Evaluation of the EFL Materials Taught at Iranian High Schools

Ali Jahangard, Sharif University of Technology
Iranian EFL Journal

Editors: Paul Robertson

and

Rajabali Askarzadeh Torghabeh
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Foreword: Profs. Askarzadeh and Robertson

Welcome to the inaugural edition of the Iranian EFL Journal. This journal is the sister journal to the long established Asian EFL Journal and Linguistics Journal. We hope you support this new venture which adds a very important addition to the study and teaching of English as a foreign language in the Middle East areas. We also wish to hear from any academics who would like to serve on our Editorial team, for already the Iranian EFL Journal is drawing quite some considerable positive attention and submissions are coming in.

It is our intention to publish up to 4 times year, though this year, our inaugural year, we plan two editions. The first edition comes from articles that our sister journal the Asian EFL Journal, has published and has kindly granted permission, along with the authors, to re-print here.

Each edition we will publish articles that cover a broad spectrum of second language acquisition learning and teaching articles. We encourage authors who are researching new areas of EFL to submit their work. The Iranian EFL Journal plans to hold, in conjunction with the Asian EFL Journal, an annual conference in Iran and other Middle Eastern countries where academics from across the globe can present on second language learning issues of international interest.

In this edition we publish 10 articles. We thank the authors for sharing their work and improving the knowledge and study of SLA. In our latter editions we will also present a Book Review section and Interview articles.

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Examining Gender-based Variability in Task-prompted, Monologic L2 Oral Performance

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Abstract
With an awakening of interest in gender, a wide array of potentials has emerged for research, theory and practice in SLA. The present study examined the monologic oral performance of 20 male vs. 20 female Iranian EFL learners on a participant-rated LCIT (least culturally inhibiting topic) vs. a participant-rated MCIT (most culturally inhibiting topic), addressed to a male vs. a female teacher. Performance was rated in terms of fluency, complexity, and accuracy. 2×2×2 Repeated Measure Mixed Factorial ANOVA revealed the following results: a) fluency varied significantly due to gender, and topic separately, b) complexity significantly varied due to topic, and c) accuracy demonstrated significant statistical difference regarding teacher gender, participant gender, and the interaction of the two. Topic also influenced variability, and finally the interaction of all the three variables, i.e. teacher gender, participant gender, and topic significantly influenced accuracy of participants’ speech. Implications of the study are discussed.

Key words: gender, task, variability, fluency, complexity, accuracy

Introduction
Gender as “something not always apparent, but always present” (Sunderland, 2000, p. 203) seems to have introduced thriving potentials for research, theory and practice in second/foreign language education over the last decades (Hruska, 2004; Norton and Pavlenko, 2004b). Now, more than ever before, SLA can no longer afford to treat gender as one variable among a host of others. Rather, it is increasingly becoming a standpoint from which language teaching dynamics can be visualized, explored, and perhaps revisited (Chavez, 2001).

Early concerns with gender in practical SLA research used to be heavily influenced by classical claims in mainstream psychology about females’ superior verbal skills like the capacity to produce more fluent, accurate, complex speech and longer sentences (e.g. Weiss, Kemmler, Deisenhammer, Fleischnhaker, and Delazer, 2003). The argument in favor of the female advantage rests further on demographics on females outnumbering males in foreign language majors (e.g. Morris, 2003;), hypothetically higher compatibility of females’ cooperative communicative patterns with communicative language teaching (Chavez, 2001), females’ positive attitude to integration with target language community (e.g. Baker and McIntyre, 2003), as a predictor of achievement (Goldberg and Wolf, 1982), results from tests of varying scales (Altani, 1995 for instance), female superiority in L2 skills such as grammar (Andreou, Andreou and Vlachos, 2004), vocabulary (Nyikos, 1990), reading (Pae, 2004), and spoken interaction (Gass and Varonis, 1986).

Variability: Dominant frameworks

Within the range of “almost overwhelming” (Wolfram, 1991, p. 104) theoretical perspectives, sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and cognitive accounts of variability have been of a celebrated status. Of the sociolinguistic accounts, Labovian paradigm, dynamic paradigm, and social psychological paradigm are distinguishable. As far as the psycholinguistic framework is concerned, speech planning and speech monitoring models are highlighted and finally the only cognitive account of variability is Skehan’s dual processing system. In what follows, a brief description of each of the models is presented in respective order.

Labovian paradigm (Labov, 1970), which has been immensely influential in shaping the earliest works on variability (Tarone, 1982, 1983), identified social factors such as social class, age, and gender responsible for inter-speaker, and stylistic factors responsible for intra-speaker variation. As described by Ellis (1994), styles in terms of the Labovian paradigm are . . . spread along a continuum according to the amount of attention paid by the speakers to their own speech . . . Attention serves as the mechanism through which
causative social factors such as verbal task (in particular), topic, interlocutor, setting or the roles of the participants influence actual performance. (p. 122)

The dynamic paradigm (Bailey, 1973; Bickerton, 1975) drawing on language change studies states that varieties of language constitute a Creole continuum. Following this paradigm, inter-speaker variation may be due to the speakers’ differential access to varieties, but intra-speaker variation occurs when speakers have access to multiple varieties and depending on the situational factors like topic, purpose, and addressee they choose to employ one variety rather than another.

Social psychological models explain variation in terms of the speakers’ attitudes to in-group and out-group members (e.g. Beebe, 1988). *Speech Accommodation Theory* (Giles, 1971) is the most prominent social psychological framework that has motivated accounts of variability in L2 learners’ language. Three types of variation in the speech of the speakers are distinguished, namely convergence (when the speaker adjusts his/her speech to that of the interlocutor), divergence (keeps his/her speech distinct from and dissimilar to that of the interlocutor) and maintenance (makes no attempt to change his/her speech). Speech accommodation is determined by the speaker’s attitude to the interlocutor(s) and can take place at any levels of language use including lexico-grammatical or discoursal levels (ibid). The appeal of Speech Accommodation Theory lies with the central emphasis it lays on the role of addressee as a predictor of variability (Ellis, 1994).

Speech planning model proposed by Levelt (1989) assigns psycholinguistic sources to variability at several stages of speech production. The stages include a) conceptualizer at which situational factors and communicative purpose shape the speaker’s decision as to the variety of language, b) the formulator stage where speech plan is made by opting for internalized lexicon, grammar and phonological rules, c) articulator stage which converts the speech plan into actual speech, and d) final stage which enables the speaker to get feedback of his/her own speech and make phonological and grammatical adjustments (see De Bot, 1992).

Speech monitoring model (Morrison and Low, 1983) resembles the model of language production proposed by Levelt (1989). However, it further distinguishes macro-level (involving adjustments in terms of communicative purpose and at sentence level) and micro-level monitoring (lexical, syntactic and phonetic adjustments). Morrison and Low (ibid) also propose pre-articulatory monitoring which occurs before the phonetic plan is made, and post-articulatory monitoring which operates on actualized speech.
Skehan’s cognitive approach to variability characterizes modern trends of research in which tasks have become the focus of research in their own right (Skehan, 1998; Robinson, 2003 among others). According to Skehan (1996, 1998) language competence is composed of formulaic lexical expressions and grammatical rules. Speakers operate the ‘dual processing system’ which enables them to have access to both sources of knowledge. Nevertheless, depending on the communicative pressure or the accuracy demand, they have a varying dependence on lexical and grammatical processing resources (ibid). Noting that in spontaneous production, due to the limitation of attentional sources, learners are more likely to rely on lexical processing, Skehan’s perspective according to Ellis (2003, p.25) is that it may be possible to identify the task conditions and procedures that lead learners to place a differential emphasis on fluency, i.e. performance free of undue pauses, and false starts, complexity, i.e. the use of a wide range of grammatical structures, and accuracy, i.e. the correct use of grammatical structures.

Models and frameworks reviewed so far constitute only a part of the whole picture of theorizing task and variability and a single theory will be far from adequate in accounting for all the dimensions. As Zuenglar (1989, p. 66) puts it, “one theory will most likely be insufficient in explaining the complexity of performance variation”. Ellis (1994, p. 132) makes a similar point maintaining that “the study of L2 variability calls for a perspective inclusive of both a sociolinguistic and a psycholinguistic perspective”. Gender is one of the factors that can inherently be of interest to different perspectives of variability accounts.

**Gender, task and L2 variability**

Although addressing gender issues in language education predates SLA, early works were almost invariably preoccupied with the so-called female superiority (see Chavez, 2001; Sunderland, 2000 among others). Another research trend was inspired by pure gender and language studies in which male and female communicative patterns were investigated. For example Coates (1993) argument that females’ communication is cooperative and males’ is competitive, hierarchically-oriented motivated classroom interaction research on male dominance in L2 situation (e.g. Spender, 1982). Concerning other aspects including communicative language use, since “TESOL profession [has] taken too long to examine gender” (Willet, 1996, p. 344), literature on the relationship between task and gender is particularly scarce.
Robinson (2001, 2003) affiliated with Skehan’s cognitive perspective identified three dimensions of tasks that cause variability in the learners’ language, namely task complexity, task difficulty, and task conditions. In this triple categorization, task conditions (as interactional factors) are further divided into participation and participant variables. Gender, in Robinson’s (2001) terms, falls in the subcategory of participant variables. O’Sullivan (2000) could show that both males and females tended to produce more grammatically accurate forms in the presence of female interviewers, but their fluency or complexity did not vary. O’Loughlin (2002), nevertheless, in a study on the effect of the gender of the examiner in the oral interview component of IELTS could not find any differences in relation to the gender of the examiner quantitatively or qualitatively. Young and Milanovich (1992) suggested that both the interviewers’ and the interviewees’ gender may be among the factors that bring about variations.

Topic of the task is also one of the influential factors in determining task difficulty or complexity (Brown, Anderson, Shilock, and Yule, 1984; Selinker and Douglas, 1985). In different ways topic of the task can prompt variability, and gender preference of the topic can well be one of them. Gass and Varonis (1986) concentrating on same-sex and opposite-sex dyads, found among other things that “only in male/female conversations is the majority of the conversation devoted to personal topics. In both female/female and male/male groups, the conversation tends to be more objective, dealing with such topics as past and future university studies, job status, and job description . . .” (Gass and Varonis, 1986, p. 337). Freed and Wood (1996) raised the issue of topic among the factors that determine the forms that occur in interaction. As Chavez stated, “[T]opics around which tasks are organized may also influence achievement scores of males as opposed to those of females” (p. 36) and one of the ways in which this can occur is through topic selection. She proceeded to quote several perspectives on gender preferences of speech topic in L1 (Bischoping, 1993; Coates, 1997; Johnstone, 1993). Coates (1997) maintained that men prefer less personal topics than women, while Johnstone (1993) concentrating on Midwestern men and women attributed physical and social themes to men’s and community-related topics to women’s stories. Bischoping (1993), on the other hand, endorsed a dismissive view of the distinction between male and female preferred topics. Based on these, Chavez (2001) argued that if the differences applied to L2 as well, then performance on tasks would be influenced by the preferences.

Considering the theoretical accounts of variability reviewed above, and also allowing for the “under-researched sites as regards gender and language learning . . . in developing
countries, in Africa, Islamic countries . . .” (Sunderland, 2000, p. 216), this paper addresses variability in Iranian context by asking the following research question:

What is the effect of participant gender, teacher gender, and the learner-perceived cultural inhibition of topic on the fluency, complexity, and accuracy of L2 learners’ monologic oral L2 performance?

Method
Participants
The participants in the study were 20 male and 20 female sophomore and junior English majors doing their Language Laboratory and Phonology courses at a private university in the Northwestern Iranian border town of Salmas. They were selected on the basis of a TOEFL test which yielded two (one all-male and the other all-female) homogeneous groups. The males’ average age was 20.85 with the youngest and oldest being 19 and 25, respectively. The females’ ages ranged between 20 and 26, and the average age equaled 21.65. Of the males, 12 (60%) spoke Azerbaijani, 3 (15%) spoke Persian, and the remaining 5 (25%) were the native speakers of Kurdish. Of the females, there were 11 (55%) Azerbaijani, 1 (5%) Persian and 8 (40%) Kurdish native speakers. (Azerbaijani and Kurdish are regional languages serving everyday communication and lacking written medium in Iranian context. Persian is used as the official language through which all public-life activities, especially schooling and instruction takes place.) They participated in the study as part of the course assessment throughout and near the end of the autumn semester from September 2005 through February 2006 in their respective courses.

Data collection procedures
To begin with, a criterion had to be established to identify a culturally ‘inhibiting’ task topic, which was one of the three independent variables. For this purpose, an operating definition was presented as follows:

A culturally inhibiting topic is by definition a topic which is not an explicitly moral, religious, social or political taboo, but remotely and by extension it may be associated with one or more than one of them following the norms of the society in question. The speakers as members of the social community are, therefore, likely to avoid expressing their ideas openly and straightforwardly when talking about it in public, non-intimate interpersonal language use like classroom or interview situations.

With the definition in hand, the next step was to identify the least culturally inhibiting topic (LCIT) and the most culturally inhibiting topic (MCIT) to be used as prompts in the
experiment. This step involved several stages. At stage one, one representative level book was chosen out of three conversational English series with the longest record of use in Iranian context, i.e. *New Interchange 3: English for International Communication* (Richards, et al., 1997), *Spectrum: A Communicative Course in English–Level 5* (Warshawsky, rein and Frankfurt, 1999) and *Headway: Upper Intermediate* (Soars and Soars, 1983). Another selection involved randomly picking out 5 general topics of the speaking activities/themes out of each of the three books. Conversations or speaking activities with similar themes and those explicitly provocative regarding religious (Islamic) norms, e.g. dating, were excluded from selection. The resulting 15 general topics were subsequently presented to the 47 participants who were asked to number the topics from the least inhibiting (1) to the most inhibiting (15) on the basis of the operational definition. Therefore, for each topic there were 47 numerical values ranging from 1 to 15, the mean of which determined the least and most culturally inhibiting topics. Figure 1 clearly illustrates the fact that to the participants, the least culturally inhibiting topic (LCIT) was ‘city and population’ while the most culturally inhibiting topic (MCIT) was ‘love and marriage’.

![Figure 1](image-url)

**Figure 1.** Mean rating of topics by male and female participants

In this study, the spoken protocols of the participants’ task-prompted monologues on the LCIT and MCIT, addressed to a male and a female teacher, were compared for fluency, complexity and accuracy. The dependent variables were fluency, complexity and accuracy with the independent variables being gender of the participant, the teacher, and gender perceived cultural inhibition of the topic. Table 1 illustrates the design of the study.
Table 1. Experimental design of the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male teacher (addressee)</th>
<th>Female teacher (addressee)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monologic talk</td>
<td>Monologic talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on ‘city and population’</td>
<td>on ‘love and marriage’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male  participants</td>
<td>N= 20</td>
<td>N= 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female participant</td>
<td>N = 20</td>
<td>N = 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the purpose of collecting the data, arrangements were made to attend to task performances by having every individual participant at a time speaking to the male and female teacher on LCIT (i.e. city and population) and MCIT (i.e. love and marriage) in the language laboratory. Each participant was given a 2-minute planning time before, and a 5 minute speaking time, both constant across all participants, and all four performances for each participant. The male teacher in the experiment was the second author, and the female teacher was a departmental staff member and course lecturer with whom the participants were already acquainted. The time gap between the two performances with male teacher and those with female teacher was 4 weeks to meet the course schedule. Teachers as addressees merely gave the topics and initial directions refraining from any feedback, or verbal interaction during the monologues. In order to eliminate uncontrolled planning, and preparation effects, arrangements were also made so that the participants who finish with their task performance could not see the ones who are waiting for their turn. The spoken protocols of the participants elicited on the four speaking events were digitally recorded.

