-driven processes such as synthesizing, generalizing, summarizing, and extrapolating; consequently, inferencing, by its very nature, involves reasoning beyond the text (Alptekin, 2006). Whereas in literal understanding readers pay attention to explicitly stated information and rely heavily on their linguistic resources, they tend to reduce their dependence on the text in inferential comprehension, and relate textual content to their reasoning and pragmatic knowledge in order to be able to form a coherent mental representation of the text subject. Hence, it can be said that the richer and deeper inference making becomes, the less reliance on the text the reader will have (Alptekin, 2006). At this stage, the reader is required to manipulate information in the text to search for relationships among the main idea and details and to use that information to interpret and draw conclusions about the author's intended meaning (Vacca et al., 2009), fill in omitted details, and/or elaborate upon what they have read (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991).

While making inferences, the reader goes through some interaction with the text and, thereby, constructs a situation model of the text in his mind which is more complex than the text base, which is a simple representation of the propositions of the text, or a literal understanding of each word as it relates to those around it in the text (Perfetti, 1999). This requires him/her to be able to (a) comprehend the text written on the page (literal understanding), (b) interpret meanings, arguments, or claims that are presented across the text (inferential understanding), and (c) apply his/her own background knowledge and prior experience to the text to facilitate or enhance understanding (Basaraba, Yovanoff, Alonzo, & Tindal, 2013). As Bhaya Nair (2003) maintains, the study of inference making and inference triggering raises the essential task of modeling aspects of the interaction between situational discourse and background knowledge when comprehending a narrative.

Much of the research conducted thus far on reading comprehension has particularly examined the role of inferences because they are at the ''heart of the comprehension process'' (Dole et al., 1991). Readers are required to make different types of inferences, such as text-based inferences (also known as text-connecting inferences) and knowledge based (or gap-filling) inferences to understand the text. Text-based, or causal inferences, for example, are those that are required to establish coherence within a text (Perfetti, 1999; Perfetti et al., 2005). The type of coherence the reader needs to establish may be local coherence, or cohesion between elements, constituents, and references of adjacent clauses, or global coherence, which can be seen as cohesion between larger chunks of information within a text. Text-based inferences, especially those required to establish local coherence, are those that frequently are needed to keep the representation of the text base minimally coherent (Perfetti, 1999). More complex inferences, such as knowledge-based inferences that draw on a reader's knowledge to help represent and understand the relationships between persons or events described in the text (Kintsch & Rawson, 2005; Oakhill & Cain, 2007), are also needed for understanding.

McCormick (1992) observed statistically significant differences in the amount of literal and inferential comprehension of fifth grade struggling readers. Particularly, while the subjects were able to answer, on average, 70% of literal questions correctly, they were able to answer merely 61 % of inferential questions correctly proving that these questions were more challenging for them.

Alptekin (2006) explored the role of culturally familiar background knowledge in inferential and literal comprehension in L2 reading among Turkish EFL university students. The participants were randomly divided into two groups, one being exposed to the original text and the other to a "nativized" version, textually and contextually modified to conform to the learners' own culture. Having read the story, the participants answered multiple-choice comprehension items aimed at tapping inferential and literal comprehension separately across the two versions of the story. The results demonstrated that the nativization of a short story from the target language culture facilitated L2 readers' inferential comprehension significantly, but did not prove influential on their literal understanding.

Alptekin and Ercetin (2011) examined the effects of working memory capacity and content familiarity on literal and inferential comprehension in L2 reading among Turkish university students with an advanced English proficiency level. They read either the original of an American short story or the "nativized" version. Then they responded multiple-choice comprehension items aiming to check literal and inferential comprehension. The results showed that working memory capacity and content familiarity had independent and additive effects on inferential understanding. The effects on literal comprehension were negligible.

As elucidated above, most of the studies working on comprehension have not considered the inferential level of comprehension, in their research to examine the difference between students' performance in more details in different text types. Nor has the research on reading comprehension levels taken text typical features into consideration.

Due to the inconsistency of the findings from different studies regarding the effect of text type on reading comprehension as well as the lack of elaboration on the concept of comprehension in such research, the authors were interested in examining the inferential level of comprehension of narrative and expository texts in Iranian EFL learners. Thus, the focus of the present study was on the inferential level of reading comprehension in four narrative texts as well as in four expository ones. The following research question guided this study:

1. Is there any difference between expository and narrative text type regarding inferential reading comprehension in Iranian EFL learners?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants of the present study were a group of 190 EFL learners, 74 male and 116 female, aged between 18 and 25, selected from among 300 bachelor's English major students studying in universities of Isfahan, Iran, through the Oxford Placement Test (OPT), i.e. a standardized English proficiency test, to correspond to upper-intermediate level of English proficiency.

3.2. Instruments

The following instruments were used in this study. First, the OPT (2004), used for the selection of the participants. Second, four narrative and four expository texts, all having similar level of difficulty calculated by the readability formula. Three indices of the Coh-Metrix 3.0 Readability Formula (2012) were used: a. the Coh-Metrix L2 Reading Index, which is calculated using three linguistic indices reported by the Coh-Metrix tool. These three indices are CELEX Word Frequency (logarithm mean for content words), Sentence Syntax Similarity (sentence to sentence adjacent mean), and Content Word Overlap (proportional adjacent sentences unweighted). This index was 13.431, 11.41, 15.173, and 10.577 for the four narrative texts, and 12.613, 11.292, 14.535, and 10.372 for the four expository ones; b. connectives incidence, which was 117.949, 122.093, 115.928, and 120 for the four narrative texts, and 89.457, 84.507, 80.214, and 88.112 for the four expository ones, respectively; and c. narrativity percentile, which was 54.38, 51.6, 68.08, and 51.6 for the four narrative texts, and 11.9, 7.35, 18.77, and 6.43 for the four expository ones, respectively. The texts were selected from ETS TOEFL Reading Collection. Each text was followed by three inferential multiple-choice items. It is noteworthy that prior to the actual data collection, the elicitation instrument was validated in a pilot phase through administration to a group of 30 similar Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners.

3.3. Procedure

The OPT test was employed to select the participants according to their proficiency in English. 300 male and female students were given the test, and 190 of them attained between 60 and 80 percent of the total score who were chosen to participate in the study. They were asked to read the eight texts, do the multiple-choice items on the texts, and answer one last item demanding them to indicate how much topic-related background knowledge, i.e. the reader's pre-existing knowledge related to the text content, they had already had on each text; they had to

specify whether they had little, moderate, or much background knowledge on each text; those who ticked much background knowledge, 10 participants, were eliminated from the study to minimize the possible interference of this extraneous variable. The administration of the tests was done in two test sessions: each session four texts, two narrative and two expository, were administered. The sessions were not under time constraint in order to combat stress and anxiety. Subsequently, the performance of the participants on the multiple-choice items were statistically analyzed through paired-samples *t*-test to provide answers to the research question of the study.

4. Results

The objective of the study was to investigate whether there is any meaningful difference between expository and narrative text type in the inferential level of EFL reading comprehension. The descriptive and comparative results regarding the research question of the study are presented below.

The descriptive results of the comparison of the two text types regarding inferential comprehension are demonstrated in Table 1 below. The measures include minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation. As can be observed in the table, the two text types of narration and exposition are similar in these measures, providing a fair basis for their juxtaposition.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Inferential Items in Expository and Narrative Texts

Text type	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.
Expository	180	1.00	10.00	5.22	2.29
Narrative	180	1.00	11.00	5.39	2.37

The comparative results of data analysis are summarized in Table 2. According to this table, the mean difference of correct answers in the expository (M=5.22, SD=2.29) and narrative texts (M=5.39, SD=2.37) (Table 3) was -0.16 with a standard deviation of 2.29. In order to compare inferential comprehension in the expository texts with that in the narrative ones, a paired-samples t-test was run. The results of this test indicated that there was no significant difference between the two text types (t=-0.852, df=179, p>0.05).

Table 2

Paired-Samples t-test in Comparison of Inferential Items between Expository and Narrative Texts

	Mean difference	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig.
Expository Narrative	-.16	2.28	.19	-.852	179	.395

5. Discussion

The study attempted to delve into the relationship between text type and inferential level of reading comprehension in Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners. The study demonstrated that regarding inferential comprehension, there was no significant difference between the two text types of narration and exposition. The discussion on the findings is presented as follows.

