

Task-Based Reading Assessment and High Intermediate Introverts/ Extroverts' Test Performance

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Abstract

In recent years, attempts in testing second language research have mostly been geared towards examining particular learner traits. These have been done to uncover the possible relationships existing between learner traits and their performance in language tests. The present study, aims at investigating the effects of task-based assessment on measuring reading comprehension proficiency of introvert/extrovert language learners. Results from the analysis of the data collected through administering a) PET Test, b) Task-based Reading Assessment, developed and validated by the present researchers, and c) JEPQ personality type questionnaire of introversion/extroversion on 99 high intermediate Iranian students indicated that: 1) there is no significant difference between PET general proficiency test and task-based assessment of introvert/extrovert test-takers, 2) there is no significant difference between cognitive and pedagogical tasks classifications among introverts and extroverts, and 3) there is no significant difference amongst introverts and extroverts in any of the tests and task subcategories.

Keywords: Task-based Assessment (TBA); Cognitive Style; Reading Assessment; Introversion; Extroversion

1. Introduction

Under the influence of sociolinguistic theory of communicative competence and psycholinguistic theory of natural second language acquisition during 1970s, the necessity of learners' exposure to authentic and natural language became a widespread concern. Consequently, a focus on meaning and purpose was encouraged (Mori, 2002) and it was not enough to focus merely on language form. Also, there was a need to increase the capacity of expressing meanings. These developments manifested their influence in syllabus design, methodology and assessment. Moreover, such improvements led to an early proposal for the use of task-based approaches (Skehan, 2003). Task-based language teaching (TBLT) recognizes that knowledge of linguistic competence is not sufficient to use a language in achieving ends in social situations. TBLT embraces a broad conception of communicative competence with aspects dealing with sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence (Mislevy, Almond & Steinberg, 2002). TBLT has been the focal point of research in language teaching in recent years. However, as Chalhoub-Deville (2001) asserts, the amount of research on task-based assessment has not been sufficient. Therefore, further study on the topic seems to be necessary.

Moreover, one of the goals of language assessment is to reduce all the sources of errors that are external to the learner's language performance to ensure that the score of the test taker is a true reflection of his/her ability to use the language. There are many sources of error which are external to the learners' language ability such as affective variables and personal attributes which may influence the learners' performance (Wigglesworth, 2001). Bachman (1990) proposes that another potential source of bias in language testing is differences in cognitive characteristics of test-takers such as field-dependency/independency and extroversion/introversion.

The aim of the present study is to examine the effect of introversion/extroversion as a cognitive style on reading task-based assessment as an area which needs more research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Task Definition

Prabhu (1987) proposes that any activity in which learners, through some process of thought, should arrive at an outcome from given information, and which teachers are allowed to control the process, is regarded as a *task*. According to him task involves cognitive processes. Skehan (1996) puts that task is any activity in which meaning is primary; there is some type of relationship to the real world; task completion has priority; and the assessment of task performance is based on the task outcome (Bygate, Skehan & Swain, 2001). Nunan (2004) defines task as a piece of classroom work that learners comprehend, manipulate, produce or interact in the target language while their attention is focused on using their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and the intention is to communicate meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also be able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, a middle and an end.

2.2 Task Types

Ellis (2003) maintains that there are three approaches for classifying tasks, namely, 'pedagogic', 'rhetorical' and 'cognitive'. As in the present study only the pedagogic and cognitive classifications were examined, just these two approaches will be explained here. One pedagogic classification proposed by Willis (as cited in Ellis, 2003) focuses on the operations which students should perform in the classroom. They are as follows:

1. *Listing*: the outcome is a list.
2. *Ordering and sorting*: it involves sequencing, ranking, categorizing or classifying items.
3. *Comparing*: it involves finding differences or similarities in information.
4. *Problem-solving*: it demands intellectual activity as in puzzles or logic problems.
5. *Sharing personal experiences*: they allow learners to talk freely about themselves and share experiences.
6. *Creative task*: projects which may involve various types of tasks.

Moreover, Prabhu (1987) also classifies tasks into three types based on the cognitive activity which is involved.

