

Teaching Persian verbal networks: A comparative study of non-Iranian Persian learners' performance with respect to their responses to inferential and alternative Questions¹

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

The present study explores the direct effects of teaching Persian lexical network on the level of foreign Persian language learners with respect to inferential and substitution questions. Raghidoost and Jamshidi (2012) state that direct teaching of lexical network significantly improves the learning ability of foreign Persian language learners. Moreover, adaptation of inferential and substitution questions in task-based modules has enabled the authors of the current research to develop the present study based on the learners' responses.

When learners read a word, an image is stored in their sensory memory which is then transferred to short-term memory (where one's current and temporary memories are stored) to be retrieved immediately in the cases of emergency. In other words, short-term

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memory serves as the information storage while functioning verbal tasks. It is, therefore, known as functional memory also. To identify and find the meaning of a word or a term, one searches the short-memory, and if needed, it can be transferred and stored in the long-term memory (Filed, 2002:19). The word information shall then be retrieved from long-term memory.

When learners store a word in their short-term memory, they would only be familiar with its image and answer substitution questions. However, according to psychologists' findings and reports, if the appropriate teaching method is applied, the learners transfer the acquired data into their long-term memory. Thus, when learners search for the answer of a question, they come across a network of related words and can easily answer inferential questions.

2. Objectives of the study

The present study attempts to investigate the impact of explicit teaching of Persian verbal networks on the responses learners provide to the inferential and substitution questions. It seeks to show how learning lexical network contributes to better answering the inferential and substitution questions, as well as identifying the questions that are attempted most frequently.

3. Methodology

The present study adopts an experimental and comparative approach. First, a preliminary test was given and administered to select learners who were more familiar with lexical networks. It is worth noting that the principles of task-based teaching were used to design the modules

of this research. The study focuses more on reading skill but also contains listening, speaking and, writing skills to provide for parallel development of all skills.

Each of the three modules taught consists of 27 verbal networks which amounts to 107 verbs overall including their subsection. At the end of the teaching session, exam questions were given into two categories of ‘inferential (in the form of True or False)’ and ‘substitution (substituting verbs in the same network)’. Learners’ answers were analyzed and compared using SPSS software.

Inferential questions: Based on the syllabus covered in each module, and the hope for measuring learners’ ability to identify synonymous words, five True/False questions were given. The applicants were required to refer to their memory to provide the correct answer.

Substitution questions: In this part, initially, six verbs presented in the module were given as choices in five questions eliminating the verb in each question. The applicants were asked to substitute the correct verb for each question. It is worth noting that in designing post-test questions, transitive, intransitive, and linking verbs were used and the instructor implicitly emphasized the substitution principles.

4. Research Findings

Post-test results were analyzed to measure the difference in the performance of applicants in answering inferential or substitution questions. The obtained mean of inferential questions (10.20) was higher than that of substitution questions (9.73; SD= 2.98). However, the results of t-test ($P > 0.05$, $0.73 = 14$) and the effect size indicator

($R=0.19$) showed no significant difference between the means of inferential and substitution questions.

5. Conclusion

The present study suggests innovative ways of teaching lexical network and the use of connections between verbs in teaching Persian. The findings show that all learners were keen on benefiting from this semantic network of verbs. They, even, requested the researchers for the design of a dictionary for this purpose. Learners of the experimental group stated that attending classes helped them improve their knowledge of Persian. It can, therefore, be concluded that compiling Persian lexical network is of crucial importance to helping foreign Persian language learners.

Keywords: lexical network, verbal network, explicit teaching, inferential questions, alternative questions