As a response to the research question, the study compared inferential comprehension between expository and narrative texts. The data from this study indicated that, in contrast with previous literature on general reading comprehension, and specifically on literal comprehension as measured by checking the reader's ability to identify/remember details and to give summary, which demonstrated an advantage for narrative texts due to the factors mentioned (content, word frequency, causality, and structure), there was no significant difference between the two text types regarding inferential comprehension. To illustrate, Basaraba et al. (2013) suggested that without a firm knowledge of the lexicon and structures used in the text, i.e. a literal understanding of the text, it is difficult, if not impossible, to infer implicit meanings. This may imply that the stronger literal comprehension of a text is made, the better inference making will be obtained on that text. Considering this, one may expect that the general outperformance on literal items in narrative texts than in expository ones, as concluded from the previous research, should lead to outperformance on inferential items in these texts.

However, as noticed in the current study, such is not necessarily the case for inferential comprehension. Put another way, one cannot predict from the general outperformance of learners on literal items in narrative texts that the same should occur as for inferential comprehension. The reason for this inconsistency may quite rationally be rooted in the different nature of inferential comprehension in comparison with the literal counterpart. An account of such

different nature was given in the literature review above and will be touched on in the following paragraphs.

The finding may earn partial justification based on Alptekin (2006), according to whose explanation readers in inferential comprehension, as opposed to the literal counterpart, tend to relate textual content to their reasoning and pragmatic knowledge to form a coherent mental representation of the text content. In other words, the readers' dependence on the text itself decreases as inferencing becomes richer and deeper. This reduction in reliance on linguistic resources neutralizes the general potential literal outperformance of the participants on the narrative texts and, conceivably, no meaningful difference is observed between expository and narrative texts in inference making. Put another way, inferential comprehension, envisaged from this perspective, has not as much to do with text typical features, including content, word frequency, causality, and structure, as may be expected. Specifically, the facility for understanding narrative texts, due to an advantageous dependence on a generally more familiar background knowledge, may have been neutralized by the inherent reduction of dependence on the text itself in the process of inference making.

However, causality, as one of the factors in differentiating text types, may seem to have a more pronounced say in inferential comprehension. Causality refers to the relationship between events in a text, and texts which are highly causal, e.g. narratives, have a clear chain of events, making it easy to determine the relationship between different events or ideas in a text. That is, it is easier to determine what events influence or cause other events in a narrative text. This allows readers to easily create causal links between different events in the text (Bower & Morrow, 1990). In expository texts, on the other hand, these causal relationships are thought to be more difficult to determine (Zabrucky & Moore, 1999); expository texts have causal connections too, but these are more difficult for a reader to detect.

Such an advantage for narrative texts, could facilitate the process of inference making, which, according to Vacca et al. (2009), requires the reader to manipulate information in the text to search for relationships among the main idea and details and to use that information to interpret and draw conclusions about the author's intended meaning, and, based on Dole et al. (1991), fill in omitted details, and/or elaborate upon what they have read. In other words, higher causality in narrative texts could potentially render making relationships and conceptual links between the events easier. Nonetheless, as in the context of the present investigation, it seems that such a

facility could be overshadowed by the text-dependence-reduction aspect of inferential comprehension. It may also be said that the construction of a mental model of the text, which is a necessity in inference making, is by itself too complex to yield differing results between high causal texts, such as narratives, and low causal texts, like expository texts.

6. Conclusion

As discussed above, in spite of some inherent differences between expository and narrative texts, the very nature of inferential comprehension, with its reduction in dependence on the explicit/literal information of the text and its deeper conceptual demand on the reader, deemphasizes the general differences between expository and narrative texts. Consequently, and as observed in the present investigation, there is no significant difference between narrative and expository texts regarding inferential comprehension.

Regarding the findings of the study, a number of implications can be made. First and foremost, developing and selecting reading materials for different levels of instruction should not simply be a matter of examining text difficulty aspects that are based on features such as readability or interest; rather, other factors such as the type and structure of the text should also be taken into account. In this regard, materials developers can include reading tasks that are more focused on text typical features and have activities that deal with sentence relationships, inference making and supporting without engaging them in finding the meaning of all and every difficult word.

Furthermore, language teachers/testers are responsible for the selection and integration of appropriate text types, expository or narrative, when teaching and testing reading comprehension. Most of the reading practice time in class should be allocated to tasks and activities which develop an awareness of text typical characteristics in students and, thereby, help them enhance their reading skill. Moreover, more work seems necessary to be spent on inference making skills in language classrooms by teachers. All in all, understanding the effect of text type on reading could lead to more efficient teaching strategies and interventions in schools and universities, especially in EFL contexts.

No exception to other research, the present study suffers from insufficiencies and limitations. The researchers did their best to check and control all the possible extraneous variables;

however, parameters such as participants' learning styles and test taking strategies might have found their way to interfere with the results. Furthermore, due to the descriptive-empirical nature of the research, the findings could be more robust if a larger number of participants could be provided to take part in the study.

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The Relationship among Willingness to Communicate, Communication Apprehension, Introversion Tendency in Freshman and Senior Iranian EFL Students

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Abstract

The current study was an attempt to figure out any significant relationship among variables, namely freshman and senior EFL students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English, communication apprehension (CA), and their introversion tendency (IT). Ninety one Iranian EFL learners, both male and female, were the participants of this study. Three questionnaires were utilized to collect the data: Modified version of WTC questionnaire, Personal Report of CA, and Introversion Scale to measure participants' WTC, CA, and IT, respectively. The results revealed

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that, firstly, there was a significant negative relationship between the participants' WTC and their CA, that is, the less they experience CA, the more willing they will be to communicate in English. Secondly, it was surprisingly revealed that there existed a significant positive relationship between participants' WTC and IT. This means that students with higher levels of IT have higher scores on WTC and vice versa. Moreover, a Pearson correlation test showed that there was a significant negative relationship between IT and CA, that is, participants with higher levels of IT have less CA and vice versa. Furthermore, no significant difference was observed between freshman and senior students regarding the studied variables.

1. Introduction

After the introduction of "unwillingness to communicate" by Burgoon (1976), other scholars started to use the positive orientation of the term in their studies called willingness to communicate. In fact, McCroskey and Baer (1985) adapted the term and renamed it as "willingness to communicate". Furthermore, with the help of conclusion provided by McCroskey and Baer (1985), MacIntyre (1994) also asserted that both WTC and unwillingness to communicate could be considered as opposite sides of the same coin. Not long after that, the studies of interested researchers on WTC resulted in finding what hinders WTC in some individuals. For instance, communication apprehension was considered as one of the major reasons to explain why an individual might be unwilling to communicate (Roach, 1999). What is more, Beatty, McCroskey, and Heisel (1998) believed that one of the major components of CA is the introversion tendency; indeed, they concluded that introverted individuals are more likely to have high levels of CA.

WTC is generally defined as "the extent to which learners display a WTC as they tackle a second [foreign] language" (Brown, 2007, p.156). One of the earliest studies on WTC was conducted by MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, and Noels (1998). Since they believed that a high level of communicative ability does not correspond with a high WTC, MacIntyre et al. (1998) concluded that other affective factors play a role in shaping one's WTC. Many researchers (e.g., Arnold, 2007; Faridizad & Simin, 2015; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Liu & Jackson, 2008;

McCroskey, Fayer, & Richmond, 1985; Messman & Jones-Corle, 2001; Yamini, Rashidi, & Shafiei, 2012) have been trying to figure out why some learners like to interact in English in their classroom, but they actually fail to do so. The answer to this intriguing question persuades other researchers (e.g., Cao & Philp, 2006; Hashimoto, 2002; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide & Shimizu, 2004) to investigate the relationship between WTC and other variable(s). One of these variables is communication apprehension.

Communication apprehension has always been central to the study of communication avoidance (McCroskey & Daly, 1984). In Oxford Advanced English Dictionary, the term apprehension has been defined as "worry or fear that something unpleasant may happen (Oxford), and it is considered as synonymous to the term anxiety. However, McCroskey has provided us with an operational definition of apprehension, or more precisely CA, as a "broadly based anxiety related to oral communication" (p.270). He believes that both real and anticipated communication with others may cause different levels of anxiety (McCroskey, 1978). Moreover, besides the dictionaries that consider both anxiety and apprehension as synonyms, some scholars such as Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) believe that apprehension is one of the three subcategories of foreign language anxiety.