**Data Analysis**

The recorded data files of the participants’ speech converted to appropriate format and analyzed with Cool Edit Pro Version 2.0 which proved especially helpful with detecting pause lengths and marking out T-unit boundaries. Then, they were transcribed and coded for fluency, complexity and accuracy by two raters. One of the raters was the second author, and the other an EFL lecturer as a staff member of a different university who had been given complete instructions on coding the protocols for the three aspects.

**Fluency**

The ratio of meaningful words per pause (WPP) was calculated for gauging fluency. Since there are no well-defined, universally agreed-upon criteria on pause, different local criteria
are employed. ‘Pause’ in this study following Crookes (1986) was operationalized as non-phonation in interclausal or intraclausal position longer than 0.60 seconds, false starts, occurrence of interword or intraword suprasegmental hesitation markers such as mum, uh, etc. (also known as filled pauses), and intraword vowel stretched longer than 0.60 seconds. In obtaining the fluency measures, repetitions, inaudible or fragmented words, unsystematic occurrence of disruption or distortion of speech by non-linguistic vocal sounds (such as coughing, sighing, etc.) as well as the words containing these occurrences word medially were ignored. Coding for fluency did not include aspects of grammatical accuracy or mispronunciation as long as they were not meaningfully distinct. Kappa coefficients (as indices of inter-rater reliability) of the number of words and the number of pauses turned out to be 0.91 and 0.83, respectively.

**Complexity**

For establishing complexity of speech, different word occurrences (Types) were divided by total word occurrences (Tokens) and the result multiplied by 100. It is also known as Type-Token Ration (TTR) (see Richards, Schmidt, Platt and Schmidt, 2003). Coding for complexity disregarded sentence fragments, repeated words, incomplete clausal units, and interclausal or intraclausal interjections. The inter-rater reliability levels (indicated by kappa coefficient) were 0.90 and 0.83 for the types (i.e. the number of different words) and for the tokens (or words), respectively.

**Accuracy**

The general approach is to obtain the percentage of error-free T-units to the total number of T-units. T-unit is defined as “one main clause plus whatever subordinate clauses, phrases, and words happen to be attached to or embedded within it” (Menhert, 1998, p. 90). Kappa coefficient for the error-free T-units was 0.94 and the total number of T-units was 0.81. Repetitions, fragments, and clusters of indistinct propositional link with the adjacent clausal units were left out of consideration.

**Results**

**Fluency**

2×2×2 Repeated Measure Mixed Factorial ANOVA results showed that a) the mean word per pause (WPP) significantly varied across the speech addressed to male vs. female teachers,
and also b) it varied significantly depending on whether the speech was about ‘city and population’ or ‘love and marriage’. However, participant gender and different interactions of variables did not prove significant. The results appear in Tables 2.

**Table 2. ANOVA table for fluency as a factor of participant gender, teacher gender, and topic**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tests of Within-Subject Contrasts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35.34</td>
<td>30.78**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gender × Participant gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.21 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error (Teacher gender)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>66.17</td>
<td>63.41**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic × Participant gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.53 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error (Topic)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gender × Topic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.37 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gender × Topic × Participant gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.18 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error (Teacher gender × Topic)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tests of Between-Subject Contrasts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.07 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Significant at \( p < 0.01 \)

ns = not significant

As illustrated in Figure 2, the participants’ monologues addressed to the female teacher contained a significantly higher mean of words (5.50) than the monologues addressed to the male teacher (4.55).

Fluency also significantly varied due to topic. On the task with LCIT (*i.e. city and population*), on average, the average number of words per pause amounted to 5.67 which exceeded 4.39 as the mean of words per pause on tasks with MCIT (*i.e. love and marriage*). Figure 3 shows the mean word per pause values on LCIT (*i.e. city and population*) and MCIT (*i.e. love and marriage*) tasks.
Complexity

As far as complexity of production is concerned, ANOVA results could only establish significant differences with regard to LCIT (The Least Culturally Inhibiting Topic) i.e. ‘city and population’ vs. MCIT (The Most Culturally Inhibiting Topic) i.e. ‘love and marriage’ at $p < 0.01$. In other words, the participants’ monologic, task-prompted speech complexity significantly varied depending only on whether the topic of the monologue was ‘city and population’ or ‘love and marriage’. All other differences regarding the other variables and their different interactions proved insignificant as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. ANOVA table for complexity as a factor of participant gender, teacher gender, and topic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.00 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gender × Participant gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>68.34</td>
<td>0.63 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error (Teacher gender)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>107.65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2390.81</td>
<td>22.53**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic × Participant gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>381.95</td>
<td>3.60 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error (Topic)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>106.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gender × Topic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>229.08</td>
<td>3.71 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gender × Topic × Participant gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18.25</td>
<td>0.29 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error (Teacher gender × Topic)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>61.64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tests of Between-Subject Contrasts

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>356.67</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>196.63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Significant at \( p < 0.01 \)

ns = not significant

As shown in Figure 4, the participants’ speech varied significantly \( p < 0.01 \) depending on whether they talked about LCIT or MCIT. They produced a higher mean of Types per Tokens when talking about MCIT (61.89) than when talking about LCIT (54.07).

![Bar chart showing MTTR comparison between LCIT and MCIT](image)

**Figure 4. Mean Type-Token Ratio on task with LCIT as opposed to task with MCIT**

MTTR = Mean Type-Token Ratio

LCIT = The Least Culturally Inhibiting Topic (i.e. city and population)

MCIT = The Most Culturally Inhibiting Topic (i.e. love and marriage)

**Accuracy**

Results indicated statistically significant differences in terms of the mean percentage of error free T-units as a matter of a) participant gender \( p < 0.01 \), b) teacher gender \( p < 0.01 \), c) interaction of teacher and participant gender \( p < 0.05 \), and d) interaction of all three variables, namely participant gender, teacher gender, and topic \( p < 0.01 \). In other words, 2×2×2 Repeated Measure Mixed Factorial ANOVA results showed that the average error-free T-unit number in participants’ production significantly varied depending on the gender of the participant, gender of the teacher, interaction of these two, and the interaction of participant gender, teacher gender, and topic (See Table 4).

Table 4. ANOVA table for accuracy as a factor of participant genders, teacher gender, and topic
Tests of Within-Subject Contrasts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1037.90</td>
<td>8.65**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gender × Participant gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>717.11</td>
<td>5.97*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error (Teacher gender)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>119.93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>88.55</td>
<td>0.69 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic × Participant gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>87.63</td>
<td>0.68 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error (Topic)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>128.24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gender × Topic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>63.06</td>
<td>0.49 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher gender × Topic × Participant gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1061.57</td>
<td>8.34 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error (Teacher gender × Topic)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>127.24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tests of Between-Subject Contrasts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2959.86</td>
<td>11.26 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>362.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at $p < 0.05$; ** Significant at $p < 0.01$
ns = not significant

Starting with the between-subject factor (i.e. participant gender), a greater mean percentage of error free T-units was found on the part of females than males. Results presented in Figure 5 indicate that female participants in the study in general produced a significantly higher mean percentage of error-free T-units (70.55) than their male counterparts (61.94).

![Figure 5. Male and female participants’ MPEFTU on task-prompted, monologic tasks](image)

MPEFTU = Mean Percentage of Error-free T-Units
Teacher’s gender turned out to be an influential factor in determining the participants’ percentage of accurate structures (Figure 6). Mean percentage of error-free T-units in the task-prompted talk addressed to male teacher (that is 68.79) was significantly higher ($p < 0.01$), than that addressed to female teacher (i.e. 63.70).

![Figure 6](image)

**Figure 6 - Mean percentage of error free T-units in the participants’ monologic, task-prompted speech addressed to male as opposed to female teacher**

**MPEFTU = Mean Percentage of Error-Free T-Units**

Accuracy of task-elicited production varied as a matter of interaction of the teacher and participant gender. In other words, accuracy as indicated by the mean percentage of error-free T-Units was significantly different depending on the interaction of male and female teachers and participants at $p < 0.05$. Figure 7 demonstrates the graphic representation.

![Figure 7](image)

**Figure 7 - Mean percentage of error free T-units in the task-prompted, monologic speech of male and female participants addressed to male and female teacher**

**MPEFTU = Mean Percentage of Error-Free T-Units**
MM = male participant addressing the male teacher; MF = male participant addressing the female teacher; FM = female participant addressing the male teacher; FF = female participant addressing the female teacher

Since the significant differences between the means cannot be established on the basis of the values of the means, several matched pair T-tests were employed. Matched pair T-test has the same function in Repeated Measure ANOVA as Scheffe in factorial ANOVA. The results indicated significant differences between the following pairs: a) male participant-male teacher vs. female participant-male teacher, b) male participant-female teacher vs. female participant-male teacher, c) female participant-male teacher vs. female participant-female teacher. More clearly,

- When addressing the male teacher, female participants’ speech contained a higher Mean Percentage of Error-free T-Units (75.21) than males’ speech (62.37);
- Females’ speech addressed the male teacher had more Error-free T-Units on average (75.21) than males’ speech addressed to the female teacher (61.51);
- Female participants’ used more Error-free T-Units on average when addressing the male teacher (75.21) than when addressing female teacher (65.88).

Finally, accuracy varied significantly as a matter of the interaction of all of the three independent variables, i.e. participant gender, teacher gender, and topic. Figure 8 presents the mean percentage of Error-free T-units.

![Figure 8](image-url)

**Figure 8. Mean percentage of error-free T-units in the task-prompted, monologic speech across participants, teachers, and topics.**

MPEFTU = Mean Percentage of Error-Free T-Units

MML = Male participant, Male teacher, the least culturally inhibiting topic;

MMM = Male participant, male teacher, the most culturally inhibiting topic;

MFL = Male participant, female teacher, the least culturally inhibiting topic;

MFM = Male participant, female teacher, the most culturally inhibiting topic;
FML = Female participant, male teacher, the least culturally inhibiting topic;  
FMM = Female participant, male teacher, the most culturally inhibiting topic;  
FFL = Female participant, female teacher, the least culturally inhibiting topic;  
FFM = Female participant, female teacher, the most culturally inhibiting topic

Here again, as in the previous case, the data looks too voluminous and confusing as graphically represented. Therefore, based on matched pair T-test results, significant mean differences between the pairs from among the 8 groups of means include:

- Male participants when performing the LCIT task produced a significantly higher mean percentage of error-free T-units when talking to the male teacher (65.57) than to the female teacher (58.31).
- When addressing the male teacher on MCIT task, females produced a significantly higher mean percentage of error-free T-units (78.64) than males on LCIT (65.57);
- When addressing the male teacher on MCIT task, females’ speech contained a higher mean percentage of error-free T-units (78.64) than that of males (59.17);
- Females talking to males about MCIT produced a significantly higher percentage of error-free T-units (78.64) compared to males addressing female teacher on LCIT (58.31);
- On MCIT task, females’ monologue addressed to the male teacher has a higher mean percentage of error-free T-units (78.64) than males’ directed to female teacher (64.72);
- Mean percentage of error-free T-units in females’ speech on LCIT addressed to the male teacher was significantly higher than that of males addressing male teacher on MCIT, that is 71.78 as opposed to 59.17;
- On LCIT task, females addressing male teacher used a significantly higher percentage of error-free T-units on average (71.78) than males addressing female teacher (58.31);
- Females produced a higher mean percentage of error-free T-units when addressing the male teacher on MCIT than when addressing the female teacher on LCIT, i.e. 78.64 compared to 66.35.

Discussion and Conclusion

Results of the study indicated significant differences in terms of fluency depending on the teachers’ gender. Participants’ speech addressed to the female teacher was more fluent than
that addressed to the male teacher. This can be attributed broadly to ‘interlocutor’ effect in Labovian paradigm (Labov, 1970), dynamic paradigm (Bailey, 1973; Bickerton, 1975), Speech Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1971) in which variability is influenced by the addressee. Following speech planning model by Levelt (1989) teacher’s gender can be an instance of situational factor in conceptualizer stage. In terms of speech monitoring (Morrison and Low, 1983), this can be associated with lexical adjustment at micro-level and pre- or post-articulatory monitoring. This finding brings together characterization of females’ cooperative communicative pattern by Coates’s (1993) and Skehan’s (1996, 1998) formulation of fluency as a matter of spontaneous production. It can be speculated that the participants’ anticipation of female teacher’s cooperative style could have reduced communicative pressure and resulted in a more spontaneous, fluent style. This finding receives general support from Robinson (2001), and Young and Milanovich (1992). However, fluent speech in the presence of female teacher is rejected by O’Sullivan (2000) and O’Loughlin (2002) who failed to find such a variation in their studies. Additionally, significantly higher fluency was found when the topic was LCIT than on MCIT'. Topic is one of the causative social factors in Labovian paradigm (Labov, 1970) influencing performance variability occasioned by the attention mechanism. This finds support in dynamic paradigm by Bailey (1973) and Bickerton (1975) who treat topic as an instance of situational factors responsible for intra-speaker variability. It can also be argued that because of the least cultural inhibition of ‘city and population’, it imposes less communicative pressure and contributes to spontaneity and thereby fluency of speech. General support to this finding is lent by Freed and Wood (1996), and Chavez (2001), Brown et al. (1984), and Selinker and Douglas (1985).

As far as complexity is concerned, a higher complexity was found on MCIT. In other words, participants’ speech was more complex when they talked about ‘love and marriage’ than when they talked about ‘city and population’. In addition to being compatible with Labovian paradigm, dynamic paradigm, Freed and Wood (1996), and Chavez (2001) Coates (1997), Skehan’s (1996, 1998) cognitive model specifically contributes to interpreting more complexity on culturally inhibiting topic. A plausible line of argument would be that since talking on ‘love and marriage’ is inhibiting to the participants, they are more likely to experience communicative pressure to pick words. Also, if interest is taken to lead to familiarity and thereby complexity of production, this finding is confirmed by Bischoping (1993) who argues for disappearance of gender-specific interest in topic.
One of the primary findings in this study on accuracy was that females were in general more accurate than males. If accuracy can be equated with superiority in language, a higher accuracy of females can be attributed to the conventional female superiority in language capacity (Chavez, 2001). Other supportive accounts are the triple categorization by Robinson (1996, 1998), Freed and Wood (1992), etc. Accuracy was found to vary significantly depending on the teacher’s gender. Participants tended to produce a more grammatically correct L2 when addressing the male teacher. This emphasizes the interlocutor effect in prompting learner attention (Labov, 1970), situational factors in dynamic paradigm (Bailey, 1973; Bickerton, 1975), and in Levelt’s (1989) speech planning model, and participant factor as source of variability in Robinson (2001, 2003). In particular, it seems to be consistent with Morrison and Low (1983) who proposes syntactic adjustments at micro-level. Higher accuracy in addressing the male teacher is refuted by O’Sullivan (2000) who suggested the opposite and O’Loughlin (2002) who failed to bear out any differences, whatsoever.

Higher accuracy was also found in the interaction of teacher gender and participant gender. Results indicated that

a. When talking to the male teacher, females’ speech was more accurate than that of males,

b. Females speech in talking to the male teacher was more accurate than males’ speech when talking to the female teacher, and

c. Females produced a more accurate speech when talking to the male teacher than to the female teacher.

