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THE CORRELATION BETWEEN IMMEDIATE VERSUS DELAYED CORRECTION IN LEARNING ENGLISH GRAMMAR

Introduction

There has been a great change in the last thirty years in the attitudes of researchers and teachers towards the errors that students make in the course of learning a foreign language. Errors which were once regarded as a sin are now considered as a necessary and perhaps beneficial strategy of learning. They are the evidence that the learners are testing hypothesis about the underlying rules, categories, and systems of the language. Such opinions have led to another change relating to the discussion of **what and how of correction**. The question of **how** to correct an error is often problematic. Even for the best- intentioned teacher, there is no easy way to know how to correct students' errors. However, many teachers and scholars have recommended some contradictory techniques of error correction. Some have introduced direct/ indirect correction (Terrell, 1985). Others have preferred whole group/ individual correction (Chastain, 1988; Rivers, 1981). Many have proposed peer/ teacher, or self-correction (Jacobs, 1989 Rodgers, 1988; Pica & Doughty, 1985). Along with these scholars, some others have suggested immediate correction. They have believed that immediate feedback is extremely valuable to students. On the contrary, many have found no evidence to show that correction has to be given immediately following the error. So, a foreign language teacher wonders whether to treat an error immediately or later. The present article, however, contrasts empirically the two contradictory methods of providing feedback; that is, immediate correction and delayed correction, and tries to investigate and see if there is any difference between the two approaches; and, if so, finds the more appropriate way of correcting the grammatical errors of foreign language learners.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

In keeping with the objectives of this study, the following questions were to be asked:

Q 1. "Is there any relation between the

immediate correction technique and improving the grammatical knowledge of foreign learners?"

Q 2. "Is there any relation between the delayed correction technique and improving the grammatical knowladge of foreign language learners?"

Q 3. "Is there any significant difference between immediate and delayed correction techniques in improving the grammatical knowledge of foreign language learners?

To keep the safe side, the three research questions were reworded to form the following three null hypotheses:

Ho 1. Using immediate correction technique results no significant difference in imporving the grammatical knowledge of foregin language learners.

Ho 2. Using delayed correction technique results no significant difference in improving the grammertical knowledge of English of foreign language learners.

Ho 3. There is no significant difference between immediate and delayed correction technique in improving the grammatical knowledge of English of the foreign language learners.

Procedure

To accomplish the purpose of the study, the following procedures were followed:

Selection of subjects

1. Nelson English language Test from 100 D series was administered to 220 students at the intermediate level to select 150 students and to ensure that the initial groups of subjects were at the same proficiency level. This sample consisted of Iranian students studying in the three English language insitiutes in Karaj. The range of age was from 12 to 23 and the average of age was about 19 years old. The subjects were selected on the basis of the principles of cluster random sampling from among the twelve classes in these three institutes.

2. Scores which were very high or too low on the test were discarded and only 150 students who were nearly at the midpoint were selected. The average score of the selected students was 72 out of 100.

3. The students, then, were randomly assigned to three group each composed of fifty students.

4. A multiple choice English grammar test including thirty items (i.e. questions of various grammatical pionts the subjects would cover during the treament) was administered to the three groups under exactly the same conditions (i.e. in the identical classrooms, at the same time, etc.). The reliability and validity of the grammar test were computed by the researchers in advance. The correlation coefficient of the tests was very high:

$r = 70$

$KR\text{-}21 = .55$

Instruction. The three classes were taught by the same instructor during the term. The classes were three days a week and each session took one hour and a half. During two months the students were taught grammar exactly in the same manner.

About thirty-five minutes of each class time was allocated to students' talk. That is, the teacher would ask them questions after reading a text and have the students to state a nearly predicted answer. As an example:

Teacher: " According to the text, where did John go yesterday?"
Besides, she would sometimes invite the students to talk about their daily activities or any other interersting topics. For instance.
Teacher: "Where did you go yesterday?"
or
"Which fruits does your brother like?"