Another variable that can affect willingness to communicate is the extent to which one is introverted. Oxford Advanced English dictionary's definition of an introvert person is "a quiet person who is more interested in their own thoughts and feelings than in spending time with other people". In addition, Jung and Baynes (1921) developed a personality theory in which they suggested that every individual is either an introvert or an extravert [extrovert] person. The introvert is focused on the internal world of reflection, dreaming and vision. Thoughtful and insightful, the introvert can sometime be disinterested in joining the activities of others. In this study, just one type of these psychological traits, i.e. introversion, is considered.

Accordingly, EFL learners' willingness to communicate (WTC), degree of communication apprehension (CA), and introversion tendency (IT) inside the classrooms may have underlying relationship with each other within every individual. In other words, by conducting this research project, it was tried to find out whether or not one can analyze to some extent language learners' WTC in the classroom by finding its relation to other affective factors, i.e., the learners' IT as well as the extent to which they experience CA with regard to their year of studying at university. In fact, with today's somewhat new definition of introversion that considers the

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introverted individuals as being more reflective than shy and hesitant (Henderson, Zimbardo, & Carducci, 2010), it is worth replicating the previous research done on the relationship between these variables.

2. Literature Review

The literature review section deals with an ascending chronological overview of the previous and at the same time the most pertinent studies on variables of the study, namely WTC, CA, and IT.

2.1. Willingness to Communicate

Barraclough, Christophel, and McCroskey (1988) explored the correlations between perceptions of WTC, CA, and communication competence of college students in the United States and Australia. One hundred and ninety five learners were asked to complete three questionnaires: Self Perceived Communication Competence questionnaire (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986), Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (McCroskey, 1982), and the WTC scale (McCroskey & Richmond, 1985). The results indicated a noticeable similarity in the relationships between communication orientations in the two cultures but showed significant differences between the cultures in terms of average scores on WTC and communication competence.

MacIntyre (2007) studied WTC as one of the variables in his article. His aim was to examine the social context and its probable influence on individuals' decision by focusing on WTC. He concluded that in order for a language to survive and be used by nonnative speakers, it is necessary to generate WTC within individuals since this sense of willingness encourages the individuals to communicate in a certain language and keeps the language safe from extinction.

Liu and Jackson (2008) carried out a research study to explore the relationship between Chinese EFL learners' unwillingness to communicate and their anxiety. Their study revealed that most of the participants were willing to take part in interpersonal conversations whereas many of them were reluctant to speak in English inside the classroom. What is more, the researchers found that unwillingness to communicate and anxiety are powerful predictors for one another and also for participants' apprehension in public speaking and tests.

A study carried out by Asaoka (2011) in order to find out whether or not group dynamics via seating arrangements inside the classrooms can create a sense of WTC in learners. Twenty six students answered WTC questionnaire and their behavior during each session was video-recorded to enable the researcher to observe learners' behavior. The result of his study revealed that students can become more willing to communicate in classrooms due to seating arrangement in beginning levels. This study also argued that WTC and development in linguistic competence should happen in a parallel way.

Zarrinabadi and Abdi (2011) investigated the possible relationship between EFL learners' WTC and their language learning orientations. In order to carry out this research, sixty seven Iranian EFL learners answered the modified versions of Likert-type WTC questionnaires developed by MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, and Conrod (2001), and also the modified version of language learning orientations questionnaire (MacIntyre et al., 2001). Their findings indicated that language orientations are correlated with WTC, both inside and outside the classroom, although its correlation with WTC outside the classroom was more outstanding.

Another study investigating Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of their WTC in conditions, namely group discussion, meeting, interpersonal conversations and public speaking with three types of listeners, that is a friend, a stranger, and an acquaintance was conducted by Barjesteh, Neissi, and Vaseghi (2012). To this end, a twenty-item questionnaire was answered by the participants. The study concluded that the learners were highly willing to communicate in group discussion and meeting. Furthermore, the result revealed that the participants have more tendency to communicate with friends.

Moreover, a longitudinal case study was conducted by Cao (2013) to explore dynamism in willingness to communicate. The study involved twelve second language learners of English participating in classes which were 50 minutes a day for 15 weeks. The author utilized various methods such as observation, interview, and journal writing to determine participants' degree of WTC though data collection was mainly done by recording the classes. The results of this case study showed that learners' WTC inside classrooms is not stable and may fluctuate over time due to learners' psychological factors as well as the atmosphere of their classrooms.

Alemi, Tajeddin, and Mesbah (2013) in a research conducted to investigate the influence of individual differences on the degree of WTC had an idea that although some factors such as age, gender, and personality types cannot lead to significant differences in participants' WTC, other

individual differences like proficiency level, length of studying, and communicating with foreigners may affect participants' degree of WTC. To perform the research, four hundred and thirty one Iranian EFL learners took part in the study by answering McCroskey's (1992) WTC questionnaire. They found that there exists no outstanding relationship between WTC and personality types like introversion.

2.2. Communication Apprehension

After receiving much criticism on the first version of communication apprehension scale (McCroskey, 1978) McCroskey, Beatty, Kearney, and Plax (1985) decided to investigate the content validity of the most recent version of the instrument, Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) at that time. The results of research showed that the scores gained from the newer instrument were quite independent of the context-based content of the items used and that they could determine apprehension in a context not represented directly in the items on the new version.

Another investigation on CA was done by Sallinen-Kuparinen, McCroskey, and Richmond (1991). This variable was compared to other variables, namely WTC, communication competence, and introversion in Finnish culture. Compared to that of American culture, the results of their research indicated that the main differences between the samples of two cultures were the differences between WTC and introversion. What is more, the data from CA and communication orientation was similar to some extent.

Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) studied the relationship between oral language anxiety and perfectionism. They videotaped the participants' interaction with the interviewer, and then they asked the participants to watch their performance and give comments on it while they were audiotaped. The analysis of the anxious and non-anxious participants' audiotape indicated that there is a difference between these two groups' personal performance standards, and their concerns over the errors they commit. It was also revealed that a relationship exists between anxiety and perfectionism. That is the methods which are used to help learners overcome perfectionism can be utilized for overcoming anxiety in language learners.

Rashidi et al. (2012) analyzed students majoring in English so as to present a causal model of factors predicting oral CA. The learners' self-esteem and introversion/extroversion (as independent variables), their gender and proficiency level (as moderator variables) and their oral CA (as the major dependent variable) were selected. The data collected from one language

proficiency test and three questionnaires revealed that self-esteem, introversion/extroversion, gender, and proficiency predicted apprehension in oral communication. They finally conclude that female learners as well as less proficient ones experience more CA in comparison to others.

Another study on CA was carried out by Hassani and Rajab (2012). The focus of the study was on determining the levels of anxiety and their relation to CA, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation by means of three questionnaires. The authors reported that "learners who have less proficiency will have more anxiety in comparison with those who have high communicative abilities" (p. 417). They also found that there was no noticeable relationship between levels of CA and learners' proficiency level.

2.3. Introversion

A comparison study was conducted by McCroskey, Burroughs, Daun, and Richmond (1990) to see whether native and non-native speakers of English are different in terms of their WTC, CA, IT, and the communication competence. The researchers reported that Swedish students believed themselves as to be more competent and introverted but less willing to communicate than American students. Also, the reports of CA were not significantly different.

Loffredo (2000) carried out an investigation to examine the relationships between Myers-Briggs personality type preferences, like introversion/extroversion, and CA. The researcher asked two hundred students at the University of Houston-Victoria to answer two questionnaires. One part of the results showed that the participants who were introverted had more communication apprehension than the extroverted ones.

Philips, Bobby Smith, and Modaf's (2004) research study sought the relationship among self-esteem, communication apprehension and introversion/extroversion, and their possible predicting power for classroom participation. The results showed that although self-esteem and CA were the predictors of classroom participation, introversion/extroversion could not predict learners' classroom participation.