General frameworks of variability (i.e. sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, cognitive) and claims by Freed and Wood (1996), Selinker and Douglas (1985), Robinson (2001, 2003), Young and Milanovich (1992) apply to all three of the findings above. On the other hand, all three are rejected by O’Loughlin (2002) who dismisses any such differences. More importantly, the three findings go against those presented by O’Sullivan (2000) who claims a higher accuracy with the female interviewer. Finding (a) can also be interpreted in the light of convergence in Speech Accommodation Theory. Assuming that the male teacher is an out-group member to the female participant (Beebe, 1988), one can be suggest that females have adjusted their speech to the speech of the male as proficient authority in L2. Nevertheless, males were more inclined to maintenance than convergence or divergence with the male teacher as in-group member (Giles, 1971) Following Skehan (1996, 1998), female speech to male teacher as addressee is one of the conditions that leads to communicative pressure and the requirement to be precise. As far as (b) is concerned, with opposite gender addressee,
females perceived more communicative stress than males (Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 1996, 1998) which resulted in females’ dependence on grammatical rule system, but apparently males did not experience the pressure. Regarding (c), the same argument holds true for females as an intra-speaker variation in sociolinguistic accounts.

Accuracy in this study was also reported to vary due to interaction of participant gender, teacher gender and topic. On further analysis significant differences were detected in 8 combinations of the three variables. Specifically,

a. Males talked about ‘city and population’ to the male teacher more accurately than to the female teacher,

b. When the addressee was the male teacher, females’ speech about ‘love and marriage’ was more accurate than males’ speech about ‘city and population’,

c. When addressing the male teacher and talking about ‘love and marriage’, females were more accurate than males,

d. Females talking to the male teacher about ‘love and marriage’ were more accurate than males talking to the female teacher about ‘city and population’,

e. When the topic was ‘love and marriage’, females were more accurate with the male teacher than males with female teacher,

f. When the addressee was the male teacher, females’ speech about ‘city and population was more accurate than males’ speech about ‘love and marriage’,

g. When the topic was ‘city and population’, females talking to the male teacher were more accurate than males talking to female teacher, and

h. Females’ speech to the male teacher about ‘love and marriage’ was more accurate than their speech to the female teacher about ‘city and population’.

The formidable-looking pattern above can be reduced into a more simplified pattern by having parts (a), a combination of parts (b) through (e), a combination of (f) and (g), and (h):

i. Males’ speech to the male teacher about ‘city and population’ was more accurate than that to the female teacher (part a);

j. Females’ speech about ‘love and marriage’ to the male teacher was more accurate than males’ speech no matter the teacher gender or topic (combination of parts b through e);

k. Females’ speech about ‘city and population’ to the male teacher was more accurate than males’ speech to the male teacher about ‘love and marriage’ as well as males’ speech to the female teacher on ‘city and population’ (combination of f and g);
1. In their own speech production, females’ speech about ‘love and marriage’ to the opposite gender teacher was more accurate than that about ‘city and population’ to the same-gender teacher (part h).

Concerning the four significant differences, as in the case of the interaction of the participant and teacher gender (see above), all the generalizations presented by the perspectives or studies about the relationship between gender and variability are relevant. Also, like all other findings in this study, O’Loughlin (2002) could not give support to accuracy differences. Parts (i) through (l) all indicate a general tendency on the part of the participants, especially the females to be accurate when talking to the male teacher which is diametrically opposed to the findings by O’Sullivan (2000). This tendency on the females’ part can be due to the male addressee which following Skehan (1996, 1998) may have offered the greatest communicative pressure and led to higher accuracy. Another source of accuracy might be the fact that due to the socio-cultural factors in Iranian context, females may have been more self-conscious in their speech addressed to the male teacher. Iran, like may other Middle Eastern countries, is for the most part, a traditionally male-dominated society and even with an increasing number of females, especially in education, males almost exclusively hold the administrative, policy and decision-making bodies.

The findings by Gass and Varonis (1986) on topic preference can lend support to some of the findings above. Assuming that preferring personal topics in opposite-gender dyads and objective topics in same-gender dyads may lead to automaticity and thereby accuracy of production, then parts (i) and (l) are justified. However, part (k) is contradicted by the same assumption. Skehan’s (1996, 1998) cognitive model helps to explain (j). It has already been argued that females’ speech to the male teacher is communicatively stressful and makes them attend to the repertoire of grammar rules and be more accurate. Moreover, such a communicative pressure is escalated due to the inhibiting nature of the topic, i.e. ‘love and marriage’. The doubled communicative pressure is likely to have prompted an utmost care in females’ speech leading to higher accuracy than males’ speech in all conditions.

**Implications and Suggestions for Further Research**

The findings bear several implications for SLA. The clearest message of this study is for the task-based language teaching and learning. Gender can no longer be viewed a static, unitary variable related to the learners only. Rather, it must be seen as an ever-present reality inseparable from and interacting with performances of the learners, teachers, interviewers, interviewees, peers, and groups. The second implication can be for communicative oral
language testing that must be adequately sensitized to the fact that gender of the test-taker, tester, and males’ and females’ attitude to the test topic may introduce bias, and distort the reliability and validity of tests. A fairer oral communicative test would, therefore, involve interviewers/testers of both genders, and a variety of topics to avoid test-taker inhibition. Syllabus designers and curriculum developers must also make room for the gender of the prospective teachers, learners, and the topic within the target socio-cultural context as influential factors in determining quantity, quality, and nature of classroom interaction. For example, syllabus designers must select the content that fosters rather than inhibits interaction because of teacher’s gender, peer’s gender, group gender, and topic, and the interrelation between these factors. Indeed, for syllabus designers this would mean a more intimate understanding and application of socio-cultural context of education in target situation analysis phase. Language teaching practitioners at large need to be duly attentive to gender which may affect or even obscure interaction in certain ways. Interaction influenced by teacher gender, learner gender or topic can lead up to biased judgement of learner performance on the part of the teachers, and language educators. Ignoring gender issues may also obstruct learner engagement in interactive tasks and obstruct L2 acquisition. Above all else, an intimate and at the same time an extensive understanding of dimensions of gender-related variability is called for in the realms of research, theory and practice in SLA.

Limitations of this study included a 4-week lapse between two performances due to course restrictions, lack of a universally accepted definition of cultural inhibition, and somewhat low number of participants. Although controlling for all these variables would be formidable, some variables including age, personality, motivation, socio-economic status could have influenced the results as intervening variables. Future research, while controlling these limitations, may also address

- SLA and gender identity focusing on regional, ethnic, religious, and multicultural contexts,
- ESL classroom context as a different discursive space within the native culture milieu, and the way gender is constructed differentially across the two,
- discoursal, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic aspects of gender and ESL/EFL learning situation, and
- negotiation of gender identity (whether student, teacher, peer, or group) in the second/foreign language classroom setting and the way it clashes or aligns with norms and aspects of gender interaction in L1.
References


Evaluation of EFL Materials Taught at Iranian Public High Schools

Ali Jahangard

Bio Data:
Ali Jahangard is a PhD student in Applied Linguistics at Isfahan University, Islamic Republic of Iran. He has eight years experience in teaching English as a foreign language in language teaching centers in Iran.

Abstract
This article evaluates four EFL textbooks which have been prescribed for use in the Iranian high schools by the Ministry of Education. The merits and demerits of the textbooks are discussed in detail with reference to 13 common criterial features extracted from different materials evaluation checklists. The paper then gives some suggestions as to how to alleviate some of the shortcomings encountered in the textbooks.

Key Words: EFL curriculum, materials evaluation.

Introduction
The researcher has been teaching English for more than 8 years throughout which time his mind has almost always been occupied with the question, “Why does the TEFL curriculum in Iranian public high schools meet neither the expectations of the learners/teachers nor those of the specialists who were involved in the developing of the curriculum?” This apparent lack of success can be attributed to a plethora of factors involved in the various stages of curriculum planning.

According to Johnson (1989, pp.1-23) the following stages are involved in the process of curriculum development:
1. Policy determination
2. Means/ends specification (syllabus design)
3. Program implementation
4. Classroom implementation
The writer of the paper will examine the materials, among others, which are in fact the realization of the process of syllabus design subsumed under the heading of means/ends specification quoted above and will exclude other factors because it is beyond the scope of the current paper to include them.

**Literature Review**

Sheldon (1988) has offered several reasons for textbook evaluation. He suggests that the selection of an ELT textbook often signals an important administrative and educational decision in which there is considerable professional, financial, or even political investment. A thorough evaluation, therefore, would enable the managerial and teaching staff of a specific institution or organization to discriminate between all of the available textbooks on the market. Moreover, it would provide for a sense of familiarity with a book's content thus assisting educators in identifying the particular strengths and weaknesses in textbooks already in use. This would go a long way in ultimately assisting teachers with making optimum use of a book's strong points and recognizing the shortcomings of certain exercises, tasks, and entire texts.

If one accepts the value of textbooks in ELT then it must surely be with the qualification that they are of an acceptable level of quality, usefulness, and appropriateness for the context and people with whom they are being used. While the literature on the subject of textbook evaluation is not particularly extensive, various writers have suggested ways of helping teachers to be more sophisticated in their evaluative approach, by presenting evaluation 'checklists' based on supposedly generalizable criteria that can be used by both teachers and students in many different situations. Although Sheldon (1988) suggests that no general list of criteria can ever really be applied to all teaching and learning contexts without considerable modification, most of these standardized evaluation checklists contain similar components that can be used as helpful starting points for ELT practitioners in a wide variety of situations. Preeminent theorists in the field of ELT textbook design and analysis such as Williams (1983), Sheldon (1988), Brown (1995), Cunningsworth (1995) and Harmer (1996) all agree, for instance, that evaluation checklists should have some criteria pertaining to the physical characteristics of textbooks such as layout, organizational, and logistical characteristics. Other important criteria that should be incorporated are those that assess a textbook's methodology, aims, and approaches and the degree to which a set of materials is not only teachable but also fits the needs of the individual teacher's approach as well as the organization's overall curriculum. Moreover, criteria should analyze the specific language,
functions, grammar, and skills content that are covered by a particular textbook as well as the relevance of linguistic items to the prevailing socio-cultural environment. Finally, textbook evaluations should include criteria that pertain to representation of cultural and gender components in addition to the extent to which the linguistic items, subjects, content, and topics match up to students' personalities, backgrounds, needs, and interests as well as those of the teacher and/or institution. Cunningsworth (1995) and Ellis (1997) have suggested that there are three different types of material evaluation. They argue that the most common form is probably the ‘predictive’ or ‘pre-use’ evaluation that is designed to examine the future or potential performance of a textbook. The other types of textbook evaluation are the ‘in-use’ evaluation designed to examine material that is currently being used and the ‘retrospective’ or ‘post-use’ (reflective) evaluation of a textbook that has been used in any respective institution. This particular paper can be classified as the ‘retrospective’ type of evaluation in which an attempt is made to check the characteristics of the textbooks under study against a collection of criteria proposed by various researchers.

**Method**

Here I would like to document the materials that were used and the procedures that were followed to support the intent of this study.

**Materials**

I browsed about 10 checklists proposed by different authors and selected 13 features which were common to most of these checklists to do the evaluation. The following 10 EFL/ESL textbook evaluation schemes were consulted to evaluate the 4 EFL textbooks under study.

*The List of 10 Textbook-evaluation Checklists:*


After a close examination of the checklists, these criteria were found to be almost common to all the schemes proposed by the above mentioned materials:

1. Are objectives explicitly laid out in an introduction, and implemented in the material?
2. Good vocabulary explanation and practice
3. Approaches educationally and socially acceptable to target community
4. Periodic review and test sections
5. Appropriate visual materials available
6. Interesting topics and tasks
7. Clear instructions
8. Clear attractive layout, print easy to read
9. Content clearly organized and graded
10. Plenty of authentic language
11. Good grammar presentation and practice
12. Fluency practice in all four skills
13. Encourage learners to develop own learning strategies and to become independent in their learning

The Textbooks under Study


Procedure

I scrutinized the four EFL textbooks against each one of the features in the checklist one by one. The results of the scrutiny of all the four textbooks on every feature are combined under common headings to save space and time.

Results

Are objectives explicitly laid out in an introduction, and implemented in the material?

At the beginning of book 1 there is an introduction that attempts to clarify the intended teaching objectives. However, there is a state of indeterminacy as to the goals toward which the teachers and the learners are to set out. The ultimate goals of the curriculum are not clarified. The authors of the book do not clearly specify the final objectives of the curriculum in vivid words so that the stake holders know what they are expected to have learnt at the end of the program (long term objectives). Likewise, the short term objectives remain unspecified in the introduction. We do not know what the learners should be able to do to demonstrate that they have achieved the intended objectives at the end of each course e.g. at the end of each year in the educational program.

‘Introduction section’ is totally omitted from books 2 and 3, probably on the grounds that it is included in book 1. The authors might have assumed that if a teacher teaches book 2 or 3, he/she must definitely be aware of the contents of book 1. There is an introduction section in book 4 which is totally different from that of book 1 in terms of the objectives that it specifies as the goals of the lessons and the course.

Part (A) of the Introduction is concerned with why the section “New Words” is included in the book and how it must be instructed by the teachers. It reads, “The purpose of this section is to familiarize learners with the new vocabulary in the Reading Comprehension section.” However, this is not implemented in the books because the number of the new words introduced in the New Words Section is considerably less than the number of the new words in the Reading Comprehension section. The question that rises is how and where those missing words are to be taught? For example, in book (B) 1, lesson (L) 1, 22 new words are introduced in the Reading Comprehension but only 10 of them are included in the New Words Section. Likewise, in B2-L3, almost 24 new words are introduced, whereas, only 12 of them are included in the New Words Section. B3-L4 contains almost 43 new words in the Reading Comprehension and only 11 of them are clarified and practiced in the New Words Section. The New Words Section is totally excluded from B4 and nowhere in the introduction
have the authors explained why. Other parts of the Introduction related to objectives specification mainly concern the activities and techniques that the teachers should not do and is less concerned with what they should do.

In sum, the final goals of the EFL program as well as the behavioral objectives which are aimed at by the curriculum designers are obscure and remain to be delineated. This may have various ramifications across the different phases of the curriculum i.e. classroom implementation and evaluation. Teachers actually dissent as to what teaching methodology to be employed, which skills and psycholinguistic abilities to emphasize and what to include in their exams. Now, the nationwide exams which are administered by the officials for third graders is playing the role of an agreement document among teachers which, in turn, has its own negative effects known as the ‘washback effect’.

Consequently, teachers teach in a way that their students can pass the tests which are administered at the final year of high school education and University Entrance Examination rather than executing the actual curriculum worked out by the academic specialists. In fact, there is now a hidden curriculum among learners and teachers which determines what they must do in the classroom.

Except for the inconsistencies mentioned above there is an acceptable degree of concordance between the objectives set in the introduction of the books for each section of the lessons in the series and their implementation in the material.

**Good vocabulary explanation and practice**

Two types of problem are observed in the explanation and use of the new vocabulary in the series. One is concerned with the lack of correspondence between the different senses of the word introduced in the New Words Sections and the senses which are used in the Reading Comprehensions. The other type is attributable to the poor contextualization of the new vocabulary in the New Words Sections.

