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The Impact of Teaching Developmental Grammatical Errors on Iranian Undergraduate Translator Trainees' L2 Paragraph Writing Ability

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the impact of teaching developmental grammatical errors on translator trainees' L2 paragraph writing ability. After the administration of Oxford Placement Test (OPT), 40 out of 100 undergraduate translator trainees were selected from the Islamic Azad University of Tonekabon branch. Further, the participants were divided into an experimental and a control groups. A pre-test of paragraph writing ability was administered to both groups and the participants were asked to write a paragraph about the selected topic. Then, the experimental group received 5 sessions of treatments on teaching developmental grammatical errors extracted from their previous writing performance while the control group received a placebo. After five sessions of the treatments, the post-test of paragraph writing ability was administered in which the participants in both groups were asked to write a paragraph about a selected topic. Three raters corrected the paragraphs. The scores were analyzed using the SPSS software by applying Independent sample t-test and Pearson correlation. The findings indicated that subjects in the experimental group showed significant improvement in their writing performance.

Keywords: paragraph, writing ability, paragraph writing, grammatical errors, developmental grammatical errors

1. Introduction

Lately, a great interest and an expressive and important role in second and foreign language education is received by writing but teaching English L2 writing is not the same as other skills of language because writing is used as a support skill in language learning. Writing is something that people use to express their emotions and thoughts, and despite the fact that writing skills come late on the ladder of acquisition, they still make a significant component of errors on Iranian undergraduate translator trainee's L2 paragraph writing ability.

Errors are grouped into two groups, interlingual and intralingaul. Interlingaul errors are those kinds of errors which are due to the L1 interference, and intralingaul errors are the ones which are committed without paying attention to learner's language background and they are due to learner's target language. The latter kind of errors is sometimes referred to as developmental errors (Brown, 1994; Corder, 1986; Johnson, 2001; Richards, 1971). According to Richards (1971), developmental errors show that learner is trying to build up hypotheses about the target language from his limited and narrow experience of being exposed to the language.

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of teaching developmental grammatical errors as an independent variable on the L2 paragraph writing of Iranian undergraduate translator trainees as a dependent variable. That is, the researchers desired to clarify whether it is worthy to teach developmental grammatical errors in L2 paragraph writing courses of Iranian undergraduate translator trainees.

2. Theoretical Framework

Sattari (2015) conducted an analysis of grammatical errors in Iranian students' English writing and found that there are some kinds of errors which are developmental errors that will be omitted as the result of students' proficiency levels. According to his study, when students' papers are corrected by the teacher and their errors are pointed out by him/her, the teacher enhances their attention to the correct language form either explicitly or implicitly.

Error Analysis (EA) and interlanguage hypotheses, which are as essential elements of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research, have been widely used to investigate the process of second language learners' learning. Learner's interlanguage has been analyzed by SLA researchers in terms of errors which exist in the L2 output. On the basis of

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these hypotheses, "Errors can be observed and classified to reveal something of the system operating within the learner" (Brown, 2000, p. 218). Comparing to the other skills in English, it is considered that writing is the most complex skill to master. Writing and grammar are closely related twist, that is, a good writing derives its greatness from correct grammar.

Hence, studying grammatical errors of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in their writing provides useful insights into the learning difficulties which need to finally be mastered by more efficient pedagogical measures. Sometimes similar grammatical errors may be seen in the writings of students at dissimilar levels of language proficiency, which show fossilized errors (Selinker, 1972). So, it is practicable to discover grammatical errors relating to a particular level of language proficiency which may show the developmental errors of that level (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982).

The nature of the composing process of writing is a very important theme in pedagogical study on writing. The outcome of the compositional nature of writing has created writing pedagogy that its emphasis is on generating ideas, organizing them coherently, using discourse markers and rhetorical conventions to set them out cohesively into a written text, revising text for clearer meaning, editing text for appropriate grammar, and producing a final product (Brown, 2001). Also writing never takes place in a vacuum; it is always placed in a rhetorical condition, it means a complex web of relations among the writing elements (Kinneavy, 1971; Moffett, 1968/1983).

A model for error analysis has been identified by Corder (1974). It consisted of three stages:

1. Data collection: it refers to the recognition of idiosyncrasy.

2. Description: it refers to accounting for idiosyncratic dialect.

3. Explanation (the ultimate object of error analysis).

Systematically analyzing errors that have been committed by language learners makes it possible to discover areas that require reinforcement in teaching (Corder, 1974).

