The influence of students' beliefs on their speaking performance = tác động của niềm tin đối với khả năng nói của sinh viên. M.A. Thesis Linguistics: 60 14 10 / Trần Thị Miên Viễn ; Supervisor : Dr. Hà Cẩm Tâm

PART I: INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale

Vietnamese students have studied English at the early classes since English is chosen as a compulsory subject at schools by the Minister of Education after a consequence of the 'open door' policy. Moreover, English is seen as a means of access to scientific, technological development and to the world knowledge, as the language for international communication, and as an instrument for receiving grants and aid. For young people, English is an effective tool for further study as well as a way to better job opportunities. Unfortunately, teaching and learning English is still a matter of much concern due to inappropriate teaching method to develop all skills of students. The fact is that graduate students even English-major students and non-English major students can not communicate verbally in English because of shyness, inadequate vocabulary, or simply lacking the necessary knowledge. There are many reasons for this; for example, during lectures, Vietnamese rather than English is mostly spoken by both teachers and students. Besides, students at colleges and universities are mainly just taught by traditional approach grammar translation method which only concentrates on the ability of using grammar rules precisely. Listening and speaking skills are ignored. As the results, lots of students rush to English Language Centers to improve their speaking skill. Also, many students of mine have come up to me and ask for help in their speaking skill. This main motivation has urged me to conduct the research.

Another motivation which the study is carried on results from interest of teaching speaking. By doing this study, I can understand my students' beliefs in speaking skill so that I can have proper methods to orientate them in learning English speaking skill

effectively. All of above factors and reasons have inspired me to do the research on "the influence of students' beliefs on their speaking performance."

2. The aim of the study

The purpose of this study is to see how students' beliefs affect their speaking skill by using the BALLI (Horwitz, 1988) survey instruments. Identification of these beliefs is to examine whether students' speaking beliefs could be linked to their speaking performance. Moreover, the study recommends some implications for teaching English speaking skill.

3. Scope and Significance of the study

This paper concentrates on finding beliefs of students in language learning, especially in learning English speaking. Hence, it examines how students' beliefs affected their speaking performance.

Furthermore, the research may be potential in equipping for modifying speaking activities in the course book in a more flexible and creative way. By doing survey of students' beliefs, the study might give teachers a profound insight into how to help students studying English speaking skill effectively.

4. Methods of the study:

The present study was designed to use both quantitative and qualitative research methods for the analysis. Two major complementary sources of data were used in the current study. The distributions of a questionnaire of Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) (Horwitz, 1988) provided quantitative data. The presentations of the students about given topic were used to elicit the qualitative data.

After collecting the distributions, the questionnaire data will be analyzed in order of five themes of BALLI (Horwitz, 1988) so as to find out the beliefs of the students in achieving a good speaking skill. The influence of students' beliefs on speaking performance was examined via students' academic marks and their presentations.

5. Organization of the study

The study is organized as follows:

Part one: Introduction presents the rationale, the aim, the scope and significance, the method and organization of the study.

Part two*:* consists of three chapters

Chapter 1 "Literature review" deals with basic theoretical backgrounds related to the study. It starts with the concepts of beliefs in language learning. It also presents related model research of Horwitz (1987, 1988, and 1990) and speaking skill assessment criteria. Finally, it states previous studies of beliefs about language learning.

Chapter 2 "The study" section 2.1 to 2.4 present the research questions, the information of subjects, data collection instruments and procedure. Section 2.5 deals with data analysis and discussions of the students' beliefs and its relationship with students' speaking performance.

Part three: "Conclusion" summarizing all the issues in the research contains major findings, limitations, implications and recommendation for further research.

PART II: DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Beliefs about language learning

Some researchers viewed beliefs about language learning as a part of metacognitive knowledge; however, Wenden (1998) claimed that in second and foreign language literature, these two terms are used interchangeably to refer to the same construct. The term, beliefs about language learning, were not clearly defined by researchers in previous studies. It seems either that the researchers assumed that the term can be understood intuitively or that the construct is too complex to be operationalized. In most studies, the term, beliefs about language learning, is used as a known construct without providing further explanation.