At some points the New Words Section in B1 ignores the fact that a word might have several different senses. In some cases, the meaning for which a particular word is introduced in the New Words Section is not consistent with the meaning of the same word used in the Reading Comprehension, and this probably bewilders the students. For example, in B1-L1, the word “pay” is used as a part of the expression “pay attention to” in the Reading Comprehension whereas introduced as “pay for sth” in the New Words Section which are incompatible in meaning. In the same lesson the expression “grow up” is used in the Reading Comprehension meaning “to become older” and in New Words it is used as “to raise farm
produce”. Likewise, in B1- L3, the word “find” is used with two different senses in the Reading Comprehension and the New Words Section: it is introduced in the New Words Section as follows: “Maryam can’t find her notebook.” whereas in the Reading Comprehension it is used in the following sentence: “She returned an hour later and found Newton standing by the fire.” ‘Find’ which is used in the New Words Section means ‘to get back after a search’ but in the Reading Comprehension it means ‘to come across’. As you see the meanings in the Reading Comprehension and the New Words Section do not converge. The word “land” in L2 is used in the Reading Comprehension to mean “a country” and it is introduced in the New Words Section to mean “a farm or field”. Fortunately, this problem is limited to only B1and L1-L3 and no such cases can be traced in the remainder of the book and nor in other books of the series. In addition, in B4, explanation of the new vocabulary as an independent section is omitted from the book and is integrated into the Reading Comprehension section.

Some of the new vocabularies which the authors might have assumed to be more significant in carrying the semantic load of the related sentence have been included in the margins of the Reading Comprehension passages with some synonyms or definitions. No specific place is designed to practice the new words in B4. It might be more useful to include some more vocabulary exercises in each lesson so that learners can integrate the new words into their mental lexicon.

The second type of problem is probably ‘poor contextualization of the new vocabulary’ in the New Words Sections of the series from B1 to B3. In B1, L2, three new words are introduced in a single sentence: “The cows are eating grass in the field.”

Likewise, in B2, L1, “There are a banana and a slice of cake on the plate.” or in the same lesson one encounters: “When she does the puzzle right, the man gives her a reward.” This problem recurs in B2, L3 .Fortunately; these cases are restricted to the aforementioned cases and do not come up in other lessons. There are no such cases of poor contextualization in B3, and interestingly, a considerable improvement is observed in this book compared to B1 and B2 in this regard. However, the imbalance between the number of the new words included in the New Words Sections and those used in the Reading Comprehensions and other sections of the book becomes more substantial, e.g. in B3, L1, there are 56 new words included, but only 5 of them are explained in the New Words Section. These imbalances persist throughout the book and the writer of the article hopes they will be eliminated in the later revisions of the book.
Approaches educationally and socially acceptable to target community

According to White (1988, p.92) “A complete syllabus specification will include all five aspects: structure, function, situation, topic, skills. The difference between syllabuses will lie in the priority given to each of these aspects.”

It seems that the authors of the books have sequenced the linguistic content of the materials according to the structural complexity, starting from less complex structures to more demanding ones. Even the reading passages are selected or, probably manipulated, so that they reinforce a particular grammatical point included in the grammar section of the books. However, the question of how and in what order the structures must be arranged in a structural syllabus is a controversial issue. Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 88) pose the same question as writing, “what assumptions underlie the ordering in the structural syllabus? Does the verb ‘to be’ come first, because it is easier to learn? If so, in what sense? Structurally, it is the most complex verb in English. Does it come first because it is needed for later structures, for example the present continuous? Is it considered to be conceptually simpler? For many students, for example Indonesian students, it causes conceptual problems, since in Bahasa Indonesian it is frequently omitted. Alternatively, is the syllabus ordered according to usefulness? The verb ‘to be’ is more useful than, say, the present simple tense of the verb ‘to go’. If we are operating the criterion of usefulness, what context are we referring to? Do we mean usefulness in the outside world or usefulness in the classroom?”

Nevertheless, my personal experience in teaching these books shows that students learn ‘present perfect tense’ with less effort than ‘the passive structure’. Moreover, they learn the ‘passive structure’ better if they are introduced the ‘present perfect’ earlier. Thus, I suggest that the ‘present perfect’ which is introduced in B1, L9, be transposed to L8 and the ‘passive’ be moved to L9.

Although the reading skill, among others, looks to be of first priority in the design of the books, a big share of the lessons is devoted to grammar drills and the various forms of grammatical exercises throughout B1, B2 and B3. Fortunately, this problem is rectified in B4 of the series. About 50% of the content of each lesson in B1 to B3 is occupied with grammatical drills. This allocation seems to be unjustified as far as the findings of research on SL reading is concerned. Researchers have noticed the need for extensive vocabulary for reading and that grammatical knowledge is called upon in advanced levels of reading proficiency for complex and embedded structures as a last resort. (See Alderson and Urquhart, 1984a; Singer, 1981). Also, Lewis (1993, p. 17) says that “vocabulary (or lexis) carries more of the meaning of a text than does the grammar”.

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**Periodic review and test sections**

At the beginning and the end of B1, 2, 3, there are review exercises. However, they are not enough. It seems better to include tests and review tests at the end of each one of the lessons. It is worth mentioning that the tests should be comparable and compatible with the format and the testing methods which will be employed in the mid-term and final exams. To compensate for this shortcoming of the textbooks teachers had developed supplementary workbooks for each one of the books. The final exams of this grade are designed, administered and corrected by state officials and the teachers play no direct roles in these processes. Therefore, despite many teachers’ will and standards of teaching, with their hands up, they had to surrender to the strong negative washback effect of the exams, and spend some time and energy of the class on answering questions and tests similar to those which are administered by the officials of the Bureau of Education every year. In B4, surprisingly, there is no review or quiz whatsoever.

**Clear attractive layout, print easy to read**

Most often the paper of the books in the series is of low quality and in some cases is more like papers which are used for daily newspapers. If this is due to factors of economy or shortage of fund then how is it that for other books in the curriculum other than English like biology, physics, etc. there is no such a problem?

The books are acceptable regarding the clarity and orthographic beauty. However, it would be more appealing if colorful pictures of real people and real environment were used.

**Appropriate visual materials available**

Visual materials can be defined as the facilities that can be employed by teachers and learners to enhance language learning in classrooms. They may range from simple hand-made realia, charts and pictures to electronic and digital materials. For the series in question, there are VHS films and also the required electronic hardware available at schools for teachers and learners.

However, the content of the films whose primary goal is assumed to help the users promote their language skills and enhance learning processes is not effectively addressed. For instance, all the films developed for book 2 of the series, almost most of them, start with vocabulary teaching. A word, generally speaking, may have various properties worthy of attention for a learner. These can be, namely, phonological, semantic, syntactic and pragmatic properties. To
teach a word, means to provide information, implicitly or explicitly, on these properties for the learners and also to provide opportunities for them to rehearse the given words to store them in their minds. Or, at least, one or two of the mentioned lexical properties may be focused on, depending on the limitations one faces in terms of time and money. However, the vocabularies in the film episodes are introduced only in the orthographic form with no sounds or pictures accompanying. No attempt is made to clarify the meaning of the words which appear on the screen. The film producers could have designed pictures or maybe some other graphic materials to illustrate the intended meanings of the introduced words. They could also have provided the pronunciation of the words with some pauses between, to let the learners repeat the words orally. For this section of the film scripts to gain any practical value and use, wide changes are required to be made by the producers.

The second section in the film episodes seems to have been designed to help the learners improve their reading skills. They start with very brief scenes of two or more people with no clear verbal interactions, very similar to a pantomime, probably with the intention of motivating the learners to activate their related background world knowledge about the topic to be discussed in the reading passage of the books. There are some problems worthy of mention concerning these sections. First, the scenes are vague and obscure regarding the messages they are trying to communicate. The learners usually get confused in catching on to the meanings the scenes intend to convey. Consequently, different learners are lead to different interpretations of the scenes and therefore distracted from the main theme of the reading passages. Second, there is very little correspondence between the majority of the scenes which are shown and the lines the narrator or the actor in the film reads aloud, i.e., in the film something is shown which is not directly related to the lines of the passage which are read. This problem is most evident in the episode designed for Lesson 5, Book 2. Nevertheless, with a bit of creativity on the part of teachers, these sections can be used as a sort of pre-reading activity to motivate the learners to think of what is going to be discussed in the related reading passages. Third, another source of difficulty is the relatively fast rate of speech of the narrator in reading aloud the reading comprehension passages. Due to the nature of written texts, it is more difficult to process them as fast as the texts produced in oral interactions. Written texts include more embedded sentences and more instances of subordination, which results in longer sentences than oral texts. Written texts are thought to have more information density per utterance than oral texts. Consequently, as a result of these factors plus some others not mentioned here, written discourse requires more mental effort and thus more time to be processed. A slower rate of speech and inclusion of short pauses
between the phrases and sentences might be quite helpful in this case. At the same time, this can provide the opportunity for the learners to repeat the phrases and sentences they hear to improve their pronunciation.

The third section in the episodes starts with a dialogue which seems to have been produced to delineate the use of the new structural patterns in actual communication. The dialogues are usually acted out at a normal rate of speech by the actors who seem to be native speakers of English. Again, very fast rate of speech and lack of space for any kind of practice are the problems that are faced in this section. Despite of all these problems, the teachers who want to use them can modify the procession rate of the work by manually stopping the device and having the learners repeat the sentences spot-check their understanding. However, the practicality of these sections can possibly be enhanced if these modifications are built into them so that less experienced teachers and maybe the learners could make more effective use of them.

The last sections of the episodes are aimed at teaching the new phones included in the related lessons. The new sounds are introduced through a series of words having a particular sound segment in common. They are pronounced by the teacher in the film with an exaggerated emphasis on the new sound patterns with the intention of making them conspicuous to the learners’ attention. However, no exercises are included. The producers could, at least, include some parts for the learners to repeat the new sounds.

On the whole, the film can possibly be improved in practicality and pedagogical value for classroom use if the above mentioned modifications are made to it.

**Interesting topics and tasks**

The topics of readings vary from factual to anecdotal ones and sometimes are funny stories. It is difficult to judge on behalf of the learners whether those are interesting for them or not and it needs research. Nevertheless, the majority of the topics are attractive to the learners in my EFL classes. However, it seems that it would be better if the topics are updated to become more congruent with the taste of the new generation which might be a bit different from that of the authors who designed the books at least ten years ago. Nowadays, learners’ needs are different from what they used to be and; hence it looks better to include texts more related to computer games, internet, and satellite programs. For instance, it is possible to take and adapt some of the texts, words and jargons which are currently used in the software such as the Windows and Linux. It is also possible to include adapted and simplified versions of
quotations and sayings of scholars renowned for their wisdom and eloquence in line with higher culturally valued objectives of education such as trustworthiness, sacrifice, courage, punctuality, patience, honesty, etc. My personal experience shows that the meaning and content of the materials taught in English classes have strong and long lasting effects on the minds of the learners. This is a valuable opportunity if we want to educate them mentally and spiritually. I have observed that the story of Oliver Twist in B2 attracts the students more than the story of a monkey known as Washoe. We should bear in mind that as teachers, our professional and social responsibility do not boil down to imparting a handful of factual information concerning the grammar or meaning of a series of words and sentences in our classes, rather we should care for the transfer of cultural values to the new generations.

**Clear instructions**

Most of the instructions are clear and easy to understand for the learners in the books in the series. Even if the learners might not be familiar with the structures and the lexis used in the instructions, the models given for each group of exercises provide contextual clues for the learners as to what they are expected to do. However, some of the instructions are lacking in the required contextual information and in the meantime, are beyond many of the learners’ English language proficiency in terms of linguistic complexity. For instance, in B1, L4, the instruction reads: “Now look at the pictures in your book or the things around you and make some sentences like the ones in Speaking 1 and Speaking 3.” In addition, in the same book in L8 we encounter the same problem of complexity in the instruction that follows: “Write six sentences in the passive form. Three about what happened in the past and three about what will happen in the future.” This problem exists in B2, too. One possible solution might be to use the learners’ native language instead of the target language in the instructions, particularly for B1 and B2 where the learners are not able to understand such sentences.

**Content clearly organized and graded**

Some of the Reading Comprehension texts tend to be more difficult for the learners to understand than others due to their structural complexity. In working with learners from different proficiency levels I realized that the learners misunderstood or did not comprehend some parts of the Reading Comprehension texts not because they did not know the meaning of the new words included in them but simply because those sentences were too complex for them to parse. After I applied the Readability formula developed by Fog (cited in Farhady et al. 1998, p.82), to my surprise, I found that there was a logical sequencing of the texts
according to the obtained text difficulty. The obvious question to ask is how is it possible for two texts which are of roughly the same readability indices to be perceived as unequally difficult by the learners? There might be many possible factors which render a text difficult or easy to understand. Content of the passage, the background knowledge of the reader, rhetorical organization, information density, number of unfamiliar words, and length and complexity of the sentences in a text are all possible candidates to make a text difficult or easy to understand.

There are different versions of Fog’s formula which make use of factors such as number of syllables or words, length of sentences, or the syntactic complexity of sentences. If you utilize the one which is based on the number of words and sentences, you will find a logical sequencing of the reading materials in the book, but if you apply the formula which is sensitive to the number of sentences and number of complex sentences you will find a differential outcome. On the basis of the latter formula, - i.e. \( \text{number of words ÷ number of sentences} + (\text{number of compound sentences ÷ number of sentences}) \times 40 \) - the text containing more compound and longer sentences will have greater readability indices indicating more text difficulty. Considering the fact that most of the unknown words in the texts are taught prior to teaching the Reading Comprehension texts in the books, therefore, it is quite plausible to conclude that the number of new words can play no major role in making the text difficult or easy to understand for the learners, rather it is the number of longer and more compound and complex sentences that probably determine the difficulty or easiness of the texts. Thus, the authors of the book should have used the sentence-complexity-sensitive formula to sequence the Reading Comprehension texts in the series. However, to solve the problem two solutions are available: the first one is to ‘re-organize’ the texts according to the readability indices obtained form the sentence-complexity-sensitive formula. This solution needs more modifications and tuning of the texts because most of the Reading Comprehension texts have been selected according to the prominence of the particular grammatical structures which they had and the writers had intended to include them in the lessons. Moreover, it requires a close reconsideration of the new vocabulary that the transposed texts include. The second solution is to break long and complex sentences down into shorter and less complex ones. This solution has its own particular problems and challenges, too. In many cases it is not possible to break a compound sentence down into its constituent clauses and phrases and assemble them into simple sentences without spoiling the meaning of the original sentence. For example, in B2, L2, there are at least 8 compound sentences which are perceived as challenging to the learners. One of the sentences which is
used at the very beginning of the text reads: "Did you know that the same side of the moon faces the earth all the time?" As you see it is not so easy to change this sentence into some simpler sentences which convey the same idea or range of meanings. Likewise, at the ending line of the same text you come across: "So now you know what people who lived before 1959 didn’t know.” At the first glance one might conclude that sentence simplification is the least troublesome solution, however, in practice, it proves most challenging. In sum, the former solution, however strenuous, feels more practical and easier to manage.