One intriguing research conducted by Meenakshi and Zafar (2011) examined the relationship between introversion/extroversion, and risk-taking, and second language acquisition (SLA). The findings indicated that, firstly, extroverted individuals are more willing to use every chance of communicating in a second language. Secondly, introverted individuals are more successful in reading and writing skills. Thirdly, extroverts can be considered as the ones who are more risk takers; therefore, they face the new situations related to second language learning more easily.

Considering the mentioned literature review, this study directs an investigation toward the relationship among variables, namely WTC, CA, and IT in freshman and senior EFL learners. As a result, the purpose of this research is to find the answer to the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL students' WTC and CA?

2. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL students' WTC and IT?

3. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian EFL students' IT and CA?

4. Is there any significant difference between freshman and senior students regarding their WTC?

5. Is there any significant difference between freshman and senior students regarding their CA?

6. Is there any significant difference between freshman and senior students regarding their IT?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Ninety one Iranian undergraduate students (both male and female) majoring in English Literature and English Translation at Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman were asked to take part in this research. The participants were randomly selected from two different grade levels, that is, freshman and senior. The participants' age ranged from 19 to 25 and less than half of them were majoring in translation. 40 freshman (44%) and 51 senior students (56%) participated in the present study.

3.2. Instruments

The following instruments were used to collect the required data for this study:

1. Willingness to Communicate, the revised version, (MacIntyre et al., 2001)

2. Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) (McCroskey, 1982)

3. Introversion Scale (McCroskey, 1970)

3.2.1. Willingness to Communicate Questionnaire

A modified version of Likert-type questionnaire (MacIntyre et al., 2001, as cited in Zarrinabadi & Abdi, 2011) was used for measuring students' willingness to communicate in English inside the classroom. The questionnaire consists of twenty seven items in four sections, namely speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension in class, which range from 1 to 5 (1= almost never willing, 2= sometimes willing, 3= willing half of the time, 4= usually willing, and 5= almost always willing). MacIntyre et al. (2001) reported this questionnaire as a valid and

reliable scale. They reported its alpha reliability as follows: speaking (8 items, α = .81), reading (6 items, α = .83), writing (8 items, α = .88), and comprehension (5 items, α = .83). The participants' total scores range from 27 to 135. The more their scores are, the more willing the participants will be to communicate in English.

3.2.2. Communication Apprehension Questionnaire

Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) (McCroskey, 1982) is composed of 24 items. This version of the instrument is reported to be highly reliable (alpha regularly >.90) in comparison to the other versions. The score for each item can range from 1 to 5 (1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree, and 5 = strongly disagree). The total scores can range from 24 to 120. Scores below 51 represent people who have very low CA. Those whose scores are between 51 and 80 have average CA, and those scores which are more than 80 represent individuals with high levels of CA.

3.2.3. Introversion

McCroskey (1970) developed an introversion scale to be distinct from communication apprehension. The questionnaire, in the five-point Likert scale format, has 18 items out of which 6 items (3, 6, 9, 12, 15, and 17) relate to neuroticism. Thus, the total scores received by the participants would be between 12 and 60. Alpha reliability of the scale is reported by the developers to be .80. In addition, those who receive scores above 48 are highly introverted while those who receive scores below 24 are considered as less introverted individuals. And, those in between are in the moderate range.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaires were given to the participants during their class time. After receiving the necessary instructions to get familiar with the nature of this study, the participants spent around forty minutes to answer the questionnaires in one session. Firstly, the participants were asked to fill the WTC questionnaire; secondly, they filled the CA questionnaire, and then, the IT scale was filled. They were to write whether they are freshman or senior students on their WTC questionnaires as well. In addition, since some of the participants were eager to get informed of their scores, the researcher asked them to write their email address on their questionnaires. To statistically analyze the data to investigate the research questions of the study, Pearson Product Moment Correlation, and Independent Samples t-test were launched.

4. Results

The report of the descriptive statistics of the variables is presented in Table 1 that includes the number of participants, min, max, mean, and standard deviation of the gathered data.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

Parameters	N	Min	Max	M	SD
IT	91	22	57	39.05	6.97
CA	91	27	117	75.92	21.92
WTC	91	44	132	86.79	17.60
WTC(S)	91	14	38	25.89	5.94
WTC(R)	91	8	32	20.08	5.75
WTC(WR)	91	8	40	23.62	7.48
WTC(C)	91	6	25	17.17	4.04
Valid N (list wise)	91				

Introversion tendency (IT); Communication apprehension (CA); Willingness to communicate (WTC); Speaking(S); Reading (R); Writing (WR); Comprehension (C)

A Pearson Correlation was launched to investigate the first research question concerning the relationship between WTC and CA (Table 2).

Table 2

Correlation between WTC and CA

		WTC	CA
WTC	Pearson Correlation	1	**-.326**[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002
	N	91	91
CA	Pearson Correlation	**-.326**[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	91	91

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As indicated in Table 2, there is a significant negative relationship between EFL students' WTC and CA ($r = -.326$, $n = 91$, $p < .01$). This means that the students with higher levels of WTC are of lower scores on CA and vice versa.

A Pearson Correlation was launched to investigate the relationship between WTC and IT, the second research question. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Correlation between the WTC and IT

		IT	WTC
IT	Pearson Correlation	1	**.321**[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002
	N	91	91
WTC	Pearson Correlation	**.321**[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	91	91

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As indicated in Table 3, there is a significant positive relationship between EFL students' introversion tendency and WTC. This means that the students with higher levels of the introversion tendency are of higher scores on WTC and vice versa.

A Pearson Correlation analysis was run to investigate the third research question. The results of this statistical test is presented in Table 4. Since the p-value is less than $\alpha = 0.05$ (-.001), therefore there is a significant negative relationship between students' IT and CA. Considering this significant negative relationship, the students with higher levels of IT had lower scores on CA, and vice versa.

Table 4

Correlation between the IT and CA

		IT	CA
IT	Pearson Correlation	1	**-.438**[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000

	N	91	91
CA	Pearson Correlation	**.438**[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	91	91

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In order to answer the fourth research question which was to find whether there is a significant difference between freshman students and senior students regarding their WTC, an Independent Samples t-test was run. According to the results (Table 5), there is no significant difference between freshman and senior groups regarding their WTC (t (89) = -.906, p = .367).

Table 5

*Independent Samples t-*test *for WTC in Freshman and Senior Groups*

Grade Level	Freshman			Senior			*t*	*df*	*Sig.*
	N	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*	*Mean*	*SD*			
WTC	40	84.90	16.99	51	88.27	18.10	-.906	89	.367

In order to find out if there is a significant difference between freshman students and senior students regarding their CA, the fifth research question, an Independent Samples t-test was launched. As indicated in Table 6, there is not a significant difference between freshman and senior groups regarding their CA (t (89) = -.041, p = .967).

Table 6

Independent Samples t-test for CA in Freshman and Senior Groups

Grade Level	Freshman			Senior			*t*	*df*	*Sig.*
	N	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*	*Mean*	*SD*			
CA	40	67.75	21.62	51	67.94	22.55	-.041	89	.967

To find out whether there is any significant difference between freshman students and senior students regarding their introversion tendency, the sixth research question, an Independent

Samples *t*-test was launched. According to the results (Table 7), there is not a significant difference between freshman and senior groups regarding their IT (*t* (89) = .252, *p* = .792).

Table 7

Independent Samples t-test for IT in Freshman and Senior Groups

Grade Level	Freshman			Senior			*t*	*df*	*Sig.*
	N	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*	*Mean*	*SD*			
IT	40	39.28	7.53	51	38.88	6.58	.252	89	.792

As far as the results of the study are concerned, it could be concluded that a significant negative relationship exists between participants' WTC and CA. Secondly, those who had higher IT were more willing to communicate in English. Additionally, it was found that the students with higher levels of IT had lower scores on CA. what is more, no significant difference was detected between freshman and senior students regarding their WTC, CA, and IT.

5. Discussion

This study aimed at investigating the relationships that exist among the variables, namely willingness to communicate, communication apprehension, introversion tendency of freshman and senior EFL students. Regarding the first research question, the results, which are in line with studies done by some researchers (e.g., Alemi et al., 2013; Barraclough et al., 1988; Liu & Jackson, 2008; MacIntyre, 2007; Roach, 1999) revealed that a significant negative relationship does exist between WTC and CA. This result could be supported by Roach's (1999) statement that considers communication apprehension as one of the main reasons for students' willingness to communicate. Moreover, since some students are afraid of being judged by others in social interactions, they become less willing to take part in conversations (Hofmann & Dibartolo, 2010).