Second language researchers believed that EFL/ESL learners bring their norms, attitudes, perception and experiences into the learning task process and learning strategies (Sakui, & Gaies, 1999). Language experts identified that during the process of learning English as a second/ foreign language, students bring complex issues such as beliefs, attitudes, norms and expectation into the course syllabus. Based on the related research, each second language learner has his/her beliefs and thought about language learning and many factors will have opportunity to affects students beliefs and they can be considered as affective factors (Hortwitz, 1987). Aptitude, attitude, norms and perceptions have the potential to affect learners' language learning process, their motivation and their ability to cope with English as a foreign language. Consequently, they can be considered as push or pull factor to help learners' ultimate success in attainment of new language in shorter time (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). Rod Ellis (2003) indicated that a learner has a belief about language learning when:

- S/he has identified different attributes about language learning and their ability to learn language, for example, the language they are learning; how best to learn a language; the importance of learning about the culture of the second language; whether they expect to be successful.

- S/he has evaluated these attributes as positive or negative

1.2. Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) by Horwitz

In the early 1980s, Horwitz (1985) developed an instrument for identifying beliefs about foreign language learning. As Patricia S. Kuntz (1996) maintains, Horwitz's BALLI evolved as a result of a brain-storming session that she had with 25 language teachers. Horwitz (1988) then compiled a teacher-generated list of beliefs that students might have about language learning and developed an instrument for her study, which she called Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) after consulting specialists in cognitive science and psychology. Three distinct BALLIs are in use today: (1) BALLI to measure the beliefs of the students of English as a second language (ESL BALLI - 1984, 1987); (2) BALLI to explore beliefs held by foreign language teachers (teachers BALLI - 1985); and (3) BALLI to assess beliefs of students learning foreign languages (foreign language BALLI – 1988, 1990). The first BALLI consisted of 27 statements and was used to assess beliefs of immigrants learning English as a second language in Texas. The second BALLI focused on the beliefs held by teachers of foreign languages; it consisted of 27 statements. The third BALLI comprised 34 statements and was employed by Horwitz to gather the opinions of students learning French, German and Spanish at the University of Texas at Austin. All the different versions of BALLIs employed a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Questions in the BALLI were divided into groups according to their theme or topic. Initially, Horwitz's BALLIs (1981, cited in Kuntz 1996) comprised four themes, i.e. (1) foreign language aptitude, (2) difficulty of language learning, (3) nature of language learning, and (4) language learning strategies. Then Horwitz (1987) modified the fourth theme to "learning and communication strategies" and added "motivation and expectation" to her instrument. The final BALLI (1988) to assess beliefs about foreign language learning had this structure. The first category of the BALLI 'Foreign Language Aptitude' concerns the general existence of special ability for language learning. The second category 'Difficulty of language learning' concerns the general difficulty of learning a foreign language. The third one 'Nature of language learning' refers to relevant issues related to the nature of language learning process. The forth theme of BALLI 'Learning and Communication Strategies' refers to various strategies learners use to master a foreign language. The last category 'Motivation and Expectation' concerns the desire and expectation for language learning opportunities.

1.3. Speaking Skill Assessment Criteria

Two methods are used for assessing speaking skills. In the observational approach, the student's behavior is observed and assessed unobtrusively. In the structured approach, the student is asked to perform one or more specific oral communication tasks. His or her performance on the task is then evaluated. The task can be administered in a one-on-one setting with the test administrator and one student or in a group or class setting. In either setting, students should feel that they are communicating meaningful content to a real audience. Tasks are focus on topics that all students can easily talk about, or, if they do not include such a focus, students should be given an opportunity to collect information on the topic.

There are many sets of criteria used in oral tests. For example, the Cambridge Certificate in English Language Speaking Skills (CELS) (Thornbury S., 2005) uses analytic scoring based on four assessment criteria: 1) Grammar and Vocabulary (accurate and appropriate use of syntactic forms and vocabulary to meet the task requirements), 2) Discourse management (ability to express ideas and opinions in coherent and connected speech), 3) Pronunciation (ability to produce comprehensive utterances to fulfill the task requirements), 4) Interactive Communication (ability to interact with other interlocutors by initiating and responding appropriately and at the required speed and rhythm). Another example is the criteria suggested by Underhill N. (1987), which consists of 1) Fluency and Naturalness, 2) Vocabulary, 3) Connecting sentences (the ease of speaking several sentences together in a connected way. Finally, the criteria suggested by the Royal Society of Art (RSA) (Hughes A., 1989) include:

- **Accuracy**: Pronunciation still obviously influenced by L1 though clearly intelligible. Grammatical/lexical accuracy is general high, though some errors which do not destroy communication are acceptable.

- **Appropriacy:** Use of language generally appropriate to function. The overall intention of the speaker is always clear.

- **Range:** A fair range of language is available to the candidate. He is able to express himself without overtly having to search words.

- **Flexibility:** Is able to take the initiative in a conversation and to adapt to new topics or changes of direction – though neither of these may be consistently manifested.