Correction. Up to this point in the experiment, the treatment was the same for the three groups. However, in this part, for one group no correction was done by the instructor. In other words, when the students made grammatical errors, the teacher didn't refer to them and moved to another question. For the second group, making immediate corrections on learners' responses became essential. Students, in this group, were believed to be corrected immedialtely by the teacher's trivial help, when she was employing such various techniques as:

1. The instructor simply repeated what a student had just said, using a rising intonation (i.e. a questioning voice) to signal students that something was worng.

2. She also sometimes repeated what the student said, stopping just before the error. So, the student could distinguish that the next word was wrong.

3. Another correction strategy used by the instructor was to diagnose the error (e.g. giving the location and the nature of the error) and then have the student to correct the utterance herself. In contrary, the grammatical errors of the third group were tolerated and were seen as a natural outcome of the development of communication skill.
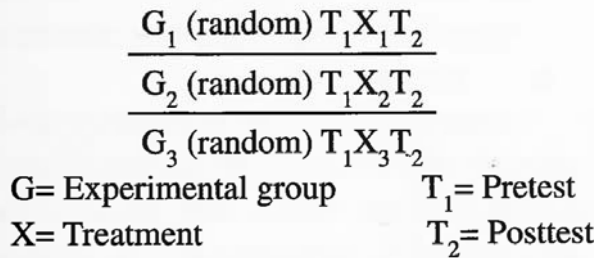
"Students can have limited linguistic knowledge and still be successful communicators." (Larsen-Freeman, 1986, p.135). So, errors were not corrected immediately, since the emphasis was on students communicating their intended meaning. Here the teacher made some notes on the grammatical errors students commited in their performance in the classroom. At the end of the class in each session, the teacher wrote the questions answered erroneously by the students on the board and encouraged the students themseleves to answer the questions again but correctly. By this method, the students' errors were corrected without directly pointing to the student committing that error.

It should be mentioned that the instructor, considering the preference of self-correction to direct teacher correction, both in the second and third groups, invited the learners to self-correct, whether immediately (as in the second group) or not (as in the third group) and no direct teacher correction was done.

Assessment. In order to assess the learners' knowledge of grammar, the same grammar test was administered again after two months of the treatment under nearly the identical condition. Hence, it can be said that pretest,

posttest group design was used to address the hypotheses in this study:

Figure 1. Pretest, Posttest Control Group Design

$$\frac{G_1 \text{ (random) } T_1 X_1 T_2}{\frac{G_2 \text{ (random) } T_1 X_2 T_2}{G_3 \text{ (random) } T_1 X_3 T_2}}$$

G= Experimental group T_1= Pretest

X= Treatment T_2= Posttest

Data analysis. In the final step, two series of grades were given to the students. Several t-tests were conducted to test the significance of the students progress and achievement to the instructional goal.

Summary of Findings

The following results were obtained:

1. Using immediate correction technique results significant difference in improving the grammatical knowledge of foregin language learners, and thus the first null hypothesis which is restated below was rejected.

Null hypothesis 1- Using immediate correction technique results no significant difference in improving the grammatical knowledge of English as a foreign language learners.

Table 1. Comparison of the scores of the posttest of the 1st & 2nd groups

Group A No Correction		Group B immediate Correction	
Number of subjects	50	Number of subjects	50
Mean	21.17	Mean	25.98

d.f.= 98   **p** < .05 $t_{obs.}$ = 2.74

Critical value of **t**= 2.000

Testing the first null hypothesis required the computation of the advantage of immediate over no correction technique. To do this, the scores of the posttest of the first and the second groups were compared. The result of analysis as shown in Table 1. suggested a significant difference at the level of **P**<.05 and $t_{obs.} > t_{crit.}$ with 98 **d.f.** As the value of mean in the second group was higher than the first one, the initial null hypothesis that denied any improvement in grammar knowledge of foreign language learners was rejected.

2. The result of this study confirmed the idea that using delayed correction technique results significant difference in improving the grammatical knowledge of foreign language learners. Thus, the second null hypotheses, which is restated below was also rejected:

Null hypothesis 2- Using delayed correction technique results no significant difference in improving the grammatical knowledge of English of foreign language learners.