Learners who experience more communication apprehension will have less willingness to communicate inside the classroom. Settipani and Kendall (2013) believe that some individuals' fear of facing unfamiliar people leads to their taking part in conversations with reluctance. This significant negative relationship between WTC and CA may be due to the shyness students feel

in face to face situations which is in line with the 'shyness' construct developed by McCroskey and Richmond (1982) who defined it as the "tendency to be timid, reserved, and most specifically, talk less" (p.463). All in all, it was determined that the relationship between WTC and CA is negative. This implies that both teachers and learners should try to get familiar with the concept of communication apprehension and find the solutions helping the learners to alleviate CA. Next, it was asked whether or not there is a strong relationship between WTC and IT. The answer was surprisingly yes. As a matter of fact, the results of this study are in contrast with those of the research studies done by Meenakshi and Zafar (2011), MacIntyre and Charos (1996), and Sallinen-Kuparinen et al. (1991) who have demonstrated that WTC and IT are negatively related to each other. This result shows that although some learners may be introvert, they may have more intentions or willingness to communicate; however, they might fail to do so due to some other factors like anxiety which must be further investigated to become clear. In fact, in previous studies the anxiety or fear factors have not been investigated in depth in relation to students' IT and WTC while in the present research study IT, WTC and CA were studied in relation to each other. Accordingly, we can claim that in this study IT has been studied in relation to students' mere willingness to participate in interactions whereas in previous studies IT had been studied in relation to the actual participation of students in interactions. The difference is that introvert students might be totally willing to take part in conversations, but they may not feel ready or competent enough to start or continue the conversation. So, further studies are needed to analyze the difference between the introverts' WTC and their actual performance in communicating with others.

The results of the third research question, which asked whether a significant relationship exists between IT and CA, revealed that students with higher levels of introversion experience less communication apprehension than those who are extrovert. It is worth mentioning that the findings are surprisingly in contrast with studies by Loffredo (2000), and Rashidi et al. (2012).

The findings of current study support Lucas, Le, and Dyrenforth's (2008) arguments that extroverts do not respond stronger to social situations than introverts, nor do they show higher improvement of positive affect during interactions. In addition, Since Mehrpour (2007) stated that an introverted individual can have a stronger character than an extrovert. The reason for this negative relation can be justified to some extent. Logically speaking, according to the obtained results, the participants who are considered as introvert may have less fear to communicate since

they are not reluctant to take part in a conversation. They may even be more willing than the extrovert ones, and they must not be blamed for their being introvert just because they may fail to communicate with others.

6. Conclusion

It is worth noting that teachers must find efficient ways to help learners overcome CA especially in speaking. All language teachers and learners can benefit from the results of this research study in order to be able to deal with CA. Secondly, the results could definitely change introverts' view toward themselves. That is, the positive relationship between IT and WTC suggests that highly introverted learners should not consider themselves as completely unwilling individuals in communication since it is clear that their sense of unwillingness may be due to their wrong common belief. Instead, they have to accept their personality and try to learn the strategies which lead them toward better communication. As it was said, researchers should differentiate between the actual performance of WTC and students' mere feeling about their WTC because these two can cause different results in relation to the same variables.

Thirdly, the significant negative relationship between CA and IT suggests that those suffering from high CA should not necessarily relate their apprehension to their introversion tendency and vice versa. Consequently, the results of this study are an aid to those language teachers and learners who are familiar with affective factors, and are interested in deepening their knowledge about introverted, willing, and apprehensive language learners. The results also are beneficial to those teachers and learners who do not believe in the remarkable relationship that exists between learners' affective side and cognitive side of learning. In fact, it is hoped that the results of the study can draw language teachers' attention to the factors that can play a crucial role in students' language learning.

Further research studies regarding WTC, CA, IT and other variables can shed light on the other factors which are responsible for the significant positive relationship between students' IT and WTC. The interested researchers may decide to consider students' gender in their studies as well. Because this study was conducted on a small scale with 91 participants from one educational setting, the applicability of conclusions drawn here is limited. One possible next step can be a replication study with a larger group of participants. What is more, the participants were

not asked about their prior programs of study, educational practices, and their academic performance which could be considered as another limitation of this research study. These educational backgrounds might predict students' WTC, CA, and IT.

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Iranian EFL Students' Preferences of Learning Styles and Assessment Techniques for Reading Comprehension Courses

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Abstract

The present study was carried out to examine Iranian English major undergraduates' perceptions of their preferred learning styles and assessment techniques for reading comprehension courses. The participants were 321 English students who were studying English literature, English translation, and English language teaching. A 40-item Likert-scale questionnaire was employed to collect data. The analysis of data revealed that competing against other classmates, following a textbook during the course, using supplementary audiovisual aids, using dictionaries, being immediately corrected by the teacher, and using supplementary pictorial data are the most favored learning styles. The least favored learning styles, on the other hand, were found to be group work, teacher's individual treatment of the students, pair work, cooperative activities, teacher's Persian explanations, and getting involved in discussions. The results also suggested that these students prefer multiple-choice exams to essay-type tests, like to receive feedback on tests from their teacher rather than peers, prefer to answer questions quickly, and are eager to know more about test taking strategies. However, they are not willing to accept criticism from their peers, do not feel comfortable when their peers assess them, dislike using the

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comments given by their peers, and do not like to make pauses before answering the questions. The identification of the most vs. least favored learning styles and assessment modes indicates the challenging task of teachers and syllabus designers in accommodating the diverse needs of learners in order to ensure efficient and feasible teaching and optimize the learning process. The study concluded with some relevant recommendations for syllabus design, material development, and teaching practice in reading comprehension courses.

1. Introduction

During the last two decades, English language teaching has undergone a shift towards learner-oriented methods and research has emphasized the specific needs of specific learners for material development, syllabus design, and teaching methods (e.g., Brindley, 1984; Sein & Robey, 1991). Teachers should be well aware of the fact that each individual learner has his/her own innate traits and strengths. In other words, learners have diverse language needs as well as learning styles due to their diverse educational, cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds. English teachers are confronted with this challenging task of addressing these diverse needs (Chung, 2009). The awareness of teachers and curriculum developers of learners' learning styles and assessment techniques has a positive effect on the optimum performance of both the teachers and their students (Sein & Robey, 1991; Sims & Sims, 1995). Teachers are able to modify their teaching and classroom activities according to the preferences of the learners to maximize the learning results (Brindley, 1984; Felder, 1996; Spratt, 1999; Stapa, 2009). Thus, it is important to explore the learners' preferences of learning style and assessment modes in different contexts, hoping that it can shed more light on the way syllabus, materials, and activities should be designed, adapted, and modified. Also, the identification of learners' preferences of learning style and assessment modes may help language teachers to cater for their students' learning preferences after having a clearer picture of their likes and dislikes regarding different classroom activities and evaluation methods and tools for reading comprehension courses. Working within a descriptive-analytical framework and focusing on an Iranian EFL context, this study aimed to find out the students' most preferred and least preferred learning styles and assessment techniques for a particular university course, namely, reading comprehension.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Learning Styles

Every learner has an idiosyncratic way of absorbing and processing information (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Learning style is defined as an individual's natural, habitual, or preferred way(s) of taking, processing, and retaining new information and skills which persist regardless of teaching methods or content (Kensella, 1995). Felder (1995) defines style as "the ways in which an individual characteristically acquires, retains, and retrieves information" (p. 21).

Learning styles have been extensively discussed in educational psychology in different language learning contexts (e.g., Oxford, 1990; Oxford & Ehrman, 1993; Wallace & Oxford, 1992). According to Guild and Garger (1985) and Jensen (1987), more than 300 learning style assessment instruments were developed in the past three decades. Different factors have been dealt with in these studies. Atomistic vs. holistic (Marton, 1988), inductive vs. deductive style (Felder, 1995; Ropo, 1987), visual vs. verbal presentation (Dunn & Dunn (1978), active experimentation vs. reflective observation (Kolb, 1984), field-independent vs. field dependent (Witkin & Goodenough, 1981), serialistic vs. holistic (Pask, 1988), and sequential vs. random (Gregorc, 1982), cognitive learning styles, sensory learning styles, and personality learning style (Reid, 1995) are the examples of styles dealt with in these instruments.