1. *Information-gap activity*: involves “transfer of given information from one person to another, one form to another, or from one place to another” (Prabhu, p.46). One example is completing a tabular representation with information available in a given piece of text.
2. *Reasoning-gap activity*: involves “deriving some new information from given information through process of inference, deduction, practical reasoning or a perception of relationships or patterns” (Prabhu, p.46). One example is to find which course of actions is best for a given purpose and within given constraints.
3. *Opinion-gap activity*: involves “identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling or attitude in response to a given situation” (Prabhu, p.47). One example is story completion or taking part in a discussion (Prabhu).

There are also some more classifications of tasks such as closed/open tasks, structured/unstructured tasks, one-way/two-way tasks and so on which are not to be dealt with in the present study.

2.3 Introversion/Extroversion

Introversion and extroversion, popularized firstly by Jung, were measured by Eysenck in 1970. The tendency to withdraw from social interaction and be preoccupied with inner thoughts and feelings is called introversion (cited in Stern, 1983). Introversion is the extent to which a person derives a sense of wholeness and fulfillment apart from a reflection of this self from other people. Contrary to our stereotypes, introverts can have an inner strength of character that extroverts do not possess (Brown, 1994). On the other hand, the tendency to be outgoing and interested in people and things in the environment is called extroversion. Extroversion is the extent to which a person has a deep-seated need to receive ego enhancement, self-esteem, and a sense of wholeness from other people as opposed to receiving that affirmation within oneself. Extroverts need other people in order to feel good. However, extroverts are not necessarily loudmouthed and talkative. They may be relatively shy but still need the affirmation of others (Brown, 1994).

Skehan (1989) reports a number of studies done on introversion and extroversion. He says that Smart et al. did not find any positive relationship between extroversion/sociability and college language achievement, even suggesting that a group of over-achievers (relative to the achievement predicted on the basis of high school grades and academic aptitude) were characterized by a tendency to be introverted. On the other hand, he reports that Rossier found a positive relationship between extroversion and oral fluency but this relationship did not hold up for other proficiency tests. Another case is Swain and Burnaby who did not find any significant relationship between teacher ratings of personality attributes and performance of either immersion or regular language course studies. Genessee and Hamayan (as cited in Skehan, 1989) also failed to find any positive relationships between personality variables and achievement. Similarly, Ely (Ibid.) found that sociability did not predict classroom participation and that, in any case, classroom participation only predicted one of three criterion measures, a 'correctness' factor based

on a story retelling task. Finally, Strong (as cited in Skehan, 1989) did not find any relationship between a measure of extroversion and various indices of structure, vocabulary and pronunciation, based on the naturalistic language obtained from a group of kindergarteners in a Californian school. In their studies, Entwistle and Wilson (Skehan, 1989 reports) suggested that introverts might code material more efficiently into long-term memory. In general, educational research is supportive of the idea that extroverts tend to under-perform slightly compared to introverts.

Pazhoresh (1994) found that introverts, both males and females, are significantly better than extroverts in reading comprehension. Daneshvari (1996) found that extroverts performed better than introverts in listening comprehension. Also, female extroverts outperformed female and male introverts. Moreover, Shahini (2006) explored the relationship between extroverts/introverts and oral proficiency on Iranian learners. He concluded that the type of receptive tasks like reading and grammar in which concentration plays a major role, introverts were more successful. On the other hand, in productive tasks, namely, oral production, no particular group had a better performance than the other.

3. The Present Study

The present study is an attempt to look for the existence of a possible difference between task-based and standardized general proficiency reading comprehension test performance of extroverts and introverts. Moreover, it seeks the difference between extroverts and introverts' high-intermediate language learners' performance in cognitive communicative tasks in reading comprehension as well as that between extroverts and introverts high-intermediate language learners' performance in pedagogical communicative tasks of reading comprehension. Therefore, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. Does introversion/extroversion have any effect on task-based reading assessment?

2. Is there any difference between extroverts and introverts' high-intermediate language learners' performance in cognitive communicative tasks in reading comprehension?
3. Is there any difference between extroverts and introverts high-intermediate language learners' performance in pedagogical communicative tasks of reading comprehension?

