The Effect of CA-based vs. EA-based Error Correction on Iranian EFL Intermediate Learners' Lexical Errors of Writing

Parvin Moazamie*

Young Researchers Club, Khorasgan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran
pmoazamie@yahoo.com

Mansour Koosha

Associate Professor, Islamic Azad University, (Khorasgan) Branch
Mansour.koosha@yahoo.com

Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate the effect of CA- based vs. EA- based error correction on the improvement of the EFL intermediate learners' Lexical Errors of writing. Forty intermediate students, all males, studying in an English Language Institute in Golpayegan participated in this study. After detecting the participants' errors, the lexical errors were classified into two categories, EA-based and CA-based errors. The errors which were because of the infuence of L1 on L2 were classified as CA-based errors and the errors which were because of the lack of target language proficiency were classified as EA-based errors. Then, the Wilcoxon Test was used to investigate the effect and the improvement of learners' lexical errors by EA-based and CA-based error correction. The results of the study showed that there is no significant difference between EA-based and CA-based error correction in the improvement of the participants' lexical errors.

Introduction

In order to master the English language, learners have to be adequately exposed to all of the four basic skills, including writing. The ability to write is not naturally acquired. It is usually learned or culturally transmitted through formal instruction (Brown 2001). Since L2 writers are in the process of acquiring the convention of target language discourse and they have a limited knowledge of vocabulary, language structure, and content, they need more instruction and guidance (Myles 2002).

Salebi (2004) states that second or foreign language learners should be aware of the differences between their native and foreign languages. However, teachers should not use the drills and exercises which are based on these differences excessively in the classroom; otherwise, the students will be oversensitive and confused concerning the differences between the native and target languages, and while trying to produce the correct structure, they produce the wrong one.

According to Ferris and Roberts (2001), while teacher responses to student writing can and should cover a variety of concerns,

including students' ideas and rhetorical strategies, error correction and improvement of student accuracy continue to be serious issues for both teachers and students in L2 writing classes. It is therefore important for researchers and writing experts to identify issues, feed-back strategies, and techniques for helping students to help themselves through various types of research designs.

According to Gass and Selinker (2008) error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make. Unlike contrastive analysis (in either its weak or strong form), the comparison made is between the errors a learner makes in producing the TL and the TL itself. It is similar to the weak version of contrastive analysis in that both start from learner production data; however, in contrastive analysis the comparison is made with the native language, whereas in error analysis it is made with the TL.

"Error feedback" refers to the feedback teachers give on students' errors, which could be either direct or indirect. Direct feedback refers to overt correction of student errors, that is, teachers locating and correcting errors for students. Indirect feedback refers to teachers indicating errors without correcting them for students (Lee 2004).

Error correction research is fraught with controversy regarding the benefits of different error correction strategies. Is direct feedback more beneficial than indirect feedback, for instance, there is research evidence showing that direct and indirect feedback has no different effects on student accuracy in writing (e.g., Robb et al. 1986; Semke 1984). However, there are studies which suggest that indirect feedback brings more benefits to students' long-term writing development than direct feedback (see Ferris 2003; Frantzen 1995; Lalande 1982) through "in- creased student engagement and attention to forms and problems" (Ferris 2003). The danger of direct

feedback, according to Ferris (2002), is that teachers may misinterpret students' meaning and put words into their mouths. Direct feedback, however, may be appropriate for beginner students and when the errors are "un-treatable," that is, when students are not able to self-correct, such as syntax and vocabulary errors (see Ferris 2002, 2003).

Research has shown that both direct correction and simple underlining of errors are signifcantly superior to describing the type of error, even with underlining, for reducing long-term error. Direct correction is best for producing accurate revisions, and students prefer it because it is the fastest and easiest way for them as well as the fastest way for teachers over several drafts (Chandler 2003). A great deal of error correction research has focused on the effects of strategies—i.e., how various error correction techniques impinge on student writing (e.g., Ferris and Helt 2000). Krkgöz (2010) examined errors in a corpus of 120 essays produced by 86 adult Turkish learners, who were beginners in their language profciency in ʻukurova University. Errors were classifed in accordance with two major categories: interlingual errors and intralingual errors, and some sub-categories were identifed. It has been found that most written errors students produce result from the interlingual errors indicating interference of the frst language.

Weijen, et al. (2009) worked on the infuence of L1 on L2 writing. The findings of their research showed that all writers use L1 while writing in L2 to some extent. Crossley and McNamara (2009) found the differences between first language (L1) writers of English and second language (L2) writers of English in using words. Results showed that L1 and L2 written texts vary in several dimensions related to the writer›s use of lexical choices. These dimensions correlate to lexical depth of knowledge, variation, and sophistication. It can be concluded that the infuence of L1 is

not very serious in L2 writing. Fang and Xuemei (2007) worked on a research based on error analysis and its implementation in the EFL (English as Foreign Language) classroom teaching. The study starts by providing a systematic and comprehensive review of the concepts and theories concerning EA (Error Analysis).

