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Using Feedback for Developing Grammatical Accuracy in Writing

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Abstract

The present research aimed at investigating one of the problems encountered by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in all ages and levels, which is committing grammar errors while writing. The research proposed and assessed the effectiveness of corrective feedback in treating such errors in their writing performance. Making use of the analytical descriptive method via reviewing and analyzing the available literature, it was concluded that corrective feedback was proven to be effective means of treating learner's errors and enable them to produce accurate pieces of writing. The results attained demonstrated also that most of the researches were not investigating corrective feedback effectiveness, but they were comparing different modes of corrective feedback. The research concluded with the significance of using corrective for enhancing the EFL grammatical accuracy of writing.

Keywords: Corrective Feedback, Grammatical Accuracy, Writing.

استخدام التغذية الراجعة لتنمية الدقة النحوية في الكتابة

الملخص

هدف البحث الحالي إلى تناول أحد المشكلات التي يواجهها معظم متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جميع الأعمار والمستويات، والتي تتمثل في كثرة الأخطاء النحوية أثناء الكتابة، ولقد اقترح البحث الحالي بل وقام باختبار فعالية التغذية الراجعة التصحيحية في معالجة مثل هذه الأخطاء في الأداء الكتابي لدى الطلاب، ولقد اعتمد البحث الحالي على المنهج الوصفي التحليلي من خلال مراجعة وتحليل الأدبيات المتاحة؛ حيث تم التوصل إلى أن التغذية الراجعة التصحيحية أثبتت أنها وسيلة فعالة في معالجة أخطاء المتعلمين بل وتمكينهم من إنتاج نصوص كتابية خالية من معظم الأخطاء النحوية، كما أظهرت النتائج أيضًا أن معظم الأبحاث لم تتناول قياس فاعلية التغذية الراجعة التصحيحية، ولكنها كانت تقارن فعالية الأنماط المختلفة لها، ولقد خلص البحث إلى أهمية استخدام التغذية الراجعة التصحيحية لتنمية الدقة النحوية في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الكتابة بحيث تكون كتاباتهم خالية من الأخطاء النحوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التغذية الراجعة التصحيحية، الدقة النحوية، الكتابة.

Writing and Grammar

Writing is one of the most sophisticated productive skills which is considered an inevitable dimension of the learners' preparation in all levels and stages. It is a significant skill which cannot be neglected as it is utilized for expressing thoughts and ideas in a written from to a large audience. However, writing is considered by the majority of people as the most complex skill to be mastered. Furthermore, the students who are studying English as a foreign language find writing more difficult than those students who are writing in their native language (Farrokhi & Sattarpour, 2012; Matsuda, 2003).

The difficulty and sophistication of writing is summarized in the number of tasks required to be done be done by students to make the final product meets the requirements of the target audience. With this in mind, grammar and writing are linked together and study writing means studying grammar and vice versa. As such, the piece of writing cannot communicate the intended meaning without being grammatically accurate as grammar accuracy is an aspect that cannot be neglected as it is essential to the piece of writing (Bailey, 2003).

Moreover, the studying of contextualized grammar in the writing context is a trend favoured by a plethora of educationists concerned with writing as a productive skill. In other words, grammar can be studied contextualized when studying writing

as the manifestation of studying grammar. With this in mind, studying grammar contextualized in writing is an important chance for practicing grammar in authentic contexts and it enables producing accurate written product (Weaver, 1996).

The Grammatical Errors in Writing

Although grammatical accuracy is part and parcel of any piece of writing, most of students commit many errors when writing whether in their native language or on their foreign language. Without grammar the intended message cannot be delivered accurately and the reader may or may not figure out the intended meaning. Moreover, producing pieces of writing free from grammatical mistakes is considered, to some extent, a principle aims of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in all levels and stages as their product in their exams and in the school projects depends greatly on the accurate written language in general and the intended message in particular. Consequently, the grammatical errors in the piece of writing affect mainly the flow of communication and may hinder transferring the intended meaning (Aliakbari, & Toni, 2009).

Thus, developing the accuracy of the piece of writing is an essential requirement as to be able to produce accurate written or spoken language. Consequently, much attention was directed towards errors and all the features related to the errors and their correction as they are inevitable component of pieces of any teaching learning endeavor (Larsen-Freeman, 2003; Lush 2002).

Another item to be considered when handling such topic is that educationalists differentiate between the errors which may be committed when speaking and the errors which may be committed while writing. It is overviewed that grammar errors in speaking can be corrected immediately as the listener may ask the speaker for more clarification to get the intended message. However, in writing, the story might be different as there might be no interaction or presence in terms of the writer and the reader. Subsequently, producing different pieces of writing free from grammatical errors is an essential component of any successful learning as writing errors cannot be tolerated like that of the spoken language one (Lightbown & Spada, 1990).

To add more, committing errors in grammar is a natural part of learning which must be taken into consideration by teachers and instructors as it is regular for students to make errors and at the same time it is normal also for teachers to correct such errors. Consequently, the systematic errors which are committed by students while writing must be corrected by teacher in order to prevent fossilization of such errors while writing or while speaking. As such, the inevitability of errors committing while producing language, especially writing necessities finding a feasible treatment for correcting such errors (Chu, 2011).

Corrective feedback and error correction

One of the successful remedies employed by many researches in applied linguistics is feedback. A wealth of literature confirmed that feedback is a successful treatment for correcting grammatical errors in writing. Furthermore, providing corrective feedback for the errors of learners is considered one of the main aspects of foreign language learning, especially when targeting the different writing skills (Sun, 2013).