3. Statement of the Problem

Shokrpour and Fallahzadeh (2004) carried out a research towards EFL writing issues at the university level. They stated that writing is a complex process which reflects the writers' communicative skills. They tried to point out the major difficulties with which their students at Shiraz University of Medical Science face when writing their reports. If a teacher wants to help EFL students write in English appropriately, they must take their major problems in writing into account to gain favorable outcomes.

According to Khoii and Tabrizi (2011 as cited in Reilly, 2005), writing is a rational activity and the most demanding of all language skills. Moreover, writing is a skill which is difficult for many teachers to teach and, ultimately, it is a skill plenty of learners do not enjoy. So it is the reason that during the last two decades there has been an increase in the introducing new techniques for helping students improve their writing.

Based on a research on struggling young writers, writing is very important but it is one of the most difficult language skills to master (Graham, Harris & Mason, 2005). The difficulty of writing is often marked by its inherently complex characteristics which based on Wall (1981, p. 53) "range from mechanical control to creativity, with good grammar, knowledge of subject matter, awareness of stylistic conventions, and various mysterious factors in between."

4. Research Question

Based on the problems and purposes discussed above, the following research question was addressed:

Does teaching of developmental grammatical errors have any impact on Iranian undergraduate translator trainee's L2 paragraph writing ability?

5. Hypothesis of This Study

The research question of this study can result in the following hypothesis:

H_0: Teaching developmental grammatical errors does not have any impact on Iranian undergraduate translator trainee's L2 paragraph writing ability.

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6. Review of the Literature

6.1 Writing Skill: General Considerations

Along with speaking and listening, writing is one of the three modes of linguistic expression and communication (Schmit, 2010). Writing is not just speaking in another modality. The same building blocks of vocabulary and grammar are essential to both writing and speaking but writing is frequently used for variety of purposes. Writing is a crucial language skill that makes people to be able to express their feelings and thoughts. According to Tierney (1989), writing is considered a complex skill because it requires the students to apply the appropriate cognitive strategies, intellectual skills, verbal information, and appropriate motivation.

Writing, in contrast with speech is not learned naturally by everyone. It is learned through explicit instruction (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996); as Leki (1992) stated 'no one is a "native speaker" of writing.' Of course it does not mean there is no difference between L1 and L2 writer. Aside from the acquisition of the second language grammar, the difference between L1 and L2 writing is to a large extent a matter of degree, because all writers continue to develop their language proficiency and genre knowledge.

6.2 L2 Errors: Basic Tenets

In the early 1950's, it was believed that language is a system and second language learning was accepted as acquisition of two language systems. It was considered that errors were evidence of language transfer, and it was believed that errors were the result of ineffective language learning and the intension of linguists and language teachers became the deletion of the errors (Khodabandeh, 2007).

In the late 1960's, it was showed that all that language learners did was not just memorizing the rules of target language and using them to produce language, they were also making their own rules on the basis of the their received input and that led to a rebirth of error analysis which required redefinition of the whole concept, a perspective which is more cognitive (Khodabandeh, 2007).

One of the first and most important studies conducted in the field of Error Analysis was the one done by Richards (1971). His study involved learners from different language background (Japanese, Chinese, Burmese, French, Czech, Polish, Tagalog, Maori, Maltese, and Indian and West African Languages) and showed the different types of errors relating to production and distribution of verb groups, prepositions, articles, and the use of questions. Based on this, he distinguished three sources of errors:

1. Interference errors: this kind of errors refers to the errors resulting from the use of elements from one language while speaking/writing another,

2. Intralingual errors: this kind of errors refers to the errors reflecting general characteristics of the rule learning such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules, and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply, and

3. Developmental errors: this kind of errors refers to the errors occurring when learners attempt to build up hypothesis about the target language on the basis of limited experiences.

7. Methodology

7.1 Design of the Study

This study followed a pretest-posttest design. First, there was a subject selection through administering an OPT with the criteria of 1 standard deviation below to 1 standard deviation over the mean to show the acceptable proficiency level of the participants (N=40) of the study. Second, the participants were divided into two groups of experimental (Gex = 20) and control (Gcon = 20). A pre-test of L2 paragraph writing ability was administered to both groups of the study and then, the experimental group received 5 sessions of teaching Developmental Grammatical Errors (DGE) extracted from their previous writing performances while the control group will receive a placebo (teaching L2 writing via the existing method). Next, a post-test of L2 paragraph writing ability was administered to both groups of the study and finally the data have been analyzed.

