

The Efficacy of Delineating L2 Sources of Grammatical Errors with Reference to the Students' L1 for Increasing Iranian EFL Learner's Production and Recognition Accuracy

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Abstract—The purpose of the present study is to investigate the impact of delineating L2 sources of grammatical errors with reference to the students' L1, instead of other types of error correction strategies, to help learners become familiar with sources of their errors and avoid making them in their text reconstruction task production and recognition test. To this end, two groups of Iranian English major (N=61) were compared. The result showed a main effect for the above- cited treatment as a result of which the experimental group outperformed the control group concerning their text reconstruction task accuracy and receptive knowledge improvement.

Index Terms—delineating, reconstruction task accuracy, receptive knowledge

I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

When we review the second language acquisition literature, we realize that lots of teachers and researchers have been concerned about the issue of grammar for a long time. Most of them tried to find suitable methods and strategies in order to facilitate the acquisition of this challenging subject (Song and Suh, 2008). Lee (2007) states that in fact, the reaction against form – oriented instruction (grammar translation method, Audio-lingual method – total physical response), motivated teachers and researchers to consider new language teaching methods which were mainly based on the meaning. By the appearance of these methods, Lee (2007) claims that language teachers have been encouraged to follow the objectives of communicative competence and fluency, while grammar teaching which was not related to communicative aims has been considered as "counterproductive"(p.88). But an immersion study shows that only meaning focused instruction cannot help us to have learners who produce target language form accurately and some stress on form is also necessary to help learners make better their language accuracy over time. (Swain, 1995, 1998).

Yoshida, 2008 claims that in fact, by the appearance of a theory that emphasized some exclusive attention to form, researchers gave their attention to written corrective feedback more than. For example, Schmidt (2001) argues that meaning oriented activities are not sufficient for second language acquisition and learners should also pay attention to specific form. Pica (2000) states that:

"Learners must be given L2 input that is made meaningful and comprehensible. They must selectively attend to form of their input as well as its meaning. They must produce L2 and be given feedback in order to modify their production toward greater comprehensibility, appropriateness and accuracy. (p.7)

Swain (1995, 1998) claims the teacher can provide learners with feedback opportunity based on the content and grammar. Izumi and Bigelow (2000) also highlight the role of error feedback claiming that students within output production will formulate and test a hypothesis in order to put their next production based on it and they can change their incorrect hypothesis through various feedback strategies. Adams (2003) says that when learners are engaged in the process of output production, they may realize that they can't communicate what they want. So in this situation, the teacher can give them the corrective feedback. They may notice their problems and understand to what extent it is different from their original output. Havranek and Cesnik (2001) believe that in different classrooms, teachers use corrective feedback in order to grant and make their learners aware of some parts which do not match the target language forms.

As it has been mentioned this focus on form led second language acquisition researchers to appreciate the role of corrective feedback. This renewed attention to form in SLA has made the issue of providing grammar the topic of very

heated discussion. Based on it lots of research have been designed concerning different kinds of feedback (Rahimi, 2009; Ferris and Roberts, 2001; Varnosfadrani and Basturkmen, 2009; Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005), factors affect corrective feedback successfulness like students characteristics, types of error correction, context and form of error correction (Havranek and Cesnik, 2001) and teachers and learners preferences regarding feedback (Yoshida, 2008). Teachers provide corrective feedback explicitly and implicitly to the erroneous productions of learners. Explicit feedback refers to providing the students with the correct forms of their errors (Bitchener, Yung & Cameron, 2005; Sheen, 2004). Whereas the proponents of indirect feedback employ various strategies such as underlining the errors and providing the marginal feedback. A great number of the studies on error feedback have been conducted in the area of explicit or implicit correction (Ferris, 2006; Chandler, 2003).

As we know the cross- linguistic difference between two languages can be the source of errors for language learners. Rahimi, 2009 claims that since teachers in a lot of English classes in Iran use grammar translation method and they focus on explicit teaching of grammar, cross- linguistic differences seem to be significant in Iran context. So despite the fact that there is significant variation in the purposes and designs of the previous studies on error feedback explicitly or implicitly, concerning those errors caused by the differences between learners' L1 and L2, it is also important to know whether delineating the problems with reference to the students' L1 would make learners familiar with the sources of their errors and help learners avoid making them in their subsequent tasks. This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. Does delineating L2 sources of grammatical errors with reference to the students' L1 would help learners improve their text reconstruction task accuracy overtime?
2. Does delineating L2 sources of grammatical errors with reference to the students' L1 would influence students' receptive knowledge of target form as measured on a recognition test?

