The Impact of Immediate Grammatical Error Correction on Senior English Majors' Accuracy at Hebron University

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the effects of grammatical error correction on EFL learners' accuracy. Twenty-two male and female senior students were chosen randomly to respond to a questionnaire investigating their beliefs about immediate grammatical error correction. Actually, the study was conducted in order to answer this question: what is the effect of grammatical error feedback on students' accuracy? The obtained results related to the questionnaire revealed that immediate error correction had a positive effect and thus enhanced the learners' accuracy.

Introduction

Accuracy, in its simple view, is the ability to produce grammatical correct sentences (Gower, 1995). Since its vital role in acquiring the English language in Palestine, grammar should seize a wide distance in EFL classrooms and should be taught either inductively or deductively. Nevertheless, the process of teaching and learning does not guarantee that all learners are expected to produce grammatical sentences, so the role of the teachers, here, is to respond and give immediate feedback. The erroneous utterances may interfere with the intelligibility of what is said. When the feedback provided during a conversational interaction, the acquisition process is facilitated (Rahimi & Dastjerdi, 2012) and the direct treatment of errors helps learners learn better.

The feedback and correction of errors are parts of the process of learning and teaching. It's believed that over-correction, i.e. repetition of correct form, is vital inside the classroom because repeating erroneous utterances by learners would be harmful for them (Doff, 1995). This belief may make students fragile so that they become reticent in the class. The role of the teacher is to be aware when and how to give immediate feedback on grammatical errors in order to avoid damaging learners' confidence. The aim of giving positive feedback is to bring about self-awareness and improvement (Gower et al., 1995). However, if the aim of the lesson is accuracy, the teachers should give immediate feedback, but they shouldn't correct mistakes resulted inadvertently. The feedback should be on those errors thought to be correct by learners. All in all, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of immediate grammatical error correction on learners' accuracy regardless to the debate whether immediate error feedback is useful or not.

Literature Review

After shedding lights upon the accuracy and corrective grammatical feedback, it's the time to go in depth through other studies aimed to examine the treatment of learners' errors. To begin with, correcting learners' grammatical errors with little delay have a great impact in developing the accuracy and fluency of EFL learners at intermediate level (Rahimi & Dastjerdi, 2012). The study shows the improvement in accuracy and fluency to intermediate learners, which is great.

To investigate how some Arab teachers treat student's oral errors in EFL classroom and what types of error they treat, Shahin (2011) observes a number of teachers giving feedback to their learners. He finds that some oral errors were immediately corrected (30%), and the focus of the teachers was on grammatical errors (66%). Therefore, grammar and meaning have to go together and any grammatical error may hinder, imped or block the hearer from understanding what is basically meant by the speaker. Furthermore, one can produce grammatical sentences with erroneous utterance and the message can easily be converted and understood by the hearer.

It is an unbelievable thought that error correction on learners' writing is useless or worthless. That is what Pan (2010) brings to the world. Pan's target population were asked to write a passage, and then they were demanded to revise their writing based on the teacher's feedback. Then, an oral meeting was conducted in order to give them feedback on their errors. However, the final version of some of their work contains more errors than what is expected from them. This result has called for the conclusion that the improvement in linguistic accuracy has nothing to do with error feedback on written work. However, Pan's feedback lacks immediacy. In contrast, Chandler's (2003) study is a refutation for Pan's (2010). According to the experimental group of Chandler's study, direct correction is best for producing accurate revisions and enhances students' accuracy.

Correct self-perception under the supervision of the teacher is a valid way for error feedback. To test this, Bei (2013) observed two adult EFL participants watching a cartoon video clip, and then they performed a narrative repetition. What Bei found is that the repetition of the narrative task enhances and increases learners' fluency and accuracy. The repetition, by the teacher, of the correct form of the erroneous grammatical utterance, by the participants, may enhance their accuracy depending on Bei's (2013) study.

If error correction is to be effective, classroom practice cannot afford to be based rigidly on any standardized practice derived from the opinions of linguists and teachers alone, but it must be flexible enough to incorporate the preferences and needs of the language learner (Oladejo, 1993, p. 71). So, the process of teaching and providing feedback is subject more to the learners' needs than to what linguists or teachers believe. In other words, if the teachers find that giving feedback is necessary, they should do so, if not, they shouldn't. However, the correction and error feedback shouldn't exceed their limits. For instance, correction can be integrated with content comment; correction may be limited in scope but powerful in effect (Alroe, 2011).