2.2. Learners' Preferences

Learners' preferences of learning styles are usually dealt with in teaching methodology. Teaching and assessment procedures are two important components of effective learning and they are complementary to each other. Thus, in order to enrich the scope of the study, learners' preferences of assessment techniques were also incorporated.

In the last three decades, learning preferences have been a focus of research in the field of language teaching. Different learning modalities have been identified. For example, Reid (1987) distinguished four perceptual learning modalities: 1) *visual* learning (e.g., reading and studying charts), 2) *auditory* learning (e.g., listening to lectures or audiotapes), 3) *kinesthetic* learning (involving physical responses) and 4) *tactile* learning (e.g., hands-on learning, as in building models). Reid (1987) found that ESL students strongly preferred kinesthetic and tactile learning styles and disliked group learning. Reid (1987) further concluded that the learning style

preferences of nonnative speakers often differ significantly from those of native speakers; and that variables such as gender, length of time living and studying in the United States, field of study, level of education, TOEFL score, and age are related to differences in learning styles.

In a study by Wintergerst, DeCapua, and Marilyn (2003), it was found that learners clearly preferred group activity to individual work. They also suggested that at least some cultural influences were at play. Both quantitative and qualitative studies in cross-cultural settings (see Anderson, 1993, for a review) support a relationship between culture and learning and emphasize that social as well as cultural factors (e.g., nationality, ethnicity, class, profession, education level, and gender) play important roles in shaping the learning preferences of learning styles.

Riazi and Riasati (2006) investigated the learning preferences of students in different areas. Results of their study indicated that teachers are aware of their students' learning preferences in some cases, but unaware in some others. Riazi and Mansoorian (2008) studied learning styles of Iranian EFL learners and found that the major styles preferred by the students were the auditory, the visual, the tactile, and the kinesthetic learning styles. In a study of learning style and gender, Mehrpour and Ahmadniay Motlagh (2015) concluded that visual and auditory learning styles are the most frequently preferred learning styles by both males and females among Iranian EFL learners.

On the other hand, assessment is a means of evaluating the students' performance. Assessment enhances instruction in many ways by informing teachers about the learning processes and difficulties and helps them to modify program goals and instructional objectives of the course. Shohamy (2001) advocates alternative assessment strategies because they "take into account students' different learning styles and abilities, ensuring fairness and equity" (p. 4).

In sum, the review of the literature on learners' preferences of learning styles and assessment techniques highlights the importance of learners' needs and preferences in educational psychology and language teaching. Moreover, as Guild and Garger, (1985) state, during the last three decades more than 300 learning style assessment instruments have been developed to understand students' learning situation preferences. This implies the introduction of a variety of assessment tools to fulfill learners' diverse needs related to their linguistic and cultural background. Many research studies have emphasized the significance of identifying distinct learning styles of learners for optimum results (e.g., Boyle & Dunn, 1998; Byrne, Flood, & Willis, 2009; Cools, van den Broeck, & Bouckenough , 2009; Ellis, 1985; Kikuchi, 2005;

Makoni, 1999; Nunan, 1988; Oxford, 1990; Stapa, 2009; Wyss, 2002; Willing, 1987). Also, research has suggested insights into learners' active role in assessment process (e.g., Black & William, 1998; Coombe & Hubley, 2004). Although there are many studies which deal with learners' preferences of learning styles and assessments techniques, they mainly concentrate on language learning at different proficiency levels (beginner, intermediate, and advanced), and learners' factors (e.g., gender, age, nationality, ethnicity, class, and cultural background). There are few studies which focus on particular language courses specially the ones which are taught at the university level. Therefore, the present study was an attempt to look at the issue from a different angle. A basic university course, namely, reading comprehension, was the focus of the present study. The reason for choosing this particular course is that it is a basic course included in the syllabus of all English programs in the Iranian universities, including English literature, English language teaching, and English translation. The investigation of the Iranian English language students' preferences of learning styles and assessment techniques for reading comprehension courses is hoped to shed more light on the way more effective materials and syllabuses for these courses can be developed in order to optimize students' involvement, participation, and ultimate achievement. The following research questions were addressed in the current study:

1. What are the Iranian English major undergraduates' most vs. least preferred learning styles for reading comprehension courses?

2. What are the Iranian English major undergraduates' most vs. least preferred assessment techniques for reading comprehension courses?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants of the study were Iranian English major undergraduate learners studying at 20 state and non-state universities in Iran. The participants' ages ranged between 18-27, and the average equalled 19. Their mother tongue was Persian. As reading comprehension courses (I & II) are offered in the first two terms of BA programs in English in all Iranian universities, the sample was chosen from freshman students of English literature, English translation, and English language teaching programs. At the initial stage, the total number of sample was 500 (43% males

and 57% females) but only a total of 321 students (35% males and 65% females) completed the survey and returned the questionnaires.

3.2. Instruments and procedure

An adapted questionnaire was distributed among the participants for data collection (see Appendix). The participants' preferences regarding their preferred learning styles and assessment techniques were self-reported on a 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire adapted from Busch, Elsea, Gruba, and Johnson (1992). The questionnaire was modified to fit the context of the study. Some items which dealt with oral skills and were not related to reading comprehension courses were omitted. The items of the questionnaire had 5-point Likert-type scale: *1. Strongly Agree, 2. Agree, 3. Neutral, 4. Disagree, 5. Strongly Disagree*. The items used in the questionnaire were on the learners' attitudes towards classroom activities, interests and motivations, their expectation of the teachers, their preferred learning styles and their preferred modes of assessment. Twenty seven items were related to learning styles and eleven items dealt with assessment techniques. Content validity of the questionnaire was established by asking two ELT experts to review and evaluate the survey items. Chronbach's alpha for the current scale was reported at 0.80 which suggests that the current survey is a reliable instrument.

Request letters were sent to the participants via email and they were asked to cooperate by responding to the questionnaire attached to the email and return it within two weeks. They were provided with sufficient explanation on how to complete the questionnaire. A total of 321 learners completed the questionnaire and returned it giving a response rate of 64.2%.

4. Results

The questionnaire data were tabulated and analyzed using SPSS program. Five points were assigned to *'strongly agree'* and one point to *'strongly disagree'*. Higher scores on the scale would indicate that the participants preferred those items more as compared to the ones that were assigned lower scores. As the results presented in Tables 1-4 show, different mean scores have been assigned to the items of the questionnaire, ranging from extremely high to extremely low. The results of the data analysis indicated variations in preferences of learning styles and assessment techniques due to the individual differences of Iranian undergraduate EFL learners.

Instead of classifying the students into categories based on learning style taxonomies, this study tried to explore the participants' most vs. least preferred learning styles and assessment modes.

Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate the results obtained for the first research question which addressed the most vs. least favored learning styles. Table 1 displays the descriptive analysis for the questionnaire items that elicited the participants' responses regarding their most favored learning styles according to their order of preference.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Most Favored Learning Styles

Order of Preference	Item No	Item Label	Mean	SD
1	20	I like competing against others.	4.82	1.05
2	1	I learn best when the class follows a textbook closely.	4.80	1.60
3	8	I like watching videos and CDs prepared based on the reading materials.	4.74	1.84
4	6	When I read I like to find the meaning of words in a dictionary.	4.71	1.05
5	26	I like the teacher to correct my mistakes immediately.	4.70	1.45
6	19	I like using pictures to learn.	4.68	1.35

As can be observed in Table 1, items # 20, 1, 8, 6, 26, and 19 were related to the most favored styles. Item # 20 examined learners' perception of class activity and interaction. A high mean score of this item indicates that the participants liked to cooperate with other members in class activities and compete against their classmates. Item # 1 elicited the participants' responses regarding teaching procedure. The high mean score observed for this item refers to the point that a well-organized teaching procedure based on course textbook is viewed by the learners in reading comprehension courses as very important. Some reading textbooks packages include CDs or videos prepared based on the reading materials of the textbook. A high value considered for item # 8 suggests that the students have a positive attitude towards audiovisual facilities for reading courses. The high value observed in the participants' responses to item # 6 reflects that referring to dictionaries results in more confidence for learners in a better understanding of the reading materials. The high score of item# 26 refers to the point that the participants like their teachers to help them and correct their mistakes immediately. Item # 26 is related to item # 30 which deals with teacher's feedback, too. Both immediate feedback provided during class activities and delayed feedback given after exam correction was perceived important by the

students. Item # 19 is similar to item # 8 in that both reflect the participants' positive attitudes towards supplementary audiovisual learning aids.