7.2 Participants

The subjects of this study consisted of 100 Undergraduate Translator Trainees who studied English at Tonekabon Azad University. The students were both females and males. The range of participants' age varied from 18 to 27. The selection of the participants was based on the results of OPT administered. Such a standardized test was administered to measure the proficiency level of the participants and to assure that the homogeneity was regarded in this study.

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Because those students who were weak on the writing, particularly paragraph writing, could be the representatives of the weak trainees, the researchers selected 40 students whose scores were at least one standard deviation below the mean score of the class and the remained subjects whose scores were not at the appropriate range, were dropped from the study. Then the selected participants for the study were divided into two groups and were randomly assigned into two groups: the experimental group and the control group. 20 participants attended as the experimental group and 20 participants as the control group.

7.3 Materials

The selection of the participants of the current study was through using an OPT. The aim of this test was to find the appropriate level for the participants of the study. The test consisted of two parts: the first part included two cloze test passages, each of which consisted of five questions and the second part concerned with the writing ability in which the participants were required to write about the selected topic. A specific answer sheet was prepared and participants were asked to answer the questions of each part there. The criterion for the selection of the participants was that their scores had to be 1 standard deviation below the mean score, since by administering the OPT a lot of scores were obtained all of which were not appropriate for the experiment. The estimated reliability for this test was (r = 0.88).

For pre-test, it was an essay-type test. Both the experimental group and the control group were asked to write about a topic which was chosen from the page 94 of the book "Paragraph Development" edited by Arnaudet and Barrett (1990). The reliability of the test of the study was estimated in an inter-rater method by three expert professors and the estimation was (r = 0.74).

For treatment, the experimental group received 5 sessions of teaching developmental grammatical errors extracted from their previous writing performances while it was a placebo for the control group. The treatment contained nine pages including some tables and explanation adopted from the book "Longman COMPLETE COURSE For THE TOEFL TEST_ PREPARATION FOR THE COMPUTER AND PAPER TESTS" by Philips (2001).

After treatment, a post-test of paragraph writing ability was given to both the experimental group and the control group. The participants were required to write about a chosen topic. Because the aim of this study was to show the degree of progress from the pre-test to the post-test in the experimental group of the study, the given topic was the same as the topic of the pre-test. The reliability of the tests of the study was estimated in an inter-rater method by three expert professors and the estimation was (r = 0.74).

7.4 Procedures

The Oxford Placement Test (OPT) version 1.1 was administered to 100 female and male translator trainees of Azad University of Tonekabon, Iran to make sure that they are homogeneous. An answer sheet was prepared for this test. No technical instrument was used for the administration of the test. The researchers themselves administered the test. Then the researchers collected the answer sheets and scored them. Then, 40 translator trainees were selected as the participants of the study. The criterion for participants' selection was that their scores should be 1 standard deviation below the mean score, because by administering the OPT a lot of scores were obtained all of which were not appropriate for the experiment. Just those students whose writing was weak could be the representatives of the weak trainees. Then, the selected participants were randomly assigned to the control group and the experimental group. 20 participants were attended as control group and 20 participants as experimental group.

For pretest, both the experimental group and the control group took a pre-test of paragraph writing. The researchers themselves administered the test. The test was of essay-type. No technical instrument was used for the administration of the test. A topic was given to the participants and they were asked to write a paragraph of about 150 words. The topic was chosen from a book called ―Paragraph Development edited by Arnaudet and Barrett (1990). The allotted time to the participants was 20 minutes.

The researchers began the treatment. All students in both experimental group and control group received a five-sessions of teaching the L2 writing via the existing method consisted of the book "Paragraph Development." On the other hand, the experimental group received five-sessions of teaching Developmental Grammatical Errors (DGE) extracted from their previous writing performances. In the case of each group, each session was lasted for 45 minutes. No technological instrument was used there.

For post-test, after five-sessions of the treatment, all participants took a post-test of writing. The test was of essay-type and the researchers themselves administered the test. No technological instrument was used there. Again the same

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as the pre-test, 20 minutes was allotted to the students for answering the test. They had to write a paragraph of around 150 words about the selected topic from the book "Paragraph Development."