II. METHODOLOGY

Participant

The participants in the study were 61 Iranian male learners of English as a foreign language, aged 17-25 .They shared the following characteristics a) their major was English and b) their level of proficiency in English was intermediate. These participants were randomly selected from 110 students of university and all of them took part in TOEFL test of English proficiency. Among the participants in the final subject (N=61), 31 learners were in the experimental group (EG), and the remaining 30 were in the comparison group (CG).

Instruments

In order to address the first research question, students were provided with four text reconstruction tasks within 4 treatment sessions. Learners were asked to reconstruct a passage after reading a text. According to Ellis (2003), output task refers to a kind of form-focused task which learners listen to or read a text, and after it, they are required to reconstruct the text based on their words. As Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), state" the assumption underlying this task is that in processing a text for meaning learners store the propositional content but not the linguistic forms used to encode the content" (P.33). Izumi and Bigelow (2000) claim that output activities catch learners' attention to form and meaning at the same time and the learners begin target language production with the intention of expressing meaning. Based on it, they finally conclude that we can be sure that this function of output completely lays stress on the combination of focus on form and meaning. Thornbury (1997) declare that the first thing for this activity is that students will listen or read a text and then try to reconstruct it. Storch (1998) state that we can use text reconstruction task by selecting a text in which function words have been omitted (in order to make it suitable for students proficiency level) and it will help students to consider semantic unit on the basis of the whole text rather than the sentence. More clearly, Storch (1998), explains that

"Students are presented with the content words and instructed to reconstruct the text by inserting appropriate function words (e.g. articles, prepositions), linking words, inflectional morphemes (e.g. tense and aspect markers, singular/plural markers), and/or changing word order in order to produce an accurate, meaningful, and appropriate text"(p.292).

In order to address the second research question, the following test was used:

The recognition tests were based on *Understanding and Using English Grammar*, and *Grammar in Use, Intermediate Course Book*. Each version consisted of 20 items, of which 16 served for four above- cited target items and 4 used as detractors. Of the 16 sentences which included the target structure, 6 of them were correct and 10 incorrect. The participants were required to read the tests and to determine whether they were correct and, if incorrect, to underline the incorrect part and produce the correct form.

Treatment and Procedure

Each participant completed four text reconstruction tasks during 8 sessions, staged at sessions 1, 3, 5 and 7. They were asked to read a text. After reading and collecting the texts, the reconstruction task was carried out by all the two groups. They were asked to reconstruct the content of the passage they had just read as accurately as possible on a sheet of paper. Four selected grammar errors including article errors, questions errors, verb errors and noun ending errors made by the learner in each of the task were then delineated with reference to the students' L1 by the researchers. It should be mentioned that there was no delineation with reference to students'L1 for the errors made by the control

group. To observe the ethical consideration, they were provided with some comments on the organization and content of their text reconstruction tasks as well as very general comments on grammar at the bottom of their papers.

The how of error delineation with reference to the student's L1 in order to raise our learners' awareness of their target language ill-structured form, highlight the differences between English and Persian structures and show the cause of their errors is extracted from the following information and is illustrated as follows:

Article errors:

These errors were largely related to exclusion of articles. Since there is no observable or overt definite or indefinite article in Persian, learners will make the article related errors (Khanchobani, 2010; Rahimi, 2009).

He is teacher. ----- /? *u moaelem aest!*.

It should also be mentioned that since there is no definite article in Persian too, language learners did not use the definite article correctly to make a difference between the specific singular and generic (Khanchobani, 2010). As Rahimian (1995) states most of the time the context will make a noun definite in Persian so one can expect a Persian speaker makes such erroneous structures as below;

Book (specific) is good. ----- /? *Ketab khob aest!*.

Book (generic) is good. ----- /? *Ketab khob aest!*.

Questions

The researcher explains that this error occurs due to difference between Persian and English interrogative structures. As Rahimian (1995) and Yarmohammadi (1996) say Persian speakers keep their questioning tones even dealing with embedded questions. So the tendency to keep the structure of question in Persian environment will lead to the following errors in English context.

Do you know what should I do?

I can't remember when did he get married.

Some of the errors are also related to variable questions and it can be due to the fact that 'wh' movement is optional in Persian but it is obligatory in English.

You saw who in the street. /? *shoma ĉe kăsi ra dăer xiyaban didid!*/?

Verb errors

As Rahimi, 2009 states "Persian speakers usually use the same structure to talk about past and present perfect, the past progressive and a past habit, and the present progressive and simple present tense" (p. 233). We can also add that Iranian EFL learners while producing a sentence in the target language try to translate the meanings which have been shaped in their minds into English. Therefore, since Persian speakers use the same structure to talk about different tenses and due to the fact that the time issue in Persian is not as significant as in English; the following kinds of errors can be expected:

He went (past). /? *u raft!*.

He went (present perfect). /? *u raft!*.