Table 2 presents the descriptive analysis for the questionnaire items that elicited the participants' responses concerning their least favored learning styles according to the order of dislike.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for the Least Favored Learning Styles

Order of Dislike	Item No	Item Label	Mean	SD
1	22	I like group work.	3.00	3.97
2	27	I learn best when the teacher moves around the class and helps individual students.	3.57	2.37
3	21	I like working in pairs.	3.57	2.66
4	15	I like cooperative activities.	3.76	1.90
5	25	I learn best when the teacher explains in Persian.	3.82	1.07
6	11	I like to engage in discussions.	4.00	1.58

As Table 2 displays, the questionnaire items # 22, 27, 21, 15, 25, and 11 referred to the least favored styles. The lowest score was assigned for item # 22. Also a low value was considered for two other related items, namely, item # 21 and item # 15. These low scores imply that the students prefer to learn reading skills individually rather than in groups or pairs. Item # 27 was assigned a low score by the participants. It shows that in reading comprehension courses, unlike general EFL courses or conversation courses, the learners do not like to be treated individually. Instead, they prefer to be treated as a member of the group and be given equal opportunities for learning. Item # 25 which is related to the use of the participants' mother tongue was assigned a low score. It indicates that EFL students prefer English as the medium of instruction in reading comprehension courses. The low score of item # 11 showed that the students, unlike in EFL courses or conversation courses, do not like to share with other class members in reading comprehension courses.

Tables 3 and 4 include the results obtained for the second research question which addressed the most vs. least favored assessment techniques. Table 3 shows the descriptive analysis for the questionnaire items that elicited the participants' responses regarding their most favored assessment techniques according to the order of preference.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for the Most Favored Assessment Techniques

Order of Preference	Item No	Item Label	Mean	SD
1	39	I prefer multiple-choice examinations to essay-type questions.	4.87	1.97
2	30	I like to get feedback on tests from my teacher.	4.80	2.45
3	28	I like to answer questions quickly.	4.76	1.05
4	40	I would like to know more about test taking strategies.	4.64	1.47

As Table 3 shows, items # 39, 30, 28, and 40 were related to the most favored assessment techniques. The highest mean value was assigned for item #39 which was related to assessment techniques. On the one hand, it implies the degree of significance the students consider for evaluation of their achievement in reading comprehension courses. On the other hand, it refers to the point that test types which deal with correct answer recognition rather than production are preferred by the students. Item # 30 is related to feedback for reading courses. The participants assigned a high value for this item which refers to the fact that they are aware of the beneficial effect of teacher feedback in pinpointing the areas which require more practice or attention. A considerably high score was observed for item # 28. It highlights the perceived significance of output which, in turn, reflects the amount of uptake the students achieve in every single activity in reading comprehension courses. It also shows that the students try to participate in class activities while competing with other members in order to attract the teacher's attention to their achievement. Item # 40 is related to evaluation modes and its high value indicates that the students expect their teachers to explain clearly about the way they are going to be assessed for their achievement. If they are familiar with the assessment techniques, they can attempt their exams in a more efficient manner.

Table 4 displays the descriptive analysis for the questionnaire items that elicited the participants' responses concerning their least favored assessment techniques according to the order of dislike.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics for the Least Favored Assessment Techniques

Order of Dislike	Item No	Item Label	Mean	SD

1	35	I accept criticism more from my peers than my teacher.	3.02	2.37
2	34	I feel more comfortable when my peers assess me.	3.09	1.90
3	36	I use the comments my peers give me to improve.	3.55	0.76
4	29	I like to pause before answering questions.	3.89	1.19

As Table 4 displays, items # 35, 34, 36, and 29 deal with the least favored assessment techniques. A low value observed for item # 35, item # 34, and item # 36 indicates that the participants preferred to hide their mistakes and weaknesses from their classmates. They wanted to have their teachers correct their mistakes rather than their peers. Item # 29 was given a low score by the students which show that they try to avid hesitations and pauses because it affects their teacher's view on their achievement. It also results in a negative attitude toward their language abilities in their classmates' mind. In order to be successful in competing with their fellow students, they attempt to give spontaneous responses to the questions raised by the teacher.

5. Discussion

As for the most favored learning styles, the study found that the participants liked to cooperate with other members in class activities. It was shown that during class sessions they are constantly comparing their achievements with those of their classmates. This finding is in line with Choudhary's (2011) study which emphasizes the EFL learners' tendency for competition. The participants preferred a well-organized teaching procedure based on course textbook. In other words, learners do not like to follow a loosely organized teaching practice that uses different (unrelated) sources which include different, incompatible procedures for teaching reading skills. This finding is in line with Bada and Oken' (2000) study which emphasizes learners' confidence in a more organized teaching syllabus. Also, the participants' preference of supplementary audiovisual aids for reading comprehension courses confirms the finding of Stapa (2009) who also found that learners like audiovisual aids especially visual ones for enhancing their reading abilities. Similarly, Bada and Oken (2000), Choudhary (2011), and Riazi and Riasati (2008) found that supplementary audiovisual materials are popular among EFL students. This finding seems to be related to the fact that the majority of learners are visual learners who

have a natural tendency towards visual materials for learning (Mehrpour & Ahmadniay Motlagh, 2015; Rinaldi & Gurung, 2008).

The results indicated that the participants favored using dictionaries for reading comprehension courses. As not all words of the reading passages are explained to the students, some of them may have difficulty remembering the meaning of some words or they may want to make sure that their interpretation of the contextual meaning of certain words is correct and appropriate to the context, the students like to refer to dictionary. This finding is different from that of the study by Bada and Oken (2000) which indicated a strong willingness of the EFL learners for guessing the known words instead of using a dictionary. It was also shown that the participants liked to be corrected by their teacher. In other words, the students did not like to correct their own mistakes through deliberation and persistent efforts. Rather, they prefer to have their teachers monitor them closely and correct their mistakes. This finding is in line with that of the study carried out by Bada and Oken (2000). The results offer valuable insights into the fact that the students want their teachers to help them immediately. This finding shows that the students consider the teacher as an authority and would rather be corrected on the spot. This result is in line with the findings of the study by Riazi and Riasati (2008) which indicated the learners' preference of immediate feedback by the teacher.

Regarding the least favored learning styles, the study found that individual learning rather than group learning or pair work was found to be preferred for reading comprehension courses. It seems that the students feel more comfortable and relaxed when they work independently of their peers. This finding is similar to the results of the study by Bada and Okan (2000) but is different from the results of the study by Riazi and Riasati (2008), Sprat (1999), Wintergerst et al. (2003), and Kavaliauskiene (2003) which indicated the learners' preference of pair work and group work for general EFL courses which deal with all language skills. In addition, it was revealed that in reading comprehension courses, unlike in general EFL courses or conversation courses, the students do not like to be treated individually by their teacher. Instead, they prefer to be treated as a member of the group and be given equal opportunities for learning. This finding is different from Choudhray's study (2011) which refers to EFL learners' preference of individual treatment of the students by the teacher.

The participants preferred English as the only medium of instruction for university reading courses. It refers to their understanding of their needs for developing reading skills and the role

of the medium of instruction in this regard. In addition, it indicates that the students do not like to make use of translation in their learning. This finding is similar to the results of the study by Riazi and Riasati (2008) which reports learners' negative attitudes towards L1 use in EFL courses. The participants did not like to share with their classmates and prefer to influence their teachers and peers by highlighting their achievements obtained through individual learning. This finding is similar to the study by Bada and Oken (2000) which indicates learners' preference of individual learning and individual achievement.