Plenty of authentic language

Authenticity is defined as follows by Johnson and Johnson (1999):

Texts are said to be authentic if they are genuine instances of language use as opposed to exemplars devised specially for language teaching purposes. The question of authenticity emerged as an important issue within communicative language teaching and in relation to notional/functional syllabuses, where emphasis was placed on ensuring that the classroom contained natural language behavior, with content identified as relevant to the learner through the process of needs analysis. There are various other reasons why authenticity may be regarded as important. One is that it presents learners with language exposure similar to that enjoyed by native speakers, including all the characteristics of natural language which may be necessary for the learner properly to interpret texts. In addition, there is motivational attraction for insisting on authentic texts, created as means of communicating content and not for some pedagogic purpose. (p.24)

If we base our discussion on the definition of authenticity which is given above, and see it as the degree the materials concord with actual instances of language the learners will encounter in real situations, the materials can be considered as authentic. In fact, the learners’ main use of English language will be limited to reading texts and passages they come up with in academic contexts in future in case they continue their education in universities. In other cases, depending upon the learners’ personal needs, their application of their knowledge of English will be limited to other instances of language used in catalogues, manuals or magazines. In few cases, they might need to listen to English programs on satellites or other media in their everyday life and, in rare cases, to communicate verbally with a foreigner who speaks English. Considering the fact that the bulk of materials is devoted to reading activities, and some space is given to dialogues to provide opportunities for the learners to practice verbal communication, the materials can, to certain extent, be regarded as authentic.
**Good grammar presentation and practice**

Grammar drills occupy the lion’s share of each lesson and range from repetition, substitution to transformational ones. They are aimed at providing the learners with oral practice of the intended grammatical points. The oral drills are techniques which were mainly utilized in Audio-Lingual method and similar approaches to second language teaching for various pedagogical purposes one of which was automatization of the grammatical patterns. Automatization can be viewed from two perspectives: One is to develop the ability to give quick and in-time responses to particular verbal stimuli mainly in phatic communion. The second one is to develop the ability to process a given piece of information without awareness or attention, making relatively more use of long-term memory. For example, to produce a particular sentence according to the grammatical rules of a language. However, because the so called standard tests which are usually administered by the officials of the Ministry of Education are almost completely lacking in tests items measuring the productive ability of the learners, the teachers, for this or maybe some other reasons, usually skip the drills and replace them with the explicit explanation of the rules and formulas underlying the patterns at issue (*strong negative washback effect*). Frankly speaking, in regular English classes at high schools they are most often *disregarded* by the majority of the teachers.

**Fluency practice in all four skills**

The books have devoted extravagant space of the lessons to materials which primarily aim at developing and enhancing the reading ability of the learners. Considering the idea that the main needs of the learners might be to acquire an acceptable degree of mastery and skill in reading materials written in English, this allocation looks justified. However, neither in the introduction nor in the lessons has it been explicitly mentioned by the writers of the books how to treat listening comprehension and writing skills. It is totally left to the teachers to decide whether to practice it or not. There is no section in the lessons specifically designed to develop and enhance listening skills in the learners. However, the teachers can probably work on this skill through having the learners listen to the reading passages read aloud by the teachers or other learners in the classroom. To involve the learners actively and attentively to listen to the passages read aloud, the teacher can ask various comprehension questions at different points or at the end of the listening activity to check their understanding. Speaking skill is also taken into account though indirectly and as a marginal activity. There are certain questions at the end of each reading passage which require the learners to give oral answers.
The last and not the least is the writing skill. If we define the writing skill as the ability to communicate one’s thoughts and ideas to a particular person or group of addressees through the orthographic form of a language, it is possible to claim that it is somehow neglected in the series. Although, some exercises of the lessons are intended to enhance the writing skills of the learners, they are limited to a few isolated sentence production activities in a decontextualized and sterile milieu of communication. Nowhere in the book, are the learners assigned writing activities to the sense which was proposed above. The authors could have included writing activities in different formats varying from controlled to free writing according to the proficiency levels of the learner groups.

Encourage learners to develop own learning strategies and to become independent in their learning

Regarding the components of the learner training in the series, the revised edition of book 4, characterizes the features of a good reader in the Introduction section as follows: “A good reader is the one who is active and has specific goals in mind before starting to read. He/She continuously checks his/her understanding of the text and the text itself against the predetermined goals.” [Translated from Persian]. The authors continue, “A good reader usually browses the whole text before starting to read and pays attention to the organization and structure of the text as well as other parts which are relevant and compatible to the goals of the reading. In the process of reading, he/she often tries to predict the incoming data in the text. He/She reads selectively, and continuously revises his decisions as to what to read with close attention, what to read quickly, what to read again, and what not to read and etc. [ibid. translated from Persian]

From the above quotation it is understood that the authors are attempting to familiarize the learners with cognitive and behavioral strategies or, at least, raise their consciousness about learning strategies. Moreover, throughout the lessons learners occasionally come up with certain vocabulary learning strategies such as building up semantic trees which relate different words from a common semantic field. It is worth mentioning that nowhere in the books 1-3 is there a part explicitly addressing the issue of strategy training whatsoever.

The writer of the paper believes that learner training is helpful and valuable in pushing our learners toward the intended goals, of both the learners themselves and the teachers, but, after all, there are a number of unresolved issues to do with the application of learner strategy research to learner training (see Ellis, 1994, p. 530-533). It is not clear whether the meta-
cognitive and cognitive strategies which are unconsciously applied by the good language learners are teachable in a conscious way. In the meantime, it is particularly vague whether strategies are sufficiently generalizable to be used with a range of learners who will themselves be affected by factors such as context, cognitive styles, and proficiency levels. Nor is there adequate evidence that strategy training leads to improvement in language learning outcomes. As McDonough (1995, pp. 172-3) points out, ‘although learning strategies and strategy training are very important elements in the teaching/learning process, great care has to be exercised in moving from a descriptive and taxonomic position to an interventionist one.’

In conclusion, regarding the above mentioned criteria, B4 is considered to be qualified in helping the learners to develop some of the learning strategies found in good language learners, although the whole idea of strategy training appears to be a thorny and a controversial issue. Books 1, 2 and 3 in the series need much revision in this regard.

Conclusion
EFL textbooks can play an important role in the success of language programs. In fact, they are the realization of the processes of means/ends specification in the curriculum planning. Sheldon (1988) suggests that "textbooks represent the visible heart of any ELT program" (p. 237). They provide the objectives of language learning; they function as a lesson plan and working agenda for teachers and learners. Cunningsworth (1995) argues that textbooks are an effective resource for self-directed learning, an effective resource for presentation material, a source of ideas and activities, a reference source for students, a syllabus where they reflect pre-determined learning objectives, and support for less experienced teachers who have yet to gain in confidence. He also contends that we should also ensure "that careful selection is made, and that the materials selected closely reflect [the needs of the learners and] the aims, methods, and values of the teaching program." (p. 7).

One of the ways to amend and improve a curriculum is to improve the textbooks and the materials employed in the program. And this is not possible unless the consumers involved, systematically evaluate and assess them on the basis of some established criteria. The reports of these types of evaluations can be shared among teachers and the authors of the materials to gain more effective EFL textbooks. Moreover, as Cunningsworth (1995) and Ellis (1997) suggest, textbook evaluation helps teachers move beyond impressionistic assessments and it
helps them to acquire useful, accurate, systematic, and contextual insights into the overall nature of textbook material.

The writer of the paper believes that the evaluation of the EFL materials currently taught at public high schools requires a deeper and more exhaustive analysis and scrutiny by a group of experienced teachers and that the viewpoints and the ideas of a single researcher might not be adequately reliable because however hard one tries, it is almost impossible to be unbiased and impartial in ones judgments.

References


Reactive and Preemptive Language Related Episodes and Uptake in an EFL Class

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Abstract
This study investigates how frequently reactive and preemptive Language Related Episodes (LREs) are used in communicative classes. The study also examines the potential of the two types of focus on form in leading to uptake. To this end, all LREs were identified and transcribed from the audio-recordings of 24 hours of instruction from one class with two qualified instructors. The LREs were then categorized in terms of reactive vs. preemptive episodes, and learner- vs. teacher-initiated preemptive episodes. The findings indicated a significant difference in the frequency of reactive and preemptive LREs and between two types of preemptive episodes. Based on the low amount of uptake in the findings, a new definition of uptake is suggested which encapsulates ‘camouflaged’ uptakes as well as learners’ immediate responses to focus on form. The paper highlights the necessity of raising EFL teachers’ awareness to make informed decisions in using different types of focus on form.

Keywords: focus on form, reactive & preemptive LRE, uptake
1. Introduction

The role of interaction in L2 learning gained considerable importance through the work of Hatch (1978) who stressed the need to study the nature of the input given to L2 learners and its possible role in second language acquisition (SLA). This growing interest in the role of interaction emerged as a result of a reaction to Krashen’s Comprehensible Input Hypothesis. The Input Hypothesis by Krashen (1982, 1998) states that in order for input to be available for acquisition, it must be comprehensible. On the other hand, Long (1983, 1996) claims that comprehensible input is necessary but not sufficient for language learning to take place. Long argues that input shaped through interaction contributes directly and powerfully to acquisition, and that modifications to the interactional structure of conversation are important to make input comprehensible.

Central to all these studies may be the role of output in L2 acquisition. Comprehensible input alone is not adequate for language acquisition. Swain’s Comprehensible Output Hypothesis (1985 a, b; 1995) deals with this inadequacy. This hypothesis proposes that comprehensible input may not be sufficient for certain aspects of L2 acquisition and that comprehensible output may be needed. Based on this hypothesis, learners must also be given the opportunity to produce comprehensible output. According to this hypothesis, the role of output is to provide opportunities for contextualized and meaningful use of language, to test out hypotheses about the target language, and to move the learner from a purely semantic analysis of the language to its syntactic analysis (Swain, 1995).

Long’s Interaction Hypothesis and Swain’s Output Hypothesis are closely associated with attention to linguistic forms within the context of performing communicative activities which has been termed “focus on form” (Long, 1991). Focus on form contrasts with more traditional types of form-focused instruction (referred to by Long, 1991 as “focus on forms”), where specific linguistic features are isolated for intensive treatment, often in non-communicative activities. In contrast, in focus on form instruction the primary focus of attention is on meaning. The attention to form arises out of meaning-centered activity derived from the performance of a communicative task (Long and Robinson, 1998; Doughty and Williams, 1998b; Ellis, 2001). Long and Robinson (1998) defined focus on form as follows: “an occasional shift of
attention to linguistic code features – by the teacher and/or one or more of the learners – triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production” (p. 23).

The interest in focus on form stems, in part, from the suggestion that it can enable learners to develop linguistic accuracy because it creates the conditions for interlanguage restructuring to take place (Doughty, 2001; Long and Robinson, 1998). Focus on form allows learners to take time out from a focus on meaning to notice linguistic items in the input, thereby overcoming a potential obstacle of purely meaning-focused lessons in which linguistic forms may go unnoticed. Such noticing, Schmidt (1990, 1995, 2001) argues, is necessary for L2 learning. Not only does focus on form provide learners with an opportunity to notice linguistic items, but it may also help them to ‘notice the gap’ (Schmidt and Frota, 1986) between models of the target language and their own language production. Furthermore, focus on form provides opportunities for ‘pushed output’ which stretches learners’ competence through the need to express themselves in language that is accurate and appropriate (Swain, 1995, 2000; Swain and Lapkin, 1995). For these reasons, focus on form is seen as potentially beneficial for L2 learners and these theoretical explanations provide a compelling rationale for including focus on form in second/foreign language curricula.

1.1. Planned vs. incidental focus on form
Various studies have examined focus on form leading to several distinctions in this respect. One is between planned and incidental focus on form (Ellis 2001, 2005). In planned focus on form, there is an a priori decision made on the part of teacher to target specific linguistic items during meaning-focused activities. This targeting may take the form of enhanced input, targeted output or both (Doughty & Williams, 1998b). Previous studies of planned focus on form have targeted, among other linguistic forms, past tense (Doughty and Varela, 1998) and question formation in English (Mackey and Philp, 1998), adjective ordering and locative construction in Japanese, and direct object topicalization and adverb placement in Spanish (Long et al., 1998). Thus, in these studies, focus on form was the result of prior planning on the part of the researcher/teacher. In contrast, incidental focus on form (Ellis, 2001) occurs
spontaneously, without prior intention, during meaning-focused activities and targets a variety of linguistic items. While planned focus on form is intensive, focusing frequently on the same linguistic structure, incidental focus on form has a more extensive focus, with many linguistic structures being targeted but on only one or two occasions (Ellis et al., 2001a). It is incidental focus on form which is explored in the present study.

1.2. Reactive vs. pre-emptive focus on form
Another distinction that has been made is between reactive and pre-emptive focus on form (Ellis et al., 2001a, 2001b; Long and Robinson 1998). Reactive focus on form has also been known as error correction, corrective feedback, or negative evidence/feedback (Long 1996), and occurs when, in the context of meaning-focused activities, learners’ attention is drawn to errors in their production. Thus, the error is the trigger which begins the discourse targeting a specific linguistic item (Ellis et al., 2001b).

Lyster & Ranta (1997) investigated the different types of reactive focus on form that French immersion teachers provide when learners produce utterances that contain a linguistic error. They distinguished six types of feedback, namely explicit correction, recasts, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition.

A considerable number of studies on reactive focus on form, mostly referred to as corrective feedback in the literature, have been conducted so far including a number of major descriptive studies by Lyster (1998a, 1998b), Lyster & Ranta (1997), Oliver (2000), and an extensive review by Seedhouse (1997b). These studies have explored the effect of corrective feedback on short-term and long-term second language development (Doughty & Williams, 1998a; Lyster, 2004; Radwan, 2005), the corrective feedback that leads to successful uptake as an immediate response to feedback (Panova & Lyster, 2002; Farrokhi, 2003; Tsang, 2004; Loewen, 2004a; Sheen, 2004), how learners perceive negative feedback (Mackey et al., 2000) and the relationship between input and interaction (Oliver, 1995, 2000; Gass, 2003; Mackey et al., 2003; Mackey & Silver, 2005). This research tradition explored some important aspects such as feedback types and the degree of their success in the short term in various learning contexts and ages. The studies have also each examined particular
instructional contexts, immersion classes (Swain, 1998; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Lyster, 2002), adult ESL settings (Ellis et al., 2001a, 2001b; Panova and Lyster, 2002; Loewen, 2004a), child ESL settings (Oliver, 1995, 2000; Oliver and Mackey, 2003), adult EFL settings (Sheen, 2004; Tsang, 2004; Radwan, 2005), or laboratory contexts (Izumi, 2002; Iwashita, 2003; Shehadeh, 2003; Mackey et al, 2003). These studies show that corrective feedback is a common event in meaning-focused settings even in immersion classes; that teachers typically favor indirect, implicit correction rather than direct, explicit correction; and that learners often do not uptake correction (i.e., they usually do not try to produce the correct utterance that has been modeled for them).

While reactive focus on form has been investigated fairly extensively (e.g., Doughty and Williams 1998a), pre-emptive focus on form has received much less attention. Ellis et al. (2001b) raised concern over the lack of empirical studies on pre-emptive focus on form and the necessity to examine pre-emptive episodes as well as reactive ones. Ellis et al. (2001b: 414) define pre-emptive focus on form as occurring when either the teacher or a learner initiates attention to form even though no actual problem in production has arisen. They argue that pre-emptive focus on form addresses an actual or perceived gap in the learners’ knowledge, and in their study of two ESL classes in New Zealand they found that pre-emptive focus on form constituted 52% of the focus on form that occurred in 12 hours of meaning-focused instruction. Furthermore, they distinguished between learner-initiated focus on form in which learners raised questions about linguistic items and teacher-initiated focus on form in which the teacher either asked questions or provided unsolicited information about specific linguistic items. In their study, learner-initiated focus on form accounted for just over 38% of the episodes while teacher-initiated episodes were just over 9% (ibid).