The author proposes that teachers should employ different and fexible error treatment strategies in accordance with the teaching objectives, students' linguistic competence, their affective factors and the effectiveness of the error correction. Hasyim (2002) mentions that error analysis is required in developing or increasing the techniques in teaching English. By doing error analysis, a teacher can concentrate on materials which can result in the correction of most errors. The teacher can also evaluate himself as to whether she succeeds in teaching or not. Finally she can improve her techniques in teaching by preparing systematic materials. Despite the importance of writing today, there are still many problems EFL students have to cope with. As it was mentioned earlier, this study seeks to find an answer to the following question:

To what extent does EA-based versus CA-based error correction help improve EFL lexical errors?

Method
The participants of this study were 40 male learners studying English at Parsian Institute in Golpayegan. Their experience in writing was limited to writing paragraphs and summaries. The participants did not have contact with English language in their living environment, that is outside the classroom. The students were all divided into four groups: elementary, low-intermediate, high- intermediate, and advanced level. Based on their levels of proficiency, forty participants out of one hundred twenty high-intermediate learners determined by the Institute.

The first essay written by the learners was used as the pre-test and the last essay was used as the post-test. In order to find the significant difference between the lexical errors in the pre-test and the post-test, the Wilcoxon Test was used.

The procedure used in this study aimed to encourage the learners to write on six distinct topics within six weeks. In the first session, narrative writing was taught to the participants. In each week, participants wrote a narrative essay about the topic the teacher chose. The participants received feedback on their writings regularly. The essays were corrected by two raters. The researcher was one of the raters. After correction, errors were divided into two main groups: "CA-based errors and EA-based errors". The errors which were because of the infuence of L1 in L2 were classifed as CA-based errors and the errors which were because of the lack of target language proficiency were classifed as EA-based errors. In some cases classifying errors as CA-based or EA-based was difficult, the researcher had an interview with the participants. It should be mentioned that participants were asked to write on each topic in about 300 words.

Data analysis
As it was mentioned before, the question was:

To what extent does EA-based versus CA-based error correction help improve EFL lexical errors?

An attempt was made to show the significant difference between the lexical errors in the pre-test and the post-test by using the Wilcoxon Test. The results of this test showed that there was a significant difference between the lexical errors in the pre-test and the post-test according to EA-based error correction ($P < 0.01$; Ties= 26 and Z= -2.619), as seen in Table 1.

EA-based lexical errors was reduced. The results of Table 2. also show that the number of CA-based lexical errors was also

Table 1. *The pre-test and the post-test using the lexical errors according to EA- based error correction*

	N	Mean Rank	Z	Sig.
Negative Ranks	17	16.35	-2.619	0.009
Positive Ranks	9	8.11		
Ties	14			
Total	40			

Table 2. *The pre-test and the post-test using the lexical errors according to CA- based error correction*

	N	Mean Rank	Z	Sig.
Negative Ranks	17	14.56	-2.862	0.004
Positive Ranks	7	7.50		
Ties	16			
Total	40			

reduced. According to the results of Tables 1. and 2., it can be concluded that there is not a significant difference between EA-based and CA-based error correction in the improvement of participants' lexical errors. Both EA-based and CA-based error correction show to be equally effective in the removal of the participants' lexical errors (P< 0.01).

Lexical interference of the first language can become more obvious when the learner does word-ford-word translation of idioms, proverbs and phrasal verbs. Therefore, lexical errors which are because of the infuence of first language are not very many; if they are it is because of the idioms, proverbs and phrasal verbs (Krkgöz 2010). Semke (1980, 1984), Kepner (1997) and Truscott (2007) claimed, ''corrected students tend to shorten and simplify their writing, apparently to avoid situations in which they might make errors'' (p. 14).

There are, however, a few studies which show that students can improve their writing complexity, whether they receive feedback or not (Robb et al. 1986; Sheppard

1992; Chandler 2003). The results of these studies contradict the above claim made by Truscott (2007) that feedback would make students write short and simple sentences. Schachter (1974) sees the strategy of avoidance employed by the learner as a possible source of the low occurrence of certain errors. According to the above results, may be the learners avoided using the words they were not certain about. Thus, the number of participants' lexical errors decreased ac- cording to both EA-based and CA-based error correction point of view. Crossley and McNamara (2009) found the differences between first language (L1) writers of English and second language (L2) writers of English in using words. Results of their study showed that L1 and L2 written texts vary in several dimensions related to the writer›s use of lexical choices. These dimensions correlate to lexical depth of knowledge, variation, and sophistication. Therefore, it can be concluded that the infuence of L1 is not very serious in L2 writing, in terms of lexical errors (Crossley & McNamara 2009).