Table 2. Comparison of the scores of the posttest of the 1st and 3rd groups

Group A No Correction		Group C Delayed Correction	
Number of subjects	50	Number of subjects	50
Mean	21.17	Mean	27.18

d.f.= 98   **p** < .05 $t_{obs.}$ = 3.16

Critical value of **t**= 2.000

Testing the second null hypothesis, required the computation of the advantage of delayed

correction over no correction technique. To do this, the scores of the posttest of the first and the third group were compared. The result of analysis as shown in Table 2 suggested a highly significant difference at the level of **P<.05** and $t_{obs.} > t_{crit.}$. with 98 **d.f.** As the value of mean in the third group was higher than the first one, the second null hypothesis that denied any improvement in grammar knowledge of foreign language learners was rejected.

3. As the results of the study proved applying delayed correction technique over the period of treatment produces a better result in improving the grammatical knowledge and in reducing the grammatical errors of foreign language learners.

Null hypothesis 3-There is no significant difference between immediate and delayed correction techniques in improving the grammatical knowledge of English as the foreign language learners? ($\mu_2 - \mu_3 = 0$)

Table 3. Comparison the scores of posttest of the 2nd & 3rd groups

Group B Immediate Correction		Group C Delayed Correction	
Number of subjects	50	Number of subjects	50
Mean	25.98	Mean	27.18

d.f. = 98   **P<.05** $t_{obs.}=2.28$
Critical value of **t**= 2.000

Testing the thrid null hypothesis, required the computation of the advantage of one technique of correction over another, that is delayed correction over immediate correction.

As the probability value was less than .05 and **F=35**, the researchers concluded that the value of variance in the two groups (i.e. groups B and C) were equal. In that case, they used the t-test whose pre-supposition is the equality of the two variance. As the $t_{obs.} > t_{crit.}$, the results of statistical analysis used for the purpose of either the rejection or confirmation of the third null hypothesis indicted that the two groups' mean, statistically enjoyed a meaningful difference (i.e.$\mu_3 > \mu_2$). So, one can clearly confirm the idea that there exists a signifincant difference between applying two techniques and a great advantage of delayed correction in improving the grammatical knowledge of foreign language learners.

Conclusions

In this study, the researchers tried to show that responding to students' feelings is considered very important as it is in new methods of teaching, and it was expected that students would make errors when they first began speaking. The researchers as teachers also tried to be tolerant of them and correct the students unobtrusively.

In addition, the researchers proved that if students are relaxed and confident, as they were in the class in which the delayed correction was treated, they will not need to try hard to learn the grammar, and delayed correction which takes place indirectly without referring to the student committing the error is more effective in enhancing students' self-confidence and to convince them that success is obtainable. Delayed correction technique is preferable to immediate correction on the grounds that it

helps students to communicate concepts in the target language unobtrusively along with learning the grammar knowledge as they make inferences when they are corrected indirectly and fix their information in their long term memory. On the other hand, by applying the immediate correction, the teacher is less successful in fixing the grammatical knowledge in the learners' long term memory because they constantly fear from making errors and this uneasiness make them too distracted to learn anything.

Classroom Implications

Teaching wise, the results to this study can be of use to teachers. The importance of these results to the teachers is the fact that their students are active in class, because they feel confidence. The teachers should take into consideration that they should give enough time to the students to make their own hypotheses regarding the system of language they are learning.

It also emphasizes the theachers' task in valuing learners, prizing their attempts, and their providing the optimal feedback for the system to evolve in successive stages until learners are speaking ambigiously without fear from making errors in the foreign language.

In addition, the teacher can make use of this study to make a student-centered classroom and put the emphasis on class creative activities. Besides, teachers can prepare appropriate exercises to help their students move in the right path.

It also should be mentioned that the results of the present research can be benenficial to syllabus designers, and curriculum developers on the grounds that by dint of such studies, they will be able to justifiably make memory modifications on their approaches to language teaching.

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