- **Size:** Most contributions may be short, but some evidence of ability to produce more complex utterances and to develop these into discourse should be manifested.

CHAPTER 2

THE STUDY

2.1. Research Questions:

This study was set up to answer the following questions:

    1. What are the students' beliefs in speaking English?

    2. How do their beliefs affect their speaking performance?

2.2. Subjects

The study involved in 40 English – major students of DHAV5 from Faculty of Foreign Language at Ho Chi Minh University of Industry (HUI). Of the 40 students, 5 are male and 35 are female aged from twenty to twenty - three. They all have finished their second academic year and have been in the third year at university. Their English proficiency was considered to be qualified as intermediate.

2.3 Data Collection Instruments

2.3.1. Questionnaire

The Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) to assess beliefs of students learning foreign language (Horwitz, 1988) was adopted to collect student's beliefs in speaking. However, the questionnaire included only 20 statements extracted from 34 statements of BALLI (Horwitz, 1988) (Appendix B) including item 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24, 26, 27, 31 and 34. These statements were selected due to its involvement to speaking skill. Moreover, only 20 items extracted from 34 ones was to create a simpler questionnaire to collect data and not too long for the forty – page thesis. These 20 statements are grouped in five categories:

    (A) The Foreign Language Aptitude (item 1, 6, 10 and 20)

    (B) The Difficulty of Language Learning (item 2, 16)

    (C) The Nature of Language Learning (item 4, 7, 11, 14 and 17)

    (D) Learning and Communication Strategies (item 3, 5, 8, 9, 12, and 13)

    (E) Motivation and Expectation (item 15, 18, and19)

The subjects were asked to read statements and decide if they: (5) Strongly agree; (4) Agree; (3) Neither agree nor disagree; (2) Disagree; (1) strongly disagree. Statements were followed by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The following was the sample of the questionnaire. The completed questionnaire was shown in Appendix A.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was adopted from the questionnaire of Horwitz (1988) about Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)

Your answer to these statements will be highly appreciated and will be valuable help in examining students' beliefs in English speaking skill and suggesting some solutions to improve speaking performance to second – year students at Ho Chi Minh University of Industry (HUI). You can be confident that you will not be identified in any discussion of the data. Thank you very much for your help!

I.   Student's personal information:
1. Sex: a. Male   b. Female

2. Age: ………………….

II.   Beliefs in Speaking English:
Students are asked to read each statement and indicate by (√)

(5) Strongly agree   *(4) Agree*

(3) Neither agree nor disagree   *(2) Disagree*

(1) Strongly disagree

Statements	Opinion				
	5	4	3	2	1
1. Some people are born with a special ability which helps them learn a foreign language.					
2. I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak this language very well.					
3. It is important to speak a foreign language with an excellent accent.					

2.3.2. Observation and Note Taking

Observation and note taking were also applied in this study. Students were asked to talk about a topic titled "Advantages and Disadvantages of Mobile Phone". Their presentations were taken notes for further assessment based on the criteria set of RSA (Authur Hughes, 1989).

2.4. Data collection procedure

2.4.1. Questionnaire

The survey extracted from BALLI (Horwitz, 1988) was distributed to 98 subjects of DHAV5 (including DHAV5A, DHAV5B, and DHAV5C) at the beginning of the classes and with the author's attendance so that their needs for clarification of some words as *self-conscious or ultimately or accent* could be met. It was carried in the mid of September, 2011 as the student began their first semester of third-year university. All the data were collected at DHAV5 right after the students spent five minutes completing at classes.

However, due to some excuses of the students' lateness and absence and carelessness in answering all items of the questionnaire, only forty completed responses were collected. Therefore, the data of the students' beliefs were analyzed on only these forty questionnaires.

2.4.2. Observation

Observation was administrated to ten students (two excellent students, three average and five good students) were asked to raise their opinions about "Advantages and Disadvantages of Mobile Phone. The presentations were implemented on only ten students since the time was partly not allowed to do with all forty students. The students partly did not seem cooperated with the author.

Ten students were gathered in a group after their class and asked to take turn to raise their voice about the topic while the author was observing and taking notes. The presentations were taken down to assess based on criteria of fluency, accuracy, range and size and re-typed for evidences in this paper (Appendix E).

2.4.3. Records of Learning Results

The study results of speaking for the second semester of forty students who filled in the questionnaire were collected from their teacher of speaking in order to assess how their beliefs impact on their speaking performance as shown in their study results.