3.1 Participants

To do the investigation in the present study, a sample of 120 participants was initially selected from high intermediate Iranian students studying at high schools. High intermediate students were those who had either passed the placement test given by the school to identify the high intermediate learners or those who had already passed the intermediate courses successfully. After administering a standardized proficiency test called Preliminary English Test (PET), scores of the 7 students who fell between one standard deviation below and one standard deviation above the mean were discarded. Moreover, 14 students were deleted because they had not taken either one or two of the tests. Consequently, 99 students found their way in the present study.

The students had already been placed in classes on the basis of the criteria set by the school authorities, including either their scores in a placement test or their successful completion of the prior course. A standardized test was administered to assure the homogeneity of the sample in terms of language proficiency. The participants were all male teenagers studying at the second and third grades of high school with an average age of 16. They represented an almost similar language background.

3.2 Instruments

Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (JEPQ) was utilized to assess the students' personality type and determine whether the participants were introverts or extroverts. The participants were asked to choose either 'yes' or 'no' for each item in the questionnaire. The time allotted for their responses was 10 minutes. Moreover, in order

to ensure that the reading comprehension tasks, developed by the present researchers, were valid and reliable, five experts (two PhD holders and three MA graduates) were asked to judge the tasks incorporated in the inventory. Furthermore, a class of 20 high-intermediate students was chosen *separately* to take the reading tasks along with PET and introversion/extroversion test as a pilot group. The purpose was to validate the newly developed tasks against a previously standardized criterion i.e. PET. The scores of the reading tasks, thus, were correlated with those of the proficiency test. The correlation index was 0.69. The index implied that the task enjoyed a satisfactory concurrent validity.

Additionally, to estimate the reliability index for the reading tasks, the researchers used Kuder-Richardson formula 21 (KR-21). The index which was 0.74 seemed acceptable for this study. After validation procedures and the pilot study, the revised form of the task-based assessment test was administered. The test consisted of seven main parts (parts A to G) having 40 questions altogether. The point allocated to each correct response was 1. The participants had 60 minutes to answer all of the questions. What they were required to do was to match, complete figures or tables, and write short answers. An answer sheet on which each participant could mark or write his answers was provided.

3. Results

In order to see whether there was any effect of introversion/extroversion on task-based reading assessment, the means of the task-based assessment and the PET exam were changed into Z-scores and then a repeated measure ANOVA was run. The results of ANOVA on PET and task-based assessment indicated that there was no significant difference between their means without considering their interaction with extroversion and introversion results. Moreover, no significant difference was found regarding interaction between task, PET and introversion and extroversion. Table 1, below, gives a summary of the findings.

Table 1: Results of ANOVA on Task-based Assessment, PET and Introversion/Extroversion

Source	Df	Mean	F	Sig.
Task & Pet results	1	.040	.173	.678
Task & Pet interaction regarding Extroverts Introverts	1	.071	.311	.733
Error (Task Pet)	103	.230		

In order to examine the second and the third research questions, the newly-developed task-based assessment which contained seven parts was subdivided into two different main categories namely; *Cognitive Types* and *Pedagogical Types*. Each fell into two and four subcategories, respectively.

The task-based reading test consists of seven parts (A to G). Each part can be categorized as both cognitive type and pedagogical type. Cognitive task includes *reasoning-gap* and *information-gap* tasks (Table 2).

Table 2: Cognitive Types of Task-based Assessment

Test Parts	Cognitive Types
A,B,D,F	Reasoning-gap
C,E,G	Information-gap

Pedagogical task consists of *comparing*, *ordering and sorting*, *problem solving*, and *creative* tasks. Parts A, B, D and F are *reasoning-gap* tasks and parts C, E and G are *information-gap* tasks as subcategories of cognitive type task. Parts A and B are *comparing* tasks; part C is *ordering and sorting* tasks; parts C, E and G are *problem solving* tasks and part F is a *creative* task; all as subcategories of cognitive type task (Table 3).