Regarding teacher-initiated pre-emptive LREs, Borg (1998) has shown that the experienced teacher he studied often pre-empted language problems. He notes that this teacher’s approach to grammar was largely unplanned and that he made decisions about what language points to focus on incidentally. Some of the strategies this teacher utilized were clearly pre-emptive rather than reactive in nature. They involved asking whether the learners had any problems, relating a grammar point to the learners’ L1, giving rules, guides,
clues for the use of a grammatical feature, using metalingual terminology, and eliciting rules from the learners (Borg, 1998, p. 23–24).

Williams’s (1999) study of learner-initiated focus on form in the context of collaborative group work included consideration of pre-emptive focus on form. This study examined how learners in an academically oriented ESL course focus on form in collaborative group work involving various kinds of form- and meaning-focused activities. It found that the learners did initiate focus on form but not very often, that more proficient learners paid more attention to form than less proficient, that focus on form arose most frequently in learner-generated requests to the teacher about language, and that the type of form that the learners focused on was “overwhelmingly lexical” (p. 610). A similar finding is reported by Poole (2005) in his study of forms learners attend to during focus on form instruction in an advanced ESL writing class with international students. While acknowledging the differences between his study and that of Williams (1999) in terms of design, Poole also found the vast majority of forms learners attended to were lexical in nature.

2. Aims of the Study

This study involved the observation of communicatively-oriented classroom activities, identification and analysis of incidental Language Related Episodes (LREs) in teacher-learner interactions. The prime objective was to investigate how frequently different types of focus on form are used in Iranian EFL classes. The second major aspect of this study is concerned with the analysis of pre-emptive language related episodes and its comparison with reactive ones. As Ellis et al. (2002) and Ellis (2005) maintain, any consideration of teacher- or learner-initiated pre-emptive focus on form is almost completely missing from current accounts of focus on form studies. It seems that these types of form-focused instruction have eluded research enquiries. Almost all studies of this nature have dealt with one single type of focus on form, namely reactive episodes. However, pre-emptive language related episodes are also an indispensable part of focus on form instruction and are at least as important and effective as reactive ones in leading to uptake (Ellis et al., 2001a). Any operational definition and categorization of form-focused episodes within meaning-oriented classes should take both into account. Therefore, the second
objective was to categorize and compare both teacher- and learner-initiated pre-emptive LREs as well as reactive ones quantitatively and qualitatively to develop a better understanding of their potentials vis-à-vis. Finally, this study investigated the occurrence of uptake following focus on form instruction. To meet these objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

1. To what extent does focus on form occur in a meaning-centered intermediate EFL class with adult learners?
2. Are there any significant differences in the use of reactive and pre-emptive types of focus on form in the observed class?
3. Are there any significant differences in the frequencies of teacher-initiated and learner-initiated pre-emptive LREs in the observed class?
4. How frequently does uptake occur in incidental LREs in general, and in reactive and pre-emptive LREs in particular in the observed class?

3. Method
To address these questions, interactions between teachers and EFL learners were audio-recorded, transcribed, categorized and compared in terms of the frequency of reactive and pre-emptive episodes, and the amount of uptake following them.

3.1. Participants
3.1.1. Teachers
Two teachers participated in this study. Teacher one (female, 35 years old) had been teaching at language schools including the one where this study was conducted for 12 years. She completed her M.A. studies in TEFL 6 years before this study. Her professional background suggested that she had been teaching in a nation-wide popular language school which advocates a strong adherence to the principles of structural/synthetic syllabuses as defined by Wilkins (1976). Teacher two (male, 32 years old), a PhD student in TEFL, had 4 years of EFL teaching experience and has been mainly involved in syllabus designing and teaching International English Language Testing System (IELTS) preparatory classes according to the school manager. They taught the same group of learners in two consecutive semesters covering the same book, namely
Focus on IELTS (O’Connell, 2002). The book contains 20 chapters and was to be covered in two 20-session semesters. Every session lasted for 90 minutes. The first teacher covered the first 10 units, and the second teacher went through the last 10 ones.

3.1.2. Learners
The learners consisted of 12 university learners, 5 males and 7 females who were majoring in medicine or engineering. They all shared Turkish as their mother tongue and were quite fluent in Persian as the official language in Iran. Their ages ranged between 19 and 34 years. The learners paid tuition and were generally highly motivated. Based on the information collected at the time of the registration for IELTS classes in this school, most of them were attending these IELTS preparation courses with a view to sitting for the IELTS exam and eventually applying to overseas universities to further their studies, whereas nearly a quarter of these learners were interested in developing their academic English for pursuing their studies in masters or doctoral programs in medicine and engineering in Iran.

3.3. Instructional Setting
One intact class in a private English language school in Tabriz, Iran was selected as a suitable site for data collection based on the objectives of the study, and the fact that learners’ shared a linguistic and cultural background. In this language school, preparatory classes for IELTS exam, which is one of the major language proficiency tests required by academic institutions, were divided into 7 proficiency levels with pre-intermediate and intermediate representing levels 4 and 5 respectively. According to an in-house placement test used for placing learners in these IELTS preparation classes, the participants’ command of English was rated as pre-intermediate representing level 4. The class was observed during their studies at IELTS level 4 and level 5.

In this private language school, the observed class met twice per week, and every session lasted 90 minutes. The course book was Focus on IELTS (O’Connell, 2002) which is about introducing different sample sections and questions of academic version of IELTS. The course book provides practice on listening, reading, writing and speaking tasks similar to the real IELTS exam.
Most of the content of the lessons are taken from authentic sources and are primarily meaning focused in that they have no predetermined linguistic focus. Preceding and following any reading and listening, there are some tasks or discussion questions developed to involve learners more with the topics and simulate the subsections of the IELTS exam. In some units, there are explicit references to some common mistakes in English along with their correct forms and some exercises to be practiced with answer keys. In the observed classes, they were all assigned as homework and were not covered during classes.

The classroom activities included role plays similar to the ones in IELTS interviews, jigsaw tasks (e.g., solving an environmental problem or some social problems such as unemployment or child labor), general class discussions (e.g., discussion on a movie, a historical monument), opinion-gap tasks (e.g., making predictions about the future), reading comprehension activities (e.g., using information in a passage to complete the missing words in a summary paragraph, paragraph heading matching, true/false/not-given statements). Learners went through the reading passages at home and discussed their understandings, opinions on the topic and their answers to the various types of tasks following a reading passage in class. Listening activities included table, diagram, or map completion, multiple choice questions and fill in the blanks. The listening tasks were all based on some dialogs or mini-lectures on social and academic English in authentic contexts. These tasks were completed during the class and teachers tried to devise some pre-listening and post-listening activities to engage their learners with the topic thematically and get them to express their own ideas on the topic. There were some content-based questions based on the reading passage or the listening material in every unit. Teachers spent some time on checking the correct answers on the basis of the ideas stated in the reading or listening material. Regarding writings, there was a brainstorming activity on the writing topic in class. The participants were encouraged to share their views on the topic as teachers wrote most of the key ideas or expressions on the board. Then, learners were asked to develop and write an essay at home using their notes and ideas they picked up from the class discussion on the topic for the next class. As the most common class activities, IELTS preparatory teachers in this language school used pair-work, group-work and whole class discussions.
3.4. Data Collection Procedures

The data were collected entirely from the meaning-focused activities from the same class in IELTS level 4 and 5 with two instructors. Two mini-size MP3 wireless recorders were employed to record whole-class interactions between the teachers and their learners. This procedure provided data relating to any interaction involving the teachers and the whole class. Therefore, interactions between learners in pairs or between the teachers and individual learners in pair works were not audible, and thus not captured for analysis. This constitutes a limitation of this study. All the analyzed data and quantification are solely based on the recorded interactions between the teachers and their learners which were audible to all of the learners and thus recoverable for the researchers.

Using this method and during 18 sessions of instruction, the authors collected 24 hours of classroom instruction, 12 hours from each teacher’s class. In every session, the first and last 5 minutes when the teachers mostly greeted and roll called the learners or gave instructions for the homework or the next class, were not included in the analysis. Moreover, there were some focus on forms or grammar-oriented interactions which were also excluded from analysis. Finally, to obtain a balanced rate of data for comparison, the researchers came up with 10 hours of meaning-oriented instruction per each class, totaling 20 hours of naturally-occurring data in which teachers and their learners were involved in communicatively-oriented interaction on topics of general interest raised in that unit.

Moreover, to collect further qualitative and confirmatory data in order to cross-check and interpret the audio-recorded data, one of the researchers was present in the class as a non-participant observer for 9 hours (3 sessions in each teacher’s class) and took field notes while trying to minimize any interference in the teaching process.

Six hours of instruction were also videotaped for the same purpose. There were already two wall-mounted mini-video recorders placed in the top corners of the classroom, one at the front overlooking the learners, and the other at the back, zooming in on the frontal sections of the class. The school had a quality assurance department and the supervisory staff unobtrusively used these mini-
cameras to monitor and optimize the quality of the ongoing instruction. Having obtained the permission of the participating teachers, the researchers used these cams to videotape 6 hours of instruction, 3 hours from each teacher’s class. Since this was an observational instrument established and practiced well before the implementation of this study, teachers and learners in this school generally got used to having them in their classes. Thus, it is assumed that the recordings did not interfere in the teaching process.

Finally, after the completion of the lessons on two occasions and upon getting learners’ consent, their books and notebooks were checked to collect any notes they took during their attendance in that particular class. Both teachers and learners were briefed that this is just to associate their notes with the ongoing interaction, and the recording of their notes is to be kept confidential and will be destroyed upon the completion of this study.

It should be noted that no effort was made to manipulate the frequency or characteristics of incidental focus on form. The teachers were not aware that the researchers intended to examine reactive and pre-emptive LREs. They were simply told that the aim of the study was to analyze classroom interaction during meaning-centered lessons. Thus, these observations can be representative of what normally takes place in these EFL classes.

3.5. Data Analysis
Long and Robinson (1998) classified focus on form into two major types: reactive and pre-emptive. Reactive focus on form happens when learners produce an utterance containing an actual non-target utterance, which is then addressed usually by the teacher but sometimes by another learner. Thus, it supplies learners with negative evidence. Reactive focus on form involves negotiation and is triggered by something problematic on the part of a learner. Reactive focus on form addresses a performance problem which may or may not reflect a competence problem. According to Varonis & Gass (1985), the discourse in reactive focus on form takes the form of sequences involving a trigger, an indicator of a problem, and a resolution. The following is an example of a reactive Language Related Episode taken from the data in the present study:
Extract 1: Reactive LRE with uptake
S: so he is in the university for 8 years
T: *he has*
S: =*has been* in the university for 8 years
T: yes

As the above extract illustrates, the teacher reformulates a learner’s erroneous utterance in the form of recast as one type of reactive LRE.

The second major category in focus on form instruction is pre-emptive LREs. According to Ellis et al (2001), pre-emptive focus on form deals with a problem similar to reactive focus on form. Pre-emptive focus on form involves the teacher or learner initiating attention to form even though no actual problem in production has happened (Ellis et al., 2001b). In other words, pre-emptive focus on form addresses an actual or a perceived gap in the learners’ knowledge. According to Varonis & Gass (1985), the type of discourse that takes place in pre-emptive focus on form consists typically of exchanges involving a query and response. Some instances of pre-emptive focus on form will make this distinction clear. Teachers sometimes predict a gap in their learners’ knowledge and seek to address it, as shown in this extract taken from the present study:

Extract 2: Teacher-initiated Pre-emptive LRE
T: ...Look at the diagram on page 35. There are 6 cities. It is about population, homes with electricity, crime rate, level of ambient noise. *What is ambient noise?*
Ss: *environment, atmosphere.*
T: *in this context, noise pollution, the rate or amount of noise in different cities,*

han!

Here the class is talking about mega-cities. The teacher takes time out from focusing on meaning to address a perceived gap in the learners’ lexical knowledge—the item “ambient noise”. Although such decisions interrupt the flow of a communicative activity and disrupt the meaning-centeredness of an activity, they highlight a specific form, assuming that this is justified on the grounds that the form in question will be problematic to the learners in some way. Teacher-initiated focus on form is initiated either by a query directed at the learners or by an advisory statement (Ellis et al., 2002).

One of the problems of such teacher-initiated pre-emption is that the perceived gap may not be an actual gap (Ellis et al., 2001b). In learner-initiated
pre-emption’s, however, the gap is presumably real. In the next extract, it seems reasonable to assume that the learner does not know the meaning of ‘rush hour’:

Extract 3: Learner-initiated pre-emptive LRE

T: In rush hours, the rate of speed is very low.
S: Rush hour means?
T: the noisy hour, I mean, for example, at, from 5:30 to 6.
S: Yes
T: in Ramadan, it is the rush hour; people are rushing home to break their fast as quickly as possible, ha! (Ss laugh)

Another important concept used in this study is uptake. In a series of studies, Lyster uses it to refer to learners’ response to the feedback they receive from teachers on their own efforts to communicate. Lyster and Ranta (1997, p. 49) have provided the following definition: "Uptake refers to a learner’s utterance that immediately follows the teacher’s feedback and that constitutes a reaction in some way to the teacher’s intention to draw attention to some aspect of the learner’s initial utterance." Whereas Lyster and Ranta have related uptake to the provision of corrective feedback, Ellis et al. (2001a, 2001b, 2002) take a broader perspective on uptake. They argue that uptake can occur even when the previous move does not involve corrective feedback. For example, there are occasions in communicative lessons where learners themselves pre-empt attention to a linguistic feature (e.g., by asking a question), thus eliciting not a teacher feedback move but a teacher response move. In such learner-initiated focus on form, learners still have the opportunity to react, for example, by simply acknowledging the previous move or by attempting to use the feature in focus in their own speech. The researchers adopted this expanded definition in counting the frequency of uptake moves in the present study.

Following the above mentioned categorization system adopted from Ellis et al. (2002), the data were subjected to a detailed analysis. In so doing, the researchers first listened to the audio-recordings, identified and then transcribed episodes in the classroom interactions in which participants made a departure from meaning-focused activities to deal with issues of a linguistic nature termed Language Related Episodes (LREs). Whenever the teachers or their learners incidentally interrupted a communicatively-oriented interaction
and temporarily shifted their attention to formal aspects of language reactively or pre-emptively, these episodes were singled out as an LRE episode. LRE instances comprise the unit of analysis in this study. An LRE was operationally defined as consisting of the discourse from the point where the attention to linguistic form starts to the point where it ends (Ellis et al., 2001a). Every unit of analysis starts from the time when either the teacher or a learner makes a momentary departure from the ongoing communicative activity to focus on a linguistic issue, whether phonological, orthographical, lexical, syntactic, discoursal or pragmatic in nature. Next, LREs were categorized as reactive or pre-emptive as defined above. A further distinction was also made between pre-emptive LREs initiated by learners and pre-emptive LREs initiated by teachers. Finally, every LRE was analyzed in terms of whether it resulted in uptake or not.

The following example taken from Ellis et al. (2001a: 300) illustrates an LRE in which a learner asks a question about the meaning of a word in a discussion activity. All of these utterances pertain to the lexical item ‘spoil’; consequently, they constitute one LRE.

S: excuse me, T, what’s spoil means?
T: spoil means=
S: =spoil
T: if you are my child
S: mhm
T: and you keep saying give me, give me sweets, give me money, give me a football,
    let me watch TV, and I say yes all the time, yes, I spoil you. I give you too much
    because you always get what you want.
S: ah, ah
T: so
S: they spoil them, mm, they always get whatever

This example also illustrates uptake in a learner-initiated LRE. The learner has asked the meaning of spoil (line 1), and the teacher provides a response (lines 4, 6–8). In lines 9 and 11, the learner responds to the provision of linguistic information by incorporating part of the teacher’s definition into his own production, so this utterance by the learner is identified as an uptake move. Likewise, extracts 1, 2, 3 taken from the data in this study represent instances of different types of LREs with or without uptake.