8. Data Analysis and Findings

8.1 Descriptive Analysis of the Data

Table1.The summary of descriptive analysis for the data of the post-test of the experimental and the control group of the study

	DGE	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
PW	DGE Conducted	20	16.5000	1.39548	.31204
	DGE Not Conducted	20	13.7000	1.75019	.39135

As it is indicated in table 1, the mean of the experimental group (DGE Conducted) is higher than that of the control group (DGE Not Conducted). Based on this table, the number of participants in each group was 20 ($N_{DGE\ Conducted} = N_{DGE\ Not\ Conducted} = 20$); moreover, the amount of standard deviation in the experimental group was lower than that of the control group which shows that the post-test scores of the experimental group are more homogenous than post-test scores of the control group.

8.2 Inferential Analysis of the Data

The focus of this section was on the inferential analysis of the data obtained in this study. The analysis of the data was conducted by using SPSS software, so the "Independent sample t-test" and the "Pearson Correlation" were calculated by this software and the results are indicated in Tables 2, 3, and 4 respectively.

Table 2. The t-test result of the study

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference
Equal variances not assumed	5.594	36.205	0.000	2.80000

On the basis of the table 2, the observed t value (t) was calculated to be 5.594. The degree of freedom (df) was calculated to be 36.205. The level of significance (sig. 2-tailed) was 0.000. The indicated mean difference between the post-tests of the control group and the experimental group was as 2.80000; that is, the calculated difference between the mean scores of the post-tests of the control group and the experimental group was as 2.80000 in this research. Based on this table, observed t was 5.594 and the degree of freedom was 36.205 while the critical value of t determined on the basis of the 2-tailed significance level of 0.05 was 2.02, so the observed t was higher than critical t and it was a reason to reject the null hypothesis. Also the indicated level of significance was 0.000 which was lower than 2-tailed significance level of 0.05 and it was another evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

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Table 3. Pearson correlation for the pre-test and post-test scores of the control group

		Pre-test CON	Post-test CON
Pre-test CON	Pearson Correlation	1	.677**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	20	20
Post-test CON	Pearson Correlation	.677**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	20	20

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

Based on table 3, the Pearson's r for the correlation between the pre-test and the post-test scores of the control group was 0.677 (r = 0.677); that is, there was a high closeness of the scores in the control group. It was obvious from the table that the Sig. (2-tailed) value was 0.001. This value indicates that whether there is a statistically significant correlation between the two set of the scores in the control group. This shows that the scores in the pre-test of the control group have undergone no significant change in the posttest.

Table 4. Pearson correlation for the pretest and post-test scores of the experimental group

		Pre-test EX	Post-test EX
Pre-test EX	Pearson Correlation	1	.250
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.0288
	N	20	20
Post-test EX	Pearson Correlation	.250	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.0288	
	N	20	20

According to table 4, the Pearson's r for the correlation between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group was 0.250 (r = 0.250); that is, there was a low closeness of the scores in the experimental group. Actually, it is shown that it was lower than that of the control group. On the basis of this table, the calculated sig. (2-tailed) value was as 0.0288. In this table, it is indicated that there is no significant correlation between the two sets of scores of the experimental group. This shows that the pre-test scores in the experimental group have undergone significant change in the post-test and after the treatment of the study.

9. Results of Hypothesis Testing

In this section, the results of the hypothesis of this study have been presented to determine the rejection or support of the hypothesis. Before analysis of the hypothesis, the hypothesis itself is repeated below:

H0: Teaching developmental grammatical errors does not have any impact on Iranian undergraduate translator trainee's L2 paragraph writing ability.

For the aim of finding if there is any significant difference between groups, the researchers selected two groups which were homogeneous and investigated the impact of teaching developmental grammatical errors on translator trainees' paragraph writing ability. As it was mentioned in the last section, the level of significance or sig. (2-tailed) was 0.0288 <0.05 and r was 0.250<0.5 and it means that there was an improvement in scores, so there was a strong trend towards a positive effect and it means that the treatment had a positive impact on scores in experimental group. On the basis of these amounts, it can be concluded that the null hypothesis was rejected.

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10. Discussion

The findings of the current study indicated that teaching developmental grammatical errors has a positive impact on translator trainee's paragraph writing ability. The result of the hypothesis of this study lends support to the issues which are related to the impacts of grammatical errors on writing ability of the students and it shows that the stated null hypothesis of this study is rejected.