Table 3: Pedagogical types of Task-based Assessment

Test Parts	Pedagogic Types
A,B	Comparing
C	Ordering and Sorting
D,E,G	Problem solving
F	Creative Tasks

Accordingly, for each of these categories and subcategories the following codes were applied so that it would become possible for SPSS software to be used (Table 4). Cog1 is the sum of all *reasoning-gap* tasks; Cog2 represents the sum of all *information-gap* tasks; Ped1 shows the sum of all *comparing* tasks; Ped2 indicates the sum of all *ordering and sorting* tasks; Ped3 signifies the sum of all *problem solving* tasks and Ped4 points out the sum of all *creative* tasks throughout the test:

Table 4: Code Applied on the Test Computing

Code Abbreviation	The Complete Task Type Name
Cog1	Cognitive Type: Reasoning-gap
Cog2	Cognitive Type: Information-gap
Ped1	Pedagogic Type: Comparing
Ped2	Pedagogic Type: Ordering and sorting
Ped3	Pedagogic Type: Problem solving
Ped4	Pedagogic Type: Creative Tasks

A repeated-measures ANOVA was run to compare the means of *Reasoning-gap* tasks (Cog1) and *Information-gap* tasks (Cog. 2). It should be noted that the scores were changed to z-scores for making the comparison among the participants' performance possible. The following table shows the results.

Table 5: *Results of ANOVA on Cognitive Tasks and Introversion/Extroversion*

Source	df	Mean	F	Sig.
Cognitive tasks	1	.323	.950	.332
Cognitive tasks interaction with Extroverts & Introverts	1	.138	.408	.666
Error(Cognitive)	96	.340	---	---

The results of ANOVA on *cognitive tasks (reasoning-gap and information-gap)* indicate that there is no significant difference between the means. Furthermore, the difference between introverts and extroverts' performances was not significant.

As to the third research question, a repeated measures ANOVA was run to compare the means of *Comparing (Ped1), Ordering and Sorting (Ped2), Problem solving (Ped3)* and *Creative Tasks (Ped4)*. There is no need to repeat that the scores were changed into z-scores for comparison. The following table shows the results.

The results of ANOVA on *pedagogical tasks* i.e. *Comparing (Ped1), Ordering and Sorting (Ped2), Problem solving (Ped3)* and *Creative Tasks (Ped4)* indicate that there is no significant difference between the mean rates (Table 6). No significant difference was found regarding interaction between pedagogical tasks and introversion and extroversion.

Consequently, the third null hypothesis is confirmed.

Table 6: Results of ANOVA on Pedagogical Tasks and Introversion/Extroversion/ Ambiversion Test of Within-subjects Contrasts

Source	df	Mean	F	Sig.
Pedagogical tasks	1	.174	.297	.587
Pedagogical interaction with Extroverts & Introverts	1	.256	.436	.648
Error(Pedagogical)	96	.587	---	---

4. Conclusions

In the present study, students were given the PET exam, the Introversion/Extroversion test (JEPQ) and Task-based Reading Assessment Battery. The data were analyzed by the use of repeated measures ANOVA. In a nutshell, the results of the study showed that there was no significant difference between Prabhu's (1987) categories defined for the cognitive types of task i.e. information-gap and reasoning-gap; moreover, no significant difference was found between Willis's (1996) task *pedagogical* classifications i.e. *comparing, ordering and sorting, problem solving* and *creative* tasks. Therefore, it may be concluded that such categorization are not that valid and they do not that much difference in the minds of test-takers and they need to be studied more. Furthermore, the results indicated that there was no interaction between different kinds of tasks examined in the study and introversion and extroversion. Consequently, it can be claimed that their classifications is under question; therefore, they need to be revised.

There is no significant difference between introvert and extrovert learners' performance on the whole. According to Bachman (1990) the extent to which the learners' performance is affected by cognitive styles needs to be studied further. Consequently, this new avenue of research directs us towards exploring different personality traits

across task-based assessment to see whether there is any interaction between these factors, such as field dependence/independence, motivation, extroversion/introversion and so forth, and task or not; if any, to what extent it is influenced by them. Moreover, Ellis (2003) proposes that there is no empirical research to show that reasoning-gap tasks work better than information-gap or opinion-gap tasks for language acquisition. Most of the research on the relation between task and acquisition has examined information-gap tasks. Therefore, more study on the effects of task types on learners' performance seems essential. A noticeable point to bear in mind is finding a meaningful consistency amongst research results because, under the same conditions, personality traits produce various outcomes; even they can be affected by different cultures (Hansen, 1984). In sum, taking steps in the realm of task territory is a quite new experience; therefore, the field for sure deserves conducting more thorough research.

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