Because the study was limited to focus on form that was interactionally and
incidentally accomplished, the researchers excluded episodes involving a problem or query concerned with content such as erroneous answers and corrections to questions about geographical locations, dates, key political or artistic figures, or any other content knowledge.

Once identified, the LREs were transcribed. Due to the large amount of the audio-taped data, only episodes involving focus on form episodes were transcribed. The researchers subsequently listened to the recordings one more time to check the accuracy of their transcriptions. Afterwards, raw frequencies as well as percentages of LRE types and uptake occurrences were calculated. Since the data consisted of frequency counts of categorical data, Pearson’s chi-square analysis was used in order to test whether the similarities and differences in the frequency of LRE types were statistically significant.

Moreover, the findings from audio-recorded data were checked against the information collected from video-recordings, field notes from the observer and learner notes. The qualitative data were used to analyze and interpret the quantitative findings.

To check the inter-rater reliability in coding the data into reactive and pre-emptive LREs, teacher- or learner-initiated pre-emptive LREs, and finally the occurrence of uptake, another researcher (an assistant professor in applied linguistics who was briefed about the study, its objectives and data analysis procedure, reviewed examples from other similar studies, and received demonstration on the coding procedure based on Ellis et al, 2001) independently coded 10 percent of the data with a resulting 86% agreement rate in the identification of LREs and their categorization.

4. Results
4.1. Focus on form as reactive vs. pre-emptive LREs
A total of 641 LREs were identified in the 20 hours of meaning-focused lessons, 334 and 307 LREs in IELTS level 4 and 5 respectively. This means that an average of one instance of LRE took place every 1.9 minutes as demonstrated in Table 1.
Table 1: Frequencies and Percentages of Reactive vs. Pre-emptive LREs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IELTS Levels</th>
<th>Reactive LREs</th>
<th>Preemptive LREs</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1 (Level 4)</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>(33.6%)</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2 (Level 5)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>(18.2%)</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total LREs</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>(26.2%)</td>
<td>473</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, the findings in Table 1 show the frequencies and percentages of reactive and pre-emptive LREs in general and between two teachers in particular. In general, 168 (26.2%) instances of reactive episodes occurred while there were 473 instances (73.8%) of pre-emptive LREs. Thus, the frequency of pre-emptive LREs is remarkably more than that of reactive LREs.

With regard to the proportion of reactive and pre-emptive LREs, the first teacher in level 4 used twice as many reactive LREs as the second teacher in level 5. However, the proportion of pre-emptive LREs in both levels was found to be similar i.e., 222 and 251 in level 4 and level 5 respectively. The findings represent a substantial discrepancy in the frequency of reactive and pre-emptive LREs. A Chi-square analysis revealed a statistically significant difference, $X^2 = 19.34$ (1df, $p<.05$).

4.2. Teacher-initiated vs. learner-initiated pre-emptive LREs

The results on the frequency of teacher- vs. learner-initiated pre-emptive LREs are presented in Table 2. There are far more instances of teacher-initiated pre-emptive LREs than learner-initiated ones in general, namely 398 (84.1%) and 75 (15.9%). Chi-square analysis shows a statistically significant difference, $X^2 = 3.87$ (1df, $p<.05$).

Moreover, the second teacher in level 5 used more pre-emptive LREs than the first one in level 4. Unlike their teacher, the learners in level 4 felt the need to raise more queries about language than they did in level 5. However, teacher-initiated pre-emptive LREs were found to be 5 times as many as learner-initiated LREs in general.
Table 2: Frequencies and Percentages of Teacher- vs. Learner-initiated Pre-emptive LREs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IELTS Levels</th>
<th>Preemptive LREs</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1 (Level 4)</td>
<td>Teacher-initiated</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>(80.6%)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>(19.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2 (Level 5)</td>
<td>Teacher-initiated</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>(87.2%)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>(12.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>398</td>
<td>(84.1%)</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>(15.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3. Uptake Moves

The last research question in this study dealt with uptake. Tables 3 and 4 illustrate the results. Table 3 presents the number of all LREs which were found to lead to uptake. Of 334 LREs in level 4, 71 (17.5%) LREs resulted in uptake. On the other hand, uptake took place even less frequently in level 5. At that level, there were 44 (12.5%) uptake moves. The overall number of uptakes indicates that the learners verbally acknowledged and signaled their understanding of the LREs merely in 15.2% of the cases. Chi-square analysis did not show any significant difference between LREs and uptake in level 4 and 5, $X^2 = 3.63$ (1df, $p<.05$).

Table 3: Frequencies and Percentages of Uptake Moves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IELTS Levels</th>
<th>LRE &amp; Uptake</th>
<th>LREs</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Uptake</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1 (Level 4)</td>
<td>Teacher-initiated</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>(17.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2 (Level 5)</td>
<td>Teacher-initiated</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>(12.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>641</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>(15.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this study, the amount of uptake in reactive and preemptive LREs is also investigated. The objective was to see whether there was a significant relationship between LRE type and uptake moves. Table 4 shows that there were 72 (62.6%) and 43 (37.4%) uptakes following reactive and preemptive LREs respectively. Reactive episodes resulted in uptake more frequently than preemptive ones at both levels.
Nevertheless, the chi-square analysis on the relationship between LRE types and the amount of uptake did not result in a significant difference, $X^2 = 3.12$ (1df, $p<.05$).

**Table 4: Frequencies and Percentages of Uptake in Reactive and Preemptive LREs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IELTS Levels</th>
<th>Uptake in Reactive LREs</th>
<th>Uptake in Preemptive LREs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1 (Level 4)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>(56.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2 (Level 5)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>(72.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>(62.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative findings are elaborated in the following section to interpret and justify the findings on the frequency of LRE type and uptake moves.

**5. Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine incidental focus on form as it arose naturally in the course of meaning-focused IELTS preparatory lessons involving adult learners from the same language background in an EFL context, namely Iran. A total of 641 LREs were identified in the 20 hours of meaning-focused lessons, a rate of one LRE every 1.9 minutes. The overall numbers of LRES in level 4 and level 5 were 334 and 307 respectively, demonstrating a slight difference in the frequency of LREs at two levels. In a similar study, Ellis *et al.* (2001b) identified 448 instances of focus on form in 12 hours in an ESL context (New Zealand) with language learners from multiple nationalities mostly East Asian. In their study, there was a focus on form episode (FFE), as they called it, at a rate of every 1.6 minutes. Also, Lyster (1998b) reports 558 responding FFEs in 18.5 hours of immersion instruction, a rate of one LRE every 1.97 minutes. Lyster, however, only examined reactive LREs. Oliver (2000) found 614 teacher responses to erroneous learner turns (i.e., reactive focus on form) in four meaning-centered ESL lessons (two with adults and two with children). She did not mention the duration of the lessons, but from the descriptions provided it is unlikely they exceeded 12 hours i.e., approximately one LRE per 1.2 minutes.

In the present study, the overall occurrence of LREs was not as frequent as it was in Ellis *et al.* (2001b), Lyster (1998b), and Oliver (2000). However, the differences do
not seem to be outstanding. The overall LRE frequency in this study indicates that there are a substantial number of LREs in the observed lessons. Both teachers tried to integrate focus on form instruction and meaning-oriented learning in their teaching. Focus on form is found to be a common occurrence in this EFL class. As Loewen (2004a) observed, currently there is little guidance for teachers regarding the optimal number of LREs in a meaning-focused lesson. Decisions about focusing on form in an activity may hinge on how comfortable the teacher and learners are with the frequency of it. This study has not directly addressed the optimal frequency of LREs but offers a descriptive picture of the amount of focus on form in an EFL class with intermediate EFL adult learners. As in ESL and immersion contexts, incidental focus on form occurred frequently in this EFL context. However, there are some differences in the distribution of LRE types and their effectiveness measured as uptake with similar studies in the literature.

The second research question was concerned with the proportion of pre-emptive and reactive LREs in the data. Based on the findings in Table 1, this study has also revealed that incidental focus on form is as likely to be pre-emptive as reactive in communicative EFL classes. However, the results indicate that there were far more pre-emptive LREs than reactive ones in general, and Chi-square analysis revealed a significant difference in the distribution of reactive and pre-emptive LREs. It means that in all of the observed lessons, both teachers and learners felt the need to raise attention to linguistic forms (pre-emptive LREs) while there was not any actual error. The equal rate of reactive and pre-emptive LREs in Ellis et al. (2001b) contrasts sharply with the findings of this study. In their study, the LREs were evenly divided between reactive and pre-emptive (223 and 225, respectively) and there was a small difference between the two classes.

Moreover, this study explored the frequency of teacher- and learner-initiated pre-emptive LREs as expressed in the third research question. As noted above, there were far more cases of teacher-initiated LREs than learner-initiated ones, and the difference is statistically significant. Surprisingly, the two teachers initiated attention to form 398 times (roughly 84%) while the learners raised questions about language 72 times (16%) out of the total 473 pre-emptive episodes in this study. Such a huge discrepancy between the proportions of the teacher- and learner-initiated LREs is comparatively similar to the findings in
Loewen (2004b) and Williams (1999) but very different from the ones in Ellis et al. (2001). Loewen (2004b) found a low rate of learner-initiated LREs in his study of pre-emptive LREs in 32 hours of communicative activities in 12 ESL classes in a private language school in New Zealand. Of 1373 LREs identified in his data, just 365 (26.5%) were learner-initiated. Likewise, Williams (1999) in her study of learner-generated focus on form in the context of collaborative group work found that the learners did initiate focus on form but not very often. In contrast, Ellis et al. (2001b) reported that the majority of pre-emptive LREs in their study were learner-initiated in both classes they observed (76 out of 99 in class 1, and 89 out of 126 in class 2).

The question remains as to why such variation in the frequency and characteristics of incidental LREs should occur in the observed lessons and among various instructional contexts. In light of the following empirical and theoretical studies in the literature, the findings in this study will be analyzed and interpreted. One explanation for the variation in this study may stem from teachers’ attitude to the use of incidental focus on form. It is likely that some teachers regard incidental focus on form as an effective means of addressing linguistic items within meaning-focused lessons, and therefore incorporate it frequently into their lessons (Borg, 1998). On the other hand, other teachers may not opt to raise issues of linguistic form in meaning-focused activities on the grounds that it may disrupt the flow of communication. As Lyster and Ranta (1997) have pointed out, these teachers may fear that the “side shows” involving focus on form may damage conversational coherence. Furthermore, Ellis et al. (2002) maintain that teachers probably vary enormously in the extent to which they engage in teacher-initiated focus on form, reflecting their orientation to a communicative task. In some cases, they hardly interject at all, preferring to maintain the communicative flow of the task. Other teachers intervene frequently, presumably because they feel the need to manufacture explicit learning opportunities out of the communication that evolves from a task (ibid). Such perspectives can have an impact on the frequency of LREs. On the other hand, Mackey et al. (2004) demonstrated that experienced ESL teachers used more incidental focus on form techniques than inexperienced teachers, and inexperienced teachers are less likely to deviate from their planned lessons to exploit spontaneous learning opportunities mostly in the form of preemptive LREs.
The above-mentioned points may partially account for the high frequency of teacher-initiated preemptive LREs in the present study. Both teachers in this study had a rich professional and academic background in ELT and therefore could manage making momentary departures from an ongoing communicative activity to focus on form. The videotaped data and field notes confirm that the teachers intervened frequently and provided preemptive LREs, thus assuming that they could predict the gaps in the learners’ linguistic command before they produced any error.

As noted before, the first teacher had some years of language teaching experience in a language school which prescribed a grammar-oriented approach to language teaching. Tentatively, a high rate of reactive LREs in level 4 class may be attributed to her focus on forms teaching experience in the past (Mackey et al., 2004). Like teachers’ beliefs on focus on form, their role in the class activities could affect the proportion of the LREs (Loewen, 2003). In the IELTS level 4, it was observed that the first teacher played an active role as a conversational partner, asking and answering discussion questions with the learners. Such interaction provided the teacher with the opportunity to focus on form in the course of conversation with individual learners. She repeatedly offered reactive LREs or in some cases preemptive ones during these interactions. As a result, she offered twice as many reactive LREs as did the second teacher in level 5. Additionally, the context of the activities, whether conducted with the whole class, small groups or pairs may account for some of the variation (Loewen, 2004a). A qualitative analysis of the videotaped data from these classes showed that the second teacher in level 5 made an extensive use of pair work activities and offered a lot of tips and preemptive LREs before involving the learners in a pair-work activity or following it.

For learner-initiated LREs, this study found a very low frequency. The previous research has identified several individual differences that may affect learners’ participation in learner-generated incidental focus on form, such as proficiency level (Leeser, 2004; Williams, 1999; Yule and Macdonald, 1990), task roles (Yule and Macdonald, 1990) and pair and group dynamics (Morris and Tarone, 2003; Storch, 2002). It is also possible that cultural differences in the norms of classroom conduct in general and in the predisposition to ask questions in particular could affect the number of LREs. For example, Cortazzi and Jin (1996) discuss Chinese learners’ negative perceptions of asking questions in class. Regarding the Iranian socio-cultural context, it seems more
plausible to assume that Iranian adult EFL learners tend to shun away from asking too many questions which may reveal their gaps in knowledge, admitting their mistakes and verbally acknowledging it publicly particularly in a co-educational setting as was the case in this study. The same may hold true for the low frequency of uptake in this study.

Loewen (2004a) suggest that characteristics of the learning context, such as age of the learners, previous years of L2 grammatical instruction, and primary pedagogical focus of the current language program may have influenced the amount of focus on form and learners’ production of uptake in his study. Similarly, the last point for a partial explanation of the low rate of learner-initiated LREs in this study might lie in the primary pedagogical focus of the current language program. The observed class was aimed at preparing and acclimating learners with the format of IELTS exam. Like any other preparation program for proficiency tests such as TOEFL and IELTS, teachers and learners try to tailor the class activities to meet the requirements of the proficiency test. This is referred to as washback effect of testing on teaching, learning, and broadly on education system (Hughes, 1989; Cohen, 1994). Since IELTS is a skill-based test which gauges applicants’ communicative rather than linguistic competence per se, this may have a beneficial backwash impact on the learners (Saville, 2000; Alderson and Banerjee, 2001). In the context of this study, the pedagogical focus of the course may have encouraged learners to become more engaged in communicatively-oriented activities while being cautious whether to disrupt the natural flow of information by raising attention to formal aspects of language or not. Moreover, the high occurrence of teacher-initiated LREs may have obviated the need for learner queries.

Although further investigation of these issues is warranted, these explanations may go some way in justifying the findings in terms of the distribution of LRE types in this study. Of course, the researchers postulated on these findings based on their experience and knowledge on EFL practices in Iran in general, this language school in particular, and qualitative evidence collected from the observations of these lessons. In this respect, the authors feel the need to emphasize the fact that there was not any systematic survey of the teachers’ and learners’ beliefs and attitudes to focus on form in this study, and these comments should be interpreted and generalized with caution.