The other reason explains the role of feedback learners received after writing each essay. Each week, the researchers corrected the participants' essays and returned them. As Doughty (2001) states, attention plays an important role in learning. In fact, the aim of the study was to fnd out the improvement of learners' lexical errors from EA-based and CA-based error correction point of view. Be- cause six weeks were not enough for the learners in order to let them correct their writing errors themselves and one of the reasons that learners were not eager in writing was because of not receiving the feedback of their writings, therefore, the researcher corrected the participants' Essays and returned them. Most studies on error correction in L2 writing classes have provided evidences that students who receive error feedback from teachers improve in accuracy over time (Ferris 1999; Truscott 1996; Truscott 1999). The efficacy of various kinds of error feedback for improvement in the accuracy and fuency of L2 students' writing showed that both direct correction and simple underlining of errors are significantly superior to describing the type of error, even with underlining, for reducing long-term error. Direct correction is best for producing accurate revisions, and students prefer it because it is the fastest and easiest way for them as well as the fastest way for teachers over several drafts (Chandler 2003).

In the present study the positive infuence of error correction was shown. Ac- cording to the results of the study, most of the learners' errors improved. The findings showed that the learners had checked their writings and became aware of their errors, in order to decrease their errors.

Another reason may be related to the learners' level of proficiency. Since participants were in high intermediate level of proficiency and had prior lexical knowledge of English, it can be speculated

that all learners that received their corrected essays, tried to check their writings and do not repeat most of their errors in their next essay.

To reduce lexical and personal reference errors, it would be necessary to en- courage students' writers, particularly the low proficient ones, to learn new words in their contexts of use rather than from isolated lists. It is equally important for the teacher to provide remedial instruction and intensive exercises tailored to the low proficient writers. Also, to improve the lexical errors of learners, it is necessary to teach the words in the sentences and force the learners to make sentences and paragraphs with the new words they learned. Teacher should try to find the more frequent lexical errors of the learners ask the students about the reason of their errors and try to correct the errors with the whole class. Some of the errors which are because of the infuence of L1 in L2 writing can be taught by explaining the similarities and differences between Persian and English. Also, the teacher should try to teach the words in a way in order to be useful in a real world.

Conclusions

The present study attempted to shed light upon the errors which were made by a sample of Iranian EFL learners. The findings showed that there was no significant difference between EA-based and CA-based error correction in terms of lexical errors. Both EA-based error correction and CA-based error correction were effective in the improvement of the learners' lexical errors. In fact, the number of the learners' lexical errors decreased. The role of feedback was important in the reduction of EA-based and CA-based lexical errors. The learners checked their corrected essays and tried to decrease their lexical errors. However, in some cases the participants avoided using the words about which they were not certain.

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تأثیر شیوهٔ تصحیح خطاهای واژگانی در نوشتار فراگیران ایرانی زبان انگلیسی
بر اساس تجزیه و تحلیل خطا در مقایسه با بررسی مقابله‌ای

پروین معظمی*

باشگاه پژوهشگران جوان، دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی واحد خوراسگان

Pmoazamie@yahoo.com

منصور کوشا

دانشیار دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی واحد خوراسگان

Mansour.koosha@yahoo.com

چکیده

این پژوهش با هدف تأثیر تجزیه و تحلیل مقابله‌ای در برابر تجزیه و تحلیل خطا در تصحیح اشتباهات واژگانی نوشتاری زبان‌آموزان پایهٔ متوسطه انجام شده است. جامعهٔ آماری این پژوهش ۱۲۰ نفر از زبان‌آموزان سطح متوسطه آموزشگاه پارسیان گلپایگان در تابستان ۱۳۸۹ بوده‌اند. که بر اساس آزمون و مصاحبه سطح دانش زبان‌آموزان مشخص شدند. ٤٠ نفر از آنها به طور تصادفی به‌عنوان نمونهٔ این پژوهش انتخاب شدند. برای سنجش خطاهای زبان‌آموزان شش موضوع انشاء به آنها داده شد که برای هر موضوع یک هفته زمان در نظر گرفته شد. پس از بازگشت انشاها از

طرف زبان‌آموزان، تصحیح گردید و به افراد بازگردانده شد. این روند تا هفتهٔ ششم برای سنجش بهبود خطاهای زبان‌آموزان ادامه یافت. برای سنجش تغییر میزان خطاهای زبان‌آموزان از پیش آزمون و پس آزمون استفاده شده است. برای تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌ها از آزمون ویلکاکسون استفاده شد و نتایج نشان دادند که در هر دو مورد تجزیه و تحلیل مقابله‌ای تجزیه و تحلیل خطا، خطاهای واژگانی زبان‌آموزان کاهش یافت.

واژه‌های کلیدی: تصحیح خطاهای واژگانی، نوشتار فراگیران ایرانی زبان انگلیسی، تجزیه و تحلیل خطا، بررسی مقابله‌ای خطاها