PART III: CONCLUSION

1. Conclusion

This thesis was set up to study the beliefs of students learning to speak English and cover how these beliefs affect their learning. Therefore, the major findings were identifies as following:

- The students had strong motivations and expectations for language learning. Besides, they did not stop believing in special ability to help them learn the foreign language (Item 1 of theme A). In addition, they believed that learning the foreign language in the foreign country and the foreign language culture are the best way to master speaking.

- Nevertheless, they had good conceptions of learning language well such as regularly repeating and practicing the language (item 12 of theme D) or guessing unknown words in the language (item 9 of theme D).

- Certainly, they owned negative attitude towards learning the foreign language. For instance, the students did not approve that they have a foreign language aptitude (item 10 of theme A) or they did not feel that they were self-conscious speaking the foreign language in front of other people (item 13 of theme D). Furthermore, they believed that learning the foreign language is a matter of translating (item 17 of theme C).

The findings also indicated the link between the beliefs and their performances

- The different beliefs in item 6 of beliefs about Foreign Language Aptitude may not affect on the students' speaking performance since the evidence showed that the average students did not believe that *people who already learn a foreign language will learn another one more easil*y while the excellent and good students agreed with the high agreement percentage.

- The findings also revealed that the excellent students considered English speaking skill was not a difficult task while the average performers believed it as a difficult task. It might be that the average students faced with high anxiety while they were speaking. The findings could be found in item 16 of beliefs about the Difficulty of Language Learning.

- In respect of beliefs about the Nature of Language Learning, the data revealed that the students with high proficiency tended to disagree that English learning was a matter of learning grammar rules and translation in English while low proficiency students tended to agree.

- The last findings were beliefs about Learning and Communicative Strategies that the students who were not self-conscious speaking English in front of other people performed worse than those who were self – conscious to speak the foreign language in front of other people. In other words, the excellent students were more self-conscious in speaking English than the average students.

In conclusion the major findings may reveal the connection of the students' speaking beliefs and their speaking performance. From that, the findings in the paper may help teachers of speaking skill understand their students' beliefs and have suitable and interesting activities. Moreover, the students may have more motivation, expectation and encouragement for their efforts in their performance in aspects of fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, even range and size in their speeches.

Perhaps, the findings may not show clearly the link between the students' beliefs and their speaking performances. However, the paper somehow may contribute partly in teaching and studying improvement of English speaking skill.

Last but not least, the topics related to students' beliefs could be implemented more in order to help students speak English better.

2. Implications and Limitations

The paper deals with a new topic of Vietnamese students' beliefs in speaking English, the research could not avoid mistakes and shortcomings.

Firstly, the study may not provide the exact connection of students' beliefs and their speaking performance due to some following reasons:

- The study was implemented on small sample.
- The presentations were carried on during break time, so the surrounding was too noisy to record. The author took notes and assessed their speaking performance of fluency, pronunciation at sight. Therefore, the results of the study may be subjective and less reliable.
- Only one presentation could not reflect the students' performance. Due to limited time, the students did not have much time to brainstorm some ideas for the topic. Thus, the presentations' range and size of the students were not totally assessed.

Secondly, the questions in the questionnaires which were selected from BALLI (Horwitz, 1988) may not reflect enough the students' beliefs because of the length of the thesis.

Thirdly, one presentation of the students was not enough evidence to assess the students' performance because the presentations were implemented on only ten students. Secondly, the topic was popular and easy for the students.

Finally, the research is only applied for a class of DHAV5 at Ho Chi Minh University of Industry. Thus, the results are not completely popularly true and do not cover many students of many universities.

The findings of the present study suggest the following.

First, considering the possible relation of beliefs about language learning and students' speaking performance revealed in the qualitative study phase, teachers should try to understand the students' beliefs about language learning in order to enhance the instructional practices - the selection of class activities and materials as well as the teaching approaches - that match with the goals or the curriculum of the schools.

Second, the beliefs that were found to influence the students' performance in regard to focusing on form such as beliefs about the importance of grammar, beliefs about the difficulty of language skills, and self efficacy in the foreign language should be addressed while the students are studying this skill. Teachers should raise awareness of the students about their preconceived ideas in these aspects and help refine beliefs that may accommodate speaking performance.

Third, the students' self efficacy in English skills should be enhanced while they are in classes. Considering the effects of self efficacy on their speaking performance found in the qualitative study phase, courses that improve students' English skills should be offered. Furthermore, the instructors should help enhance the students' understanding about their own ability in speaking language skill.

Finally, in order to get exact results of the students' performance, researchers should do many assessments on their performance such as making conversations, monologue, etc. Researchers may spend time on observation of the students during courses.