Noun ending errors

It was highly based on the possessive endings. Due to lack of elements such as 's to join the possessor and the possessions in Persian, its speakers clarify the relation by the vowel sound /e/, which does not appear in writing (Rahimi, 2009; Fallahi, 1991). So we can expect the following kinds of errors:

Book Bab. / *ketab-e bab!*.

Noun endings errors were also seen while making a plural form of a noun in English. It can be made because Persian speakers never add any particular element to the nouns in Persian to make a plural form of them when the nouns come after figures.

He has seven book. /? *u haft ketab darad!*.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the result of investigation to see the extent to which delineation with reference to students' L on four targeted linguistic errors helped learners improve the accuracy of their text reconstruction task when producing new texts.

As evident in the table 1, the error means of EG and CG in their first text reconstruction tasks are 11.28 and 12.57, respectively. The error mean of the fourth text reconstruction task was 4.60 for EG and 7.32 for CG. The standard deviations for the two groups are very close in their first text reconstruction tasks; however, the standard deviation of CG is almost twice as much as that of EG (4.65 and 2.52, respectively) indicating a larger disparity among the error means of CG. Overall, one can see a slight difference between the error means of the two groups at the beginning of the experiment, while this difference has increased in their last text reconstruction tasks.

TABLE 1
ERROR MEANS IN TEXT RECONSTRUCTION TASK 1 AND 4 IN EG AND CG

Task	M	SD
1EG	11.28	9.56
1CG	12.57	9.23
4EG	4.60	2.52
4CG	7.32	4.65

In order to further confirm this hypothesis, as a follow up test, two independent-tests were run to show whether the difference between error means of the first text reconstruction tasks of the two groups as well as that of their last text reconstruction tasks was significant or not. The results of the first t-test showed that the difference between the error mean of text reconstruction task one for EG and that of the same text reconstruction task for CG was not significant ($T = 0.47, p > 0.05$), indicating that the two groups were equal with respect to their text reconstruction task accuracy at the beginning of the study. On the other hand, the second t-test indicated that the difference between the last text reconstruction task written by EG and CG was significant ($T = 2.12, p < 0.05$), with EG making fewer errors than CG (4.6 and 7.32, respectively).

As Table 2 shows, the error means for both experimental and control groups decrease from the first to the last text reconstruction task. The difference between the error means of text reconstruction task 1 and text reconstruction task 4 for EG is 6.68 while this index is 3.25 for CG. Thus, it implies that EG have made more improvement than CG. The same is true with the standard deviations. That is, the standard deviations for both groups have decreased from the first to the last text reconstruction task, though the decrease in EG is much larger than in CG, indicating smaller disparity among the error means of CG. The results of the repeated measures test of ANOVA showed significant differences between the means of the four text reconstruction tasks in both groups ($F = 13.16, p < 0.01$) for EG; $F = 4.01, p < 0.05$) for CG). Bonferroni test was used as the post hoc test to correct the significance level and to eliminate the effect of repeated analyses for the same group of students. The results of the post hoc Bonferroni test showed that except for text reconstruction tasks one and two, there are significant differences between the error means of all the other text reconstruction tasks for EG, whereas, for CG, significant difference was observed only between the error means of text reconstruction tasks one and four.

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR ERROR MEANS OF THE FOUR TEXT RECONSTRUCTION TASKS BY EG AND CG

Task	Error mean		SD	
	EG	CG	EG	CG
1	11.28	12.57	9.56	9.23
2	10.84	11.71	7.94	9.27
3	7.20	10.02	5.72	6.65
4	4.60	9.32	2.52	4.65

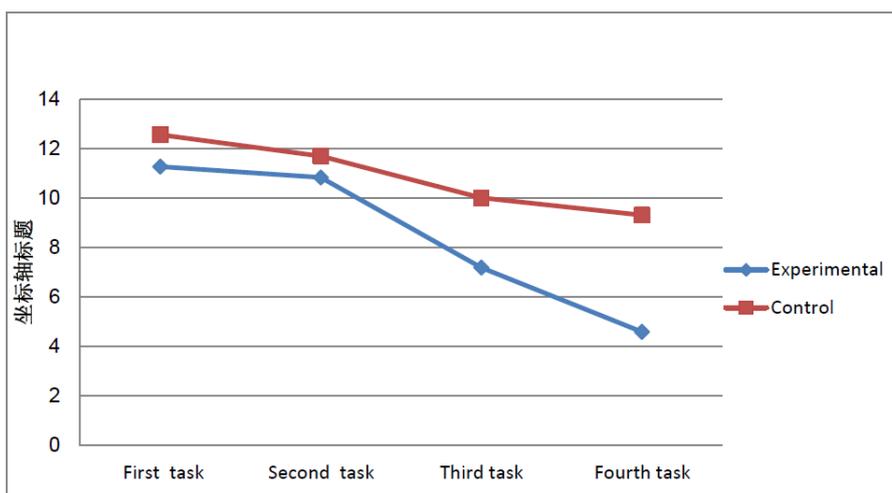


Fig. 1. Error mean scores graph of the four text reconstruction tasks by EG and CG