Rationale

Learners do commit grammatical errors. The teacher either corrects or ignores them. If these errors are not corrected directly, learners may repeat them and produce segments of ungrammatical language. However, when the teacher keeps on correcting learners' errors, learners may become hesitant or get embarrassed. All in all, the value of this study is to find out the impact of immediate grammatical feedback on learners' accuracy and to check the effects of such feedback.

Research Question

This study aimed to answer the following question:

Does immediate grammatical error correction enhance EFL learners' accuracy?

Methodology

Participants

In order to collect data for the present study, a group of twenty-two male and female English language majors, seven females and fifteen males, who were in their fourth year of study were randomly chosen and consulted to fill in a questionnaire (see Appendix A). The questions were designed to find out students' views on immediate grammatical error correction. They were nonnative speakers and in the near future would have B.A. degree in the English language. The main drive behind choosing them was that they were more advanced than other students depending on their level of proficiency. The questionnaire was administered from 28th of March to 9th of April 2013 inside the campus of Hebron University.

Instruments

The instrument of evaluation used in this study was a questionnaire which covered some of the most important items for error correction. The questionnaire had two parts (see Appendix A) containing questions to be answered by the students.

Procedure

The questionnaire was delivered to the participants. They were asked to fill in the questionnaire by putting a tick on the items with which they strongly agreed, agreed, strongly disagreed, or disagreed. Then, they were required to write down whether they liked to be corrected or not, and their answers were written down (Appendix B).

Results

The results elicited from the participants' responses to the questionnaire questions are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Strongly agree was calculated as number1, agree was calculated as number 2, neutral number 3, disagree number 4, and strongly disagree as number 5. The participants agreed on ten items out of sixteen, were neutral with six and did not disagree with any item. Table 1 below shows ten items out of sixteen with which the participants agreed (see Appendix A).

Table 1. Means for items with which the participants agreed

Items	Means
2. I like to be immediately corrected when I make a grammatical mistake.	1.7
8. In order to be accurate, teachers should give direct feedback to any grammatical mistakes.	1.8
13. Knowing much grammar helps my oral production.	1.86
7. Immediate grammar correction increases my anxiety.	1.9
16. I like my colleagues to correct my grammar errors.	2.14
1. Whenever I make a grammatical mistake, the teacher directly corrects me.	2.2
14. I feel cheated if the teacher doesn't correct my grammatical errors.	2.23
3. I feel confident when producing grammatical error-free sentences.	2.3
10. Grammatical error correction may be harmful that it distracts attention from much more important issues.	2.55
4. If the teacher keeps on correcting me, I feel down and get embarrassed.	2.8

As shown in Table 1, the means for these items range from 1.7 to 2.8 which indicate the importance of immediate error feedback. All the participants agreed that immediate grammatical error correction has a positive effect on their accuracy. By glancing furtively at the table, one can notice that the most crucial item appearing is "I like to be immediately corrected…", so the participants are in need to be directly offered feedback regarding their grammar errors. Item 2 shows the relationship between immediate feedback and accuracy. It is clear that the participants are thirsty to accuracy by being grammatically and immediately given feedback. The last item in the table, which received the least attention by the participants, is also an indication for the vitality of error correction. Though they may get embarrassed, they like their teachers to correct them, but the teachers shouldn't over correct whatever errors produced. Moreover, it is clear that whoever is the doer of the correction, it is seen as important as the development of the learners (participants) accuracy. Although immediate grammatical error feedback is crucial, the participants agree that it may distract the attention from more much important issues (item 10), which may contradict with the idea of error correction at all. As a whole, the remaining items are attaching importance to the efficiency of immediate grammatical feedback.

The participants were neutral with six items. Table 2 below shows the items with which the participants were neutral.

Table 2. Means for items with which the participants were neutral

Items	**Means**
9. I don't notice my errors or the feedback on these errors.	3.31
5. I feel that my colleagues will poke fun at me if I'm corrected.	3.5
15. It is easy to hold a conversation in English without knowing its grammar.	3.59
12. It is difficult for me to master the English grammar.	3.64
11. It's a waste of time that the teachers keep on correcting grammatical mistakes.	3.81
6. The teachers shouldn't care much about grammatical errors.	3.95

Table 2 manifests the items about which the participants were unable to decide regarding total agreement or disagreement. By a look at Table 2, one can notice that all the items nearly have the same means. These items show that learners sometimes don't notice their errors and don't know the psychological effect of error correction. They don't recognize well whether grammar knowledge is a pavement for accuracy, and they don't able to bring to light whether grammar acquaintance is fundamental for language mastery. However, the participants almost disagree that teachers shouldn't care much about grammatical error (3.95).