This study is compatible with Sattari's (2015) study in which he analyzed grammatical errors in Iranian students' English writing. According to Sattari (2015), there are some types of errors which are called as developmental errors that will be removed as the result of students' proficiency levels. Based on the above study, when students' papers are corrected by the teacher and their errors are marked by him/her, the teacher attracts their attention to the correct language form either explicitly or implicitly. Also the result of the current study is in line with Selinker (1972) who said that studying grammatical errors of EFL students in their pieces of writing provides benefit insights into learning difficulties which requires to ultimately be mastered by more sufficient pedagogical measures.

Moreover, this study is agreeable with a research which was conducted by Tajzadeh, Khodabandehlou, and Jahandar (2013) in which a pre-test of writing has been administered and after that the experimental group received treatment on grammar instruction while the control group received a placebo and then a post-test of writing has been administered. After analyzing their obtained data, the results of their study made it clear that in the case of some Iranian EFL learner's view point, learning grammar is important and effective in writing English as a foreign language.

In addition, there is a close relation between the results of this study and a study which was conducted by Fatemi (2008). In his study, he investigated the relationship between writing competence, language proficiency, and grammatical errors in the writing of Iranian TEFL sophomores. Fatemi's research has two phases. In its first phase, a quantitative approach was used and in its second phase a qualitative approach was used. According to the first phase, the significant correlations were found between the subject's writing competence and their language proficiency, between their writing competence and sub-skills of language proficiency. The strongest correlation was shown between writing and grammatical competence.

11. Implications of the Study

It is obvious that errors are one of the unavoidable parts of EFL writing, in which of course, many impacts are over EFL writers when writing a composition in the target language. The presence of errors has been under control of all theories of language-teaching as they define an important aspect of second language acquisition. Some pedagogical implications for writing teachers, educators, as well as syllabus designers are provided below.

The first implication concerning to language teachers is trying to get the advantage of errors. On the basis of theoretical aspect, writing teachers can use errors as an indicator of how far the learners have improved towards the goal and what is remained and is needed for them to acquire (Corder, 1981). It means that errors are as a way of feedback for the writing teachers to show the efficiency of their pedagogical methodology. Moreover, teachers can investigate the errors that their students have committed to discover the parts that need further attention. Then writing teachers should be capable of not only detecting and describing the linguistic aspect of the error, but also recognize the psychological causes for them. So, one of the basic and important skills of the teacher is the diagnosis and treatment of errors (Erdogan, 2005).

The focus of the second implication is on the error awareness of the students. Errors which discovered in writing of EFL student writers are unique on the basis of their "bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate experiences" (Hyland, 2003, p. 50) and writing accuracy can be hindered by such errors. So students should be educated about errors and second language acquisition principles and this should be done by the teachers. This reality should be learned by the students that errors are a natural part of language acquisition which can be overcome by time, effort, and patience (Ferris, 2002).

It is considered that errors are as a result of teaching and learning inadequacy, but naturally it is believed that errors can be used as an important tool which language teachers require to improve their teaching methods. Fossilization of students' errors can be avoided when teachers develop their teaching methodology as a result of students' errors.

It can be noted that instructors have to develop materials and designed activities and they are also required to have solid linguistic knowledge as well as analysis skills. By analyzing students' grammatical errors, the instructor can identify and classify errors and teach only the grammatical concepts that are critically necessary for editing writing. She/ he should teach these needed concepts by providing mini-lessons and conferences to gain better result. In the

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case of syllabus designers, errors are important to see what items are valuable to be included in the syllabus and what items are extra and are better not to be included there. Analyzing errors of participants can help distinguish learners' linguistic difficulties and need at a certain language learning stage.

12. Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the results of this study, teaching developmental grammatical errors has a significant role in undergraduate translator trainees' paragraph writing ability. This study can be replicated by the researchers by considering some effective suggestions. The first matter is that of the population of the study. The selected participants in this study were 40, so the researchers are advised to replicate this study in future by using more than 40 participants.

The next point is that of the situation of this study. Because this study was done in university, the other researchers can conduct their study in a situation other than university such as institutions or high school and with participants other than translator trainees. As another point, it is better to conduct this study with more than 5 sessions. This study was conducted in simply 5 sessions of treatment because of the time limitation, so the future researchers are advised to replicate this study in more than 5 sessions in order to obtain better results.

Also, the current study was limited to writing skill, but it is possible for the future researchers to replicate this study in other language skills like speaking. Finally, the subjects of the current study were of mixed gender. The future researchers can replicate this study by selecting only male or only female subjects.

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