In order to answer the second research question, the data obtained from pretest indicated a difference between the two groups' mean scores; the experimental group scored higher than the control group. The statistical analysis of the results of the pretest, and the group mean comparison revealed that $T_{observed}$ to be .85, with probability value: $P < .05$. It is clear that the value of $T_{observed}$ does not exceed $T_{critical}$ that is 2. Therefore the difference between two groups was not significant at $P < .05$. It means that the two groups turned out not to be significantly different at the beginning of the study. Therefore, based on this result, any differences on the post – test found for experimental groups can be attributed to treatment effects rather than to pre – existing differences.

The analysis of the results of posttest, and the group means comparison showed the $T_{observed}$ to be 5.71 with the probability level of $P < .05$ and is much higher than $T_{critical}$. It means that there is a significant difference between the experimental and control group. Therefore this significant difference between the experimental and control group can be attributed to treatment effect with EG acting on the recognition test better than the control group.

TABLE 3
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR RECOGNITION TEST SCORES

	Experimental Group			Control group		
	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
M	65.66	86.21	20.55	65.15	67.42	2.27
SD	32.71	19.70		34.12	30.15	

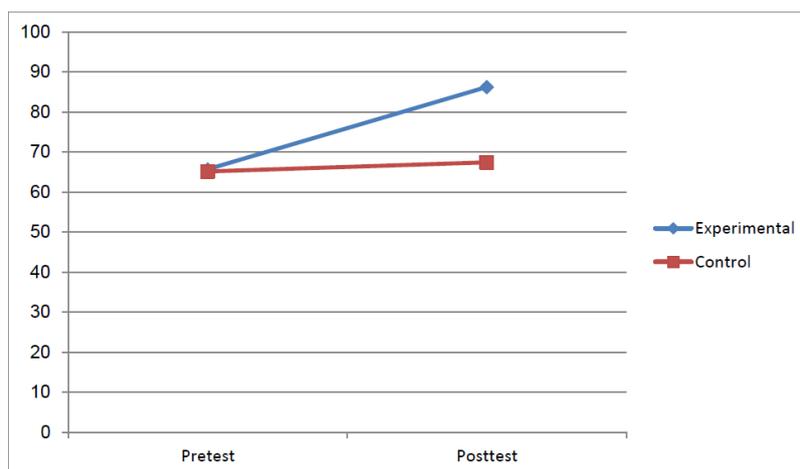


Fig. 2. Mean scores graph of recognition test by the two groups.

The results of the present study are interpreted as an indication that English learners, native speakers of Persian, benefited from delineating L2 sources of errors with reference to their L1 as a result of which the experimental group learners improved their production and recognition levels. The control group production patterns concerning the first and second research questions do not show gain a finding which doesn't seem to weaken our claim. We interpreted the results of this study as an indication that delineating L2 sources of grammatical errors with references to the students' L1 induced salience which drew the learners' attention to L1 – L2 differences, made them notice the differences. In this study, learners who were able to comprehend the differences between L1 and L2 on the basis of the desired treatment improved their production and recognition levels. Concerning the positive role of delineating with reference to the students L1, the findings of this study are consistent with Manuchehri (1974) claiming that English teachers must be familiar to some extent with learner's native language. She continues that "this kind of information enables teachers to develop insights into the problems that his students are likely to encounter as the result of the differences between English and their native language" (Manuchehri, 1974; p. 171). In order to make teachers able to help students preventing errors, Isfahani(1989) claims that errors made by Persian students learning English as a foreign language show that pre-systematic and systematic errors are due to transformational rules used by learners in creating simple and complex sentences.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study found that delineating L2 sources of grammatical errors with reference to the learner's L1 can help the experimental group learners to gain accuracy. It was found that the above-cited treatment contributes to the text reconstruction task accuracy and can also be conducive to add to the learner's receptive knowledge measured through recognition tests.

The pedagogical implication of this study can help teachers, researchers, syllabus designers and material developers to consider the role of cross-linguistic differences between any two languages while teaching in the class, conducting different studies on language acquisition issues and also selecting or grading of materials to help second language learners to learn a language. Another important implication can be due to the fact that since a lot of Iranian teachers prefer to apply a lot of error correction strategies, it will be helpful to know how cross-linguistics differences can influence the efficiency of error correction while treating different kind of errors in the classroom. The underlying objectives of these kinds of studies are to help teachers to know about those errors resulting from language differences and diminish the difficulty acquiring second language.

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