Yet, there is no one single item with which the participants disagreed. The reasons of which could be that learners find it more acceptable to produce error-free sentences than to produce ungrammatical utterances. If you take a look at Appendix B, you can find grammatical errors in written form provided by the participants when they were asked to answer the questionnaire. If these errors were ignored and not corrected, the learners may believe that what they produce or write is correct. The need for oral and written accuracy has a very much interest in EFL learners' context so that the foreign language they are learning (English) can be said to be mastered. Error correction and feedback in language teaching are seen valid for accurate production.

In answering part 2 of the questionnaire, all the participants' answers are approximately close each other. The corner core of the answers is that the participants believe that grammatical error correction may let them avoid making these mistakes, or errors, again. Participant B

answers part2 as "I need to know my mistakes in order to correct them." However, participant P is against immediate grammatical error correction. She bears in mind that "[She] will be embarrassed and it will affect *on [her] attention." Nevertheless, two of the participants didn't answer. To see all the answers of the participants, see Appendix B.

Discussion

The results bear witness to the indispensible importance of immediate grammatical error feedback. Error correction is seen as the main source of feedback to students (Wieczorek, 1991, p. 498). Oladejo (1993) suggests that:

"Although learners generally want their errors corrected, they also have preferences in terms of how much emphasis each error type should attract. The majority of the learners believe that errors relating to organization of ideas should receive the highest attention for correction." (p. 78)

According to Oladejo, grammatical error correction deserves high attention since grammatical errors is followed closely by vocabulary errors. Because of this, the twenty-two participants of this study like to be immediately corrected when they make a grammatical mistake though the concentration is shifted from accuracy to fluency. Generally, corrective feedback facilitates the acquisition of the target language and it can assist learning (Ellis et al., 2009).

Giving direct feedback to grammatical mistakes enhances EFL learner's accuracy. As shown in Table 1, item 8, learners do agree that immediate feedback on their errors build up their accuracy. Depending on Alreo's (2011) study, he discussed the importance of giving direct feedback on students' written work. He found that direct feedback is significant and beneficial. This may apply to grammar correction too.

Moreover, the participants find it useful to be taught grammar. Teaching grammar effectively is noted as beneficial. For example, Spada and Lightbown (1993, p. 205) suggested that grammar focused instruction and corrective feedback can contribute positively to second language development. And it is noted that limited awareness of grammar may affect both teachers' and students' accuracy (Shuib, 2009). However, in Table 2, the participants are not sure that grammar knowledge or its mastery can let them hold a conversation. Moreover, their errors or the feedback on these errors are not clear enough for them to notice. Still, Rahimi and Dastjerdi (2012) noticed the errors of their experimental group, gave them immediate and delayed feedback, and observed the development in accuracy and fluency of their oral production.

Grammatical errors need to be focused on during teaching and learning processes as they proved to be a major obstacle for learning the language (Shahin, 2011, p. 223). This idea is confirmed by the participants of this study in most of the items in Table 1. It is believed that grammar and meaning go together. The one who produces grammatical sentence is able to produce meaningful one. Regardless to the error correction provider, participants do need immediate grammar feedback, as they responded to item 1, 3, 14 and 16. They feel cheated if they are not corrected immediately, and they become more confident if they produced error free sentences. This claim is proved by Oladejo's (1993) study that his participants can improve their accuracy and fluency if they corrected. Ganjabi (2011, p. 1286) concludes his study as teachers should vary the types of activities and procedures to teach grammatical points, and they should understand that the students' beliefs have a great effect on the success or failure of their teaching enterprise.

However, the reason why the participants believe that grammatical error correction may be harmful that it distracts attention from much more important issues (item 10 in Table 1), and they feel down and get embarrassed if the teacher keeps on correcting them (item 4) could be the

teacher's way in giving the feedback. Alreo (2011, p. 63) noted that "… grammar and syntax would make the case for error correction more compelling and could show instructors how correction might be better implemented". The issue here is the manner of correction. The teacher should bear in mind how, when and how to give valid feedback that can be accepted without causing any distraction to learners and that can increase their anxiety.

The reasons why the participants didn't disagree with any item could be that the good effects of grammatical error correction on their accuracy. Error correction feedback is useful and has a positive effect on the collocation competence at advanced and intermediate levels, but not at the elementary level (Jafarpour & Sharifi, 2012, p. 3). The study recommends that teachers use error correction feedback in teaching. The study makes sense since it alleviates the controversial theories about error correction feedback.