With regard to the most favored assessment techniques, it was found that recognition rather than production test types are preferred by learners. This finding is line with the findings of Choudhary's (2011) study which refers to the preference of multiple choice items by the EFL learners. The participants were found to favor teacher feedback. This finding refers to their appreciation of the role of feedback in pinpointing the areas which require more practice or attention on their part. Riazi and Riasati (2008) and Choudhary (2011) reported similar results for EFL context. The results showed that the participants like to provide immediate response to the questions. It shows that they try to participate in class activities while competing with other members in order to attract the teacher's attention to their achievement. Choudhary's (2011) study indicated that the participants are eager to know how to perform successfully in the exams. If they are familiar with the assessment techniques, they can attempt their exams in a more efficient manner. This finding is different from Kikuichi's (2005) study which did not find any strong willingness on the part of the learners for learning test taking strategies.

As for the least favored assessment techniques, a preference of teacher feedback over peer feedback suggests that the students do not like their classmates focus on their mistakes. In addition, the teacher feedback was found to be more reliable and helpful. This finding is similar to the results of the studies by Bada and Okan (2000) and Choudhary (2011) which emphasize that EFL learners would mind having their mistakes corrected by their peers. Also, spontaneous answer to questions was favored by the participants. The students try to attract the teacher's attention and at the same time compete against their classmates by highlighting their achievements. This is in line with Choudhary's (2011) study which indicates that EFL learners have a tendency to provide quick answers to the teacher's questions in order to highlight their individual achievements in the class.

Some questionnaire items were not included in the list of the most preferred and the least preferred items. The students liked a relaxed and friendly atmosphere and fun learning in class activities, a finding which is in line with the finding obtained in the study by Kikuchi (2005). They assigned a rather low score for item # 17 which deals with strictness of the teacher. This is similar to the findings of Kikuchi (2005) who suggested that Japanese university learners did not like strict teachers. The item # 12 and item # 14 and item # 18 had a rather low score which indicates that the participants did not favor games in a reading comprehension course, a finding in line with Rinaldi and Gurung's (2008) study. Items #37 and item # 38 received low scores. This implies that the participants did not like frequent quizzes; rather they better liked to be assessed through one major multiple-choice test.

6. Conclusions

Concerning the first research question, it can be concluded that competing against other classmates, following a textbook during the course, using supplementary audiovisual aids, using dictionaries, being immediately corrected by the teacher, and using supplementary pictorial data are the most favored learning styles among Iranian university students of English literature, English translation, and English language teaching who take reading comprehension courses. The least favored learning styles, on the other hand, were found to be group work, teacher's individual treatment of the students, pair work, cooperative activities, teacher's Persian explanations, and text-related discussions. Regarding the second research question, the results of the study revealed that Iranian undergraduate students of English literature, English translation and English language teaching prefer multiple-choice exams to essay-type tests, like to receive feedback on tests from their teacher rather than peers, prefer to answer questions quickly, and are eager to know more about test taking strategies. However, these students are not willing to accept criticism from their peers rather than their teachers, do not feel comfortable when their peers assess them, dislike using the comments given by their peers, and do not like to pause before answering the questions.

As Nunan (1989) states, in learner-centered teaching, learning preferences of the learners should be taken into account. Concerning the learners' preferences of learning styles examined in the present study, the following implications are suggested for teaching reading comprehension courses to undergraduate English major students in Iranian universities: 1) it is important to

accommodate individual differences of learners by using diverse classroom activities and teaching techniques to ensure efficient and feasible teaching. 2) it is useful to direct class activities in such a way that they give each individual learner opportunities for competing against their classmates. 3) learners have a significant tendency to follow a well-organized and comprehensive textbook. In the beginning of the course, the teachers should inform the learners about the reading materials, and the exact teaching and testing procedures which will be followed throughout the course in a clear manner. Incompatible and unparalleled procedures should be avoided in order to prevent confusion. 4) learners like to be provided with equal chances for participating in class activities and answering the questions without stress and anxiety. The encouraging tone of the teacher helps them answer the questions without hesitation. 5) the use of mother tongue in reading comprehension courses should be minimized. 6) it is useful to accompany the written reading materials with appropriate audio-visual aids in order to encourage a better learning achievement. 7) if the students are allowed to use dictionaries during the reading activities, they can remember the forgotten or less remembered words and better understand the meaning of new words and consequently gain more confidence in taking the new lesson and, at the same time, following the class activity without any lapses due to misunderstanding or lack of understanding. 8) various feedback types are useful for every individual learner both during the teaching procedure and after exam correction.

Regarding the assessment techniques preferences of Iranian undergraduate English majors for reading comprehension courses, the following points are suggested: 1) it is helpful to develop recognition test types rather than essay-type tests for reading comprehension course. 2) the feedback learners receive on their exams is important as it helps them identify the problems and recognize the way how to remove them. 3) in the beginning of the course the teacher can clearly explain the assessments techniques s/he is going to employ for the evaluation of learners' achievement and how students can tackle them using test-taking strategies.

Replication studies using instruments other than the ones used in this study are obviously advisable in order to permit greater confidence in the generalization of the results. Replication of the study across different proficiency levels and investigating the contribution of variables like affective factors (e.g., stress, anxiety, motivation, and self-esteem), cognitive factors (e.g., field-dependence vs. independence,) and personality factors (e.g., extrovert vs. introvert) to learners' preferences of learning styles and assessment techniques are also suggested.

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Appendix
Learning Styles and Assessment Techniques Questionnaire

Instruction: Please choose the number on the scale (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) that best represents the degree to which you agree with the statements in each item. Items 1-27 are related to learning styles. Items 28-40 deal with assessment and evaluation techniques.

Item No	Item Label	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree
1	I learn best when the class follows a textbook closely.	□	□	□	□	□
2	If I don't know the answer to a question. I like to try to guess the answer.	□	□	□	□	□
3	I learn best when there is a friendly atmosphere.	□	□	□	□	□
4	I learn best when the teacher makes learning fun.	□	□	□	□	□
5	I like to learn word formation rules and patterns.	□	□	□	□	□
6	When I read I like to find the meaning of words in a dictionary.	□	□	□	□	□
7	When I read I like to guess the meaning of words in context.	□	□	□	□	□
8	I like watching videos and CDs prepared based on the reading materials.	□	□	□	□	□
9	I like to hear information to help me learn.	□	□	□	□	□
10	I like to get oral explanations of new words, grammar etc.	□	□	□	□	□
11	I like to engage in discussions.	□	□	□	□	□
12	I like to learn by doing activities.	□	□	□	□	□
13	I like frequent breaks in activities.	□	□	□	□	□
14	I like games that let me get out of my chair and move.	□	□	□	□	□
15	I like cooperative activities.	□	□	□	□	□
16	I learn best when I work alone in class.	□	□	□	□	□
17	I learn best when the teacher is strict and controls the class.	□	□	□	□	□
18	I like to learn by interacting with other people.	□	□	□	□	□
19	I like using pictures to learn.	□	□	□	□	□
20	I like competing against others.	□	□	□	□	□
21	I like working in pairs.	□	□	□	□	□

22	I like group work.	□	□	□	□	□
23	When I work with others, I feel frustrated and confused.	□	□	□	□	□
24	I learn best when the teacher gives frequent assignments.	□	□	□	□	□
25	I learn best when the teacher explains in Persian.	□	□	□	□	□
26	I like the teacher to correct my mistakes immediately.	□	□	□	□	□
27	I learn best when the teacher moves around the class and helps individual students.	□	□	□	□	□
28	I like to answer questions quickly.	□	□	□	□	□
29	I like to pause before answering questions.	□	□	□	□	□
30	I like to get feedback on tests from my teacher.	□	□	□	□	□
31	I like my teacher to assess me in various skills.	□	□	□	□	□
32	I feel more comfortable when my teacher corrects me.	□	□	□	□	□
33	I prefer to correct my own errors.	□	□	□	□	□
34	I feel more comfortable when my peers assess me.	□	□	□	□	□
35	I accept criticism more from my peers than my teacher.	□	□	□	□	□
36	I use the comments my peers give me to improve.	□	□	□	□	□
37	I prefer taking a series of small quizzes rather than one large test.	□	□	□	□	□
38	I learn best when the teacher gives frequent tests.	□	□	□	□	□
39	I prefer multiple-choice examinations to essay-type questions.	□	□	□	□	□
40	I would like to know more about test taking strategies.	□	□	□	□	□