Merits of corrective feedback

Corrective feedback is believed to have a number of merits as a feasible tool for preventing learners from committing errors (Ellis et al., 2008; Ferris& Roberts, 2001).

- **Feedback prevents learners from fossilizing errors**

By avoiding repetition of errors after correcting them by teachers, fossilization of errors is prevented. The teacher always monitors the students' performance and when a mistake or an error occurred, he corrects such error; consequently, the learners acquire only the right form.

- **Feedback stresses the right form in the students' performance**

Corrective feedback empowers learners to understand that they are on the right path and they are doing their work in the right way. When students are given positive corrective feedback, they will fossilize what they have learned to be used later in future situations.

- **Feedback enables learners to overcome their errors.**

It is confirmed in the previous lines that committing errors is part and parcel of every successful learning. Via corrective feedback, the students can identify the errors they committed and correct them besides avoiding committing such errors in their writing in the future.

- **Feedback assists learners to learn accurate English**

As it was said earlier, language accuracy is of paramount importance for delivering the written or the spoken message. Thus, correcting the errors which might be committed by learners via feedback will empower them to acquire accurate English and produce accurate English.

- **Correcting learners' errors upgrade EFL learners writing skills**

Producing pieces of writing containing grammatical errors might blur the intended meaning; more than that, it may distort it. Subsequently, no doubt that using corrective feedback for correcting learners' errors might enable them to brush up their writing skills and be good writers.

Consequently, corrective feedback can be used for improving grammatical accuracy in writing among EFL learners.

Types of corrective feedback

Literature in language learning showed that there are different types of corrective feedback. Ellis (2009) proposed a classification of corrective feedback for those working in the teaching field as follows:

1. Direct corrective feedback
2. Indirect corrective feedback
3. Metalinguistic corrective feedback
4. Focused corrective feedback
5. Electronic corrective feedback
6. Reformulation corrective feedback

The following lines depict the different types of corrective feedback in details shadowed by some examples when needed.

1. Direct corrective feedback

In the direct corrective feedback, the teacher tells the learner explicitly that he has committed an error and s/he provides also correction of such error. In this type

the teacher did not allow that the student to do much effort to reach the error or the correction of that error.

2. Indirect corrective feedback

In the indirect corrective feedback, the teacher implicitly expresses that the student has committed a mistake without showing the error or the correction of such error. This type of corrective feedback allows students to search for the error and correct it like problem solving.

3. Metalinguistic corrective feedback

In the meta linguistic corrective feedback, the teacher does not provide direct realization of the error or the correction of the error, but s/he does provide that there is an error committed without showing the place of the error and the correction. The teacher in the meta linguistic feedback provide some linguistic codes refer to the errors committed such as (*g* for grammar, *s* for spelling, *ss* for sentence structure) for the learners.

4. Focused corrective feedback

In the focused corrective feedback, the teacher provides correction for error committed by students which are related to the items that he has already explained to the students. The teacher pays the due attention to the items explained and corrects the errors related to them only and neglect the other errors which were not encountered.

5. Electronic corrective feedback

In the electronic corrective feedback, the teacher uses the electronic learning environment and the computerized programs to provide digital feedback for the students' performance in different linguistic aspects.

6. Reformulation corrective feedback

Reformulation is a type of corrective feedback where the teacher reshapes or reformulates what was said in a wrong way in a correct way. Such mode of corrective feedback is to some extent related to spoken language not the written one.

Problem of the Research

The current research problem is summarized in that the EFL learners commit many errors when writing pieces of writing which distort the meaning or negatively affect transferring the intended meaning to the target audience. Such errors related to grammatical accuracy of the intended meaning which is an inevitable aspect of any piece of writing.

Consequently, the present research sought to provide a feasible solution of the such problem which is summarized in corrective feedback regardless of the type. Thus, the present research targeted find an answer for the following research question:

"What is the effectiveness of corrective feedback in enhancing grammatical accuracy among EFL majors?"

Methodology

The present research made use of the descriptive analytical method via reviewing the available literature related to the research of the two main variables, namely corrective feedback and grammatical accuracy. The results of the analysis conducted is portrayed in the following section supported by the studies and research gathered by the researcher.

Results

In the light of the literature-reviewed studies, meta-analyses studies, stat of the art studies, research papers, master's theses, and doctoral dissertations, it was assured that corrective feedback as a means for developing the accurateness of grammatical structure is a feasible tool which produces considerable effectiveness in avoiding and overcoming producing error grammatical structures. Added to that, corrective feedback was proven by the researchers to be one of the quick, easy and simple ways of individualizing instruction and tailoring the teaching learning process to suit every student in the classroom. Feedback was proven to be part and parcel of most treatments in the classroom. Finally, most of the literature reviewed by the researcher do not directly explore the effectiveness of corrective feedback but, most of the research aimed to compare the effectiveness of the different types of corrective feedback and which mode outperforms the others (Ahangari & Amirzadeh, 2011; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Chandler, 2003; Evans et al., 2011; Sheen, 2007).

Conclusions

Based on the aforementioned results and discussion the following research conclusions are of considerable importance:

- Putting the contextualized grammar in the foreground of the teaching learning process is an important factor in the successful teaching learning process of English as a foreign language.
- Errors are unavoidable component in the teaching learning process which should not be taken seriously by teachers, but they should be used as a source of development in the teaching learning process.
- Corrective feedback is a means of individualizing instruction as feedback provided to every individual student is different from his classmates.
- Corrective feedback is an effective means of enhancing the EFL student grammatical accuracy in writing.

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