In addition, another reason for this may be that not all the errors should be corrected. Over-correction may cause distraction for learners. Chaudron (1988) notes that:

"In any communicative exchange, speakers derive from their listeners' information on the reception and comprehension of their message… from the language teacher's point of view, the provision of feedback is a major means by which to inform learners of the accuracy of both their formal target language production and their other classroom behavior and knowledge. From the learners' point of view, the use of feedback in repairing their utterances, and involvement in repairing their interlocutors' utterances, may constitute the most potent source of improvement in both target language development and other subject matter knowledge" (pp. 132-133)

Being in the discussion, the twenty-two participants' viewpoint toward immediate grammar feedback is positive. Teachers should make allowance for positive correction for students' errors in grammar.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between immediate grammatical error correction and accuracy. It emphasized that the effect of corrective and immediate feedback builds up students' accuracy. It also showed students' opinions toward grammar and reveals that grammar and grammatical feedback are necessary in EFL context where English is taught as a foreign language. Oladejo's (1993) participants responded to his questionnaire as "it is necessary to correct their errors in English in order to enhance their fluency and accuracy in the language".

The study elicited responses from learns as to whether they like to be corrected or not. It is clear that almost all the participants agreed that grammatical error correction is vital to develop their accuracy. In addition, they don't want to repeat the same error again, according to their responses to part B of the questionnaire.

Teachers' style of correction should be varied. They should follow various streams of correcting and giving feedback that don't distract students' attention from the main subject that is going to be discussed. Yet, the error feedback provider doesn't cause a big problem for the participants. The main issue for them is to be corrected whether by the teacher or by their colleagues.

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Appendix A

The Questionnaire

Please respond as required for this research paper.

This questionnaire has two parts. Please answer both parts.

Part 1: Please put (✓) with which you strongly agree, agree, neutral, strongly disagree or disagree.

Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐

Items	**Strongly agree**	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
1) Whenever I do a grammatical mistake, the teacher directly corrects me.					
2) I like to be immediately corrected when I do a grammatical mistake.					
3) I feel confident when producing grammatical error-free sentences.					
4) If the teacher keeps on correcting me, I feel down and get embarrassed.					
5) I feel that my colleagues will make fun of me if I'm corrected.					
6) The teachers shouldn't care much about grammatical errors.					
7) Immediate grammar correction helps to develop my confidence.					
8) In order to be accurate, teachers should give direct feedback to any grammatical mistake.					
9) I don't notice my errors without feedback.					
10) Grammatical error correction may distract attention from much more important issues.					
11) It's a waste of time for teachers to keep on correcting grammatical mistakes.					
12) It is difficult for me to master the English grammar.					
13) Knowing much grammar helps my oral production.					
14) I feel cheated if the teacher doesn't correct my grammatical errors.					
15) It is easy to hold a conversation in English without knowing its grammar.					
16) I like my colleagues to correct my grammar errors.					

Part two: Please respond to one of the following questions in your own words.

If I make a grammatical error or mistake, I **like** to be corrected because …….
……

If I make a grammatical error or mistake, I **don't like** to be corrected because ……..….
……

Thanks for your patience.

Appendix B
Answers of Part 2 by the Participants

One should be aware that the following is the answers of part 2 provided by the participants. The researcher has not changed any word (as originally written). Regardless to the errors and mistakes, these answers are valuable to bear in mind.

Participant A: No answer.
Participant B: "I need to know my mistakes in order to correct them."
Participant C: "Correcting errors makes perfection."
Participant D: "I don't want to *do the mistake again."
Participant E: "It is hard to get rid of."
Participant F: "Next time I will avoid my mistakes."
Participant G: "I want to know the ****gaps of me*** in language."
Participant H: "The correction of my errors develops my confidence."
Participant I: No answer.
Participant J: "I will learn from my mistakes, and this correction helps me *to avoid these grammatical gaps in future."
Participant K: "When I speak correctly without errors, I feel that I speak fluently."
Participant L: "I will never make the same mistake again."
Participant M: "I want to speak fluently."
Participant N: "That *help me *to know my mistakes to avoid the repetition of *it again."
Participant O: "When the teacher corrects my grammatical errors, I will not repeat these errors again."
Participant P: "I will be embarrassed and it will affect *on my attention."
Participant Q: "I can avoid it next time."
Participant R: "I want to learn from my mistake."
Participant S: "That *help me *to avoid the mistakes."
Participant T: "I won't *to make it again and improve my language."
Participant U: "I just want to master the language, *and to be free of error and to be at Φ good position in society you must be free of error in language."
Participant V: "I need to avoid my error in the future."