Finally, it is important to consider the effectiveness of the various types of LREs. While few studies have directly addressed the link between incidental
focus on form and L2 learning, the majority of these studies have used uptake as an indication of the effectiveness of incidental focus on form (Lyster and Ranta, 1997; Oliver, 2000; Mackey et al., 2003; Ellis et al., 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Loewen, 2003, 2004 to name but a few). The last research question in this study was concerned with uptake moves in response to incidental focus on form. The findings in Tables 3 and 4 show that uptake moves following incidental focus on form were very low in this study. The overall number of uptakes indicates that the learners verbally incorporated LREs in their immediate productions merely in 15.2% of the cases. Moreover, there was not any significant difference in the amount of uptake in two levels. Of course, uptake moves were more common following reactive episodes than pre-emptive ones. Out of 168 reactive episodes, 72 (44%) resulted in uptake whereas only 43 (9%) of 473 pre-emptive episodes led to learner uptake.

The low occurrence of uptake found in this study contrasts sharply with the findings of Ellis et al. (2001a). They reported much higher levels of uptake in their study of 12 hours of meaning-focused lessons in two ESL classes. They found that uptake occurred in 74% of the LREs in these classes. Additionally, unlike the findings in this study which did not show any significant association between LRE types and the occurrence of uptake, Ellis et al. (2001a) found that uptake was more frequent in reactive and learner-initiated LREs, whereas teacher-initiated LREs had significantly lower levels of successful uptake.

Other studies of uptake also demonstrate varying levels of uptake production. Lyster and Ranta (1997), in a study of four classes (18.3 hours) of Grade 4 French immersion lessons in Canada, found that only 27% of the reactive LREs resulted in successful uptake. Similarly, Mackey and Philp (1998), in their study of planned focus on form, found that only 33% of the recasts were repeated or modified, leaving 67% of the recasts to be followed by topic continuation on the part of the learner. Similarly, Oliver (1995), in a study of primary school children involved in an information exchange task, found that nonnative speakers incorporated just fewer than 10% of recasts into their own production. She argues, however, that 16% of the time it was not possible to incorporate recasts, and 55% of the time it was not appropriate to do so (such as after a yes/no question). Thus, she claims an uptake rate of 35%. Finally, Pica (2002), in an investigation of discussion activities in two content based classes in a university-based English language institute, found that limited opportunities existed
for either negative feedback or modified learner output (uptake). Ellis et al. (2001a) suggest that the differing contexts of the research may account for these differences. They argue that some of the reported studies involved school-aged children rather than university learners, with the suggestion that younger learners might be less likely to produce uptake. Also, the immersion context of several of the studies may be responsible for decreased attention to linguistic form and more attention to meaning, since “the emphasis in an immersion program is not on studying the language, but on studying the content of the curriculum in the second language” (de Courcy, 2002, p. 5). These diverse findings suggest that the benefit of incidental focus on form in terms of successful uptake may vary considerably depending on the context.

Ellis et al. (2001a) contends that private language school settings (like the context of the present study) may make learners more inclined to notice linguistic form, even if they engage in meaning-focused activities during their studies. However, such statement is not supported by the findings of this study if uptake is considered as an indication of such noticing. In the present study, uptake moves were very low although lessons were observed in private language school with highly motivated learners. Does it mean that EFL learners in this class did not benefit from focus on form as it was reported in the literature?

Because uptake is an optional move (Ellis et al., 2001a), it does not necessarily occur after the provision of linguistic feedback. Learners may opt not to produce uptake, even if there is the opportunity for them to do so. Furthermore, there may not always be a chance for learners to produce uptake as immediate verbal responses to an LRE. Oliver (2000) maintains that learners may have no opportunity to react to teachers’ feedback if the teacher continues his or her turn. That does not mean, however, that if a learner fails to produce uptake, the linguistic form has not been noticed. Mackey and Philp (1998) suggest that “noticing/learning” is possible without the production of uptake. Their experimental study indicates that some learners can benefit acquisitionally even if they do not uptake recasts of their deviant utterances. Furthermore, it has been acknowledged that uptake is not necessarily indicative of L2 acquisition, although it may be facilitative of it (Ellis et al., 2001a; Lightbown, 1998).

Although such explanation may partially account for the low frequency of uptake moves in this study, a very low occurrence of uptake prompted the authors to proceed with a detailed analysis of the data from audio and video recordings, and field notes.
The qualitative analysis of LREs revealed that a good number of uptake moves are not encapsulated in the current definition of the uptake. For example, the researchers found that there were many instances that the learners took notes whenever an LRE took place in the lessons. On two occasions, one of the authors checked learners’ notes after the completion of the class to confirm that their notes contained the LREs identified in the field notes and audio-recordings. Such evidence proved that there were a substantial number of teacher-initiated and some instances of learner-initiated preemptive LREs in which none of the learners acknowledged uptake verbally or explicitly while some decided to note it down in their books. The researchers call these instances “camouflaged” uptake moves.

Moreover, preemptive and reactive LREs were sometimes contextually so prominent and clearly illustrated that the researchers could unanimously conclude that every one in that class understood the point irrespective of the fact that they manifested their noticing explicitly in the form of uptake (for instance, see Extracts 4 and 5). Loewen (2004a) also raised this issue. He contends that when learners initiate an LRE, they are often looking for explicit information about a linguistic item, such as a vocabulary definition or an explanation of a grammatical item. The response to the provision of such information is very often likely to be an acknowledgment token, such as ‘oh’ or ‘yeah’. For example, in learner-initiated LREs about vocabulary (e.g., see Extract 3), learners did not often repeat all or even part of the definition provided for them so uptake, the way it is defined in the literature, did not take place. In the cited learner-initiated preemptive LRE in Extract 3, the teacher decided to depart from the ongoing meaningful interaction to teach the meaning of ‘rush hour’ and raised the context of fasting month (the holy month of Ramadan) in Islamic countries and the evening time when most of the fasting people are in a hurry to return home and break their fast. After activating learners’ schematic knowledge through this crystal-clear example, there was no need and in fact little expectation or opportunity for the students to acknowledge their incorporation of that vocabulary item as uptake. Conversely, in the case of reactive LREs, the classroom environment may have created an expectation that learner errors would be pointed out, and that when this occurred, learners should produce the correct form (Loewen, 2004a). Although further investigation of these points is warranted, they may go some way in explaining why uptake was found to be very low in general, and why reactive LREs resulted more in successful uptake than did preemptive LREs.
Considering the recent critical notions on the role of uptake as an index of language acquisition and the conflicting findings in the literature on the amount of uptake moves, it seems necessary to find more accountable measures of noticing form and its integration. SLA researchers need to find some other measures or use multiple indices to examine the effectiveness of focus on form. It seems that uptake needs to be redefined and expanded to take into account multiple sources of learners’ incorporation of LREs. In the modified definition of uptake, the researchers recommend that learners’ notes and non-verbal acknowledgements such as nodding following an LRE instance, intra-session immediate and delayed incorporation of LREs in the form of verbal or written responses by the learners be taken into account as indices of uptake. Videotaping interactions seems to be essential for this purpose. Then, analyzing uptake in terms of both verbal and non-verbal clues, oral as well as written incorporation of the LREs on the part of the learners along with retrospective data elicitation means such as stimulated recall procedures (Gass and Mackey, 2000) can be much more elucidating on estimating an accountable rate of uptake.

6. Implications for further research
This study provides further support for the incorporation of focus on form as the incidental attention that teachers and L2 learners pay to form in the context of meaning-focused instruction without disturbing the flow of communication in EFL classes. Whereas previous research addressed reactive focus on form (i.e., corrective feedback), the study reported in this article also included preemptive focus on form. One of the main findings of the study is that in the observed lessons preemptive focus on form occurred more frequently than reactive focus on form. This finding is important because it suggests that researchers and teachers need to pay more attention to preemptive focus on form than has been the case to date.

The findings demonstrate that teacher-initiated preemptive episodes took place more frequently than learner-initiated and reactive LREs. Both of the teachers in this study have had graduate studies in English language teaching and have been professionally teaching English for many years. The decisions they made regarding the use of focus on form techniques especially preemptive ones can be adopted by other EFL teachers. The researchers emphasize the fact that educated and experienced teachers can tap their learners’ linguistic gaps collaboratively (i.e., fill the holes in learners’
interlanguage as described by Swain, 1998; Swain and Lapkin, 1995) and deal with form in the context of meaning-focused lessons by raising them preemptively. As mentioned earlier, Mackey et al.’s (2004) study on experienced and inexperienced teachers’ use of incidental focus on form supports this notion. Teacher-initiated preemptive LREs can lubricate the learning process by focusing on diverse linguistic structures as they arise spontaneously during meaning-focused activities. Thus, the use of teacher-initiated LREs can pave the way for learners to move to a higher proficiency, minimize the number of non-target utterances by the learners, and consequently alleviate the need for reactive/learner-initiated focus on form as the findings in this study show. Furthermore, unlike reactive or student-initiated LREs, this type of LREs is not face-threatening, and students will not be embarrassed or negatively affected especially in co-educational contexts in some Asian countries.

Another implication of this study is concerned with the adoption of uptake to gauge the effectiveness of focus on form. It is too premature to make pedagogic decisions on the implementation of different types of focus on form according to this definition. Clearly further investigation into the relationship between uptake and learners’ ability to subsequently use the targeted linguistic items is warranted.

This study also raised some questions which require further examination. Future research studies are suggested to investigate preemptive and reactive LREs in elementary and advanced proficiency levels, particularly in general English classes as opposed to IELTS or TOEFL preparation classes. Moreover, given that the body of previous research on preemptive LREs and the amount of uptake following them is relatively small, additional research on this matter is clearly warranted. A detailed study on the frequency of preemptive LREs in the terms of their linguistic focus and the amount of uptake following teacher- and learner-initiated preemptive LREs would be a fruitful line of inquiry. This study did not investigate teachers’ beliefs and attitudes towards the use of focus on form in general and LRE types in particular. Future studies can examine the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and educational background, and its relationship with their attention to form and use of LRE types within meaning-oriented classes. Finally, this study calls for a redefinition of uptake. As pointed out earlier, uptake can be further analyzed and measured using multiple indices.
7. Conclusions
In summary, incidental focus on form appears to be pedagogically significant due to its potential in creating opportunities for learners to attend to linguistic elements in a meaningful context as they arise incidentally within a broader framework of communication. This study has shown that incidental LREs are frequently utilized in meaning-focused EFL classes, although their frequency and characteristics can vary considerably. Most of the focus on form studies carried out so far have almost exclusively concentrated on reactive LREs. The study has indicated the importance of widening the scope of research to include pre-emptive LREs as well. It explored the frequency of pre-emptive LREs and compared them with the reactive ones. The results revealed a significantly higher rate of pre-emptive focus on form, particularly teacher-initiated LREs than reactive ones. This is indicative of the fact that pre-emptive LREs deserve more attention than they have received so far. Moreover, based on the low frequency of the observed uptake, a new definition of uptake is suggested to incorporate not only uptakes resulting from verbal instances but also other non-verbal written manifestations of uptake such as learner notes. The variations in the findings of this study, in conjunction with those of previous studies of LREs and uptake, show the importance of taking the instructional context into account. The researchers have made some speculations about the findings based on qualitative data collected as part of this study and the Iranian EFL context. Finally, this study raised some interesting questions on pre-emptive LREs and uptake to broaden our understanding of focus on form and its optimal integration into meaning-centered EFL classes.

Acknowledgments:
The authors would like to extend their gratitude to Dr. Oliver, Dr. Nassaji, and Dr. Nunn for their insightful comments and contribution. Special thanks go to the teachers and learners in Goldis Language School for their kind cooperation and support. Moreover, we thank two anonymous reviewers for their meticulous and critical reading of the manuscript. Their suggestions and comments were extremely helpful.
References


Refusal Strategies by Yemeni EFL Learners

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Abstract
This is a pragmalinguistic investigation into the speech act of refusing as made by Yemeni learners of English as a foreign language. For this study, 20 Yemeni learners of English were asked to respond in English to six different situations in which they carry out the speech act of refusal. Their English performances were compared to those of Yemeni Arabic native speakers and American English native speakers in order to find out whether the refusal given by the group in question, i.e., Yemeni learners of English, correspond more closely with those of the Yemeni Arabic native speakers or with speakers of the target language, the American English native speakers. The data, collected from a Discourse Completion Test (DCT), were analyzed in terms of semantic formula sequences and were categorized according to the refusal taxonomy by Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss Weltz (1990). Results indicate that although a similar range of refusal strategies were available to the two language groups, cross-cultural variation was evident in the frequency and content of semantic formulas used by each language group in relation to the contextual variables, which include the status of interlocutors (higher, equal, or lower status) and eliciting acts i.e., requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions). For instance, Yemeni Arabic native speakers tended to be less direct in their refusals by offering preceding “reasons” or “explanations” (in the first position of the semantic formula order) other than their own desire in refusing. American English native speakers, on the other hand, used different semantic order by preceding “regret” in the first position giving more direct refusals. Due to their high proficiency in English, Yemeni learners of English showed evidence of pragmatic competence of the target language in constructing their refusal styles in three areas: the order in which semantic formulas for refusing were used, the frequency of semantic formula and the content of semantic formulas. However, they at times displayed some of their native speech community norms, falling back on their cultural background when formulating refusals.

Key words: Interlanguage pragmatics, pragmatic competence; pragmatic transfer; speech act of refusal, Yemeni learners of English.
Introduction

Much of the work in interlanguage pragmatics has been conducted within the framework of speech acts. Speech acts can be thought of as ‘functions’ of language, such as complaining, thanking, apologizing, refusing, requesting, and inviting. Within this view, the minimal unit of communication is the performance of linguistic act. All languages have a means of performing speech acts and presumably speech acts themselves are universals, yet the ‘form’ used in specific speech acts varies from culture to culture. Thus, the study of second language speech acts is concerned with the linguistic possibilities available in languages for speech act realization and the effect of cross-cultural differences on second language performance and on the interpretation by native speakers of second language speech acts (Wolfson, 1989, p.183).

Numerous studies in interlanguage pragmatics have recognized that the learners’ ability to use appropriate speech acts in a given speech act event and to use appropriate linguistic forms to realize this speech act is a main component of pragmatic competence. Fraser (1983) describes pragmatic competence as “the knowledge of how an addressee determines what a speaker is saying and recognizes intended illocutionary force conveyed through subtle attitudes” (p.30). Rintell (1997) also pointed out that “pragmatics is the study of speech acts”, arguing that L2 learner pragmatic ability is reflected in how learners produce utterances in the target language to communicate specific intentions and conversely, how they interpret the intentions which their utterances convey. One of the consistent findings in the empirical studies of speech act behavior is that, although the typology of speech acts appears to be universal, their conceptualization and verbalization can vary to a great extent across cultures and languages. In other words, L2 learners may have access to the same range of speech acts and realization strategies as do native speakers (NSs), but they can differ from in the strategies that they choose. Therefore, it is clear that L2 learners must be aware of L2 sociocultural constraints on speech acts in order to be pragmatically competent.

When second language learners engage in conversations with native speakers, difficulties may arise due to their lack of mastery of the conversational norms involved in the production of speech acts. Such conversational difficulties may in turn cause breakdowns in interethnic communication (Gumperz, 1990).
speakers violate speech acts realization patterns typically used by native speakers of a
target language, they often suffer the perennial risk of inadvertently violating
conversational and politeness norms thereby forfeiting their claims to being treated by
their interactants as social equals (Kasper, 1990). Communication difficulties are
resulted when conversationalists do not share the same knowledge of the subtle rules
governing conversations. Scarcella (1990) ascribes high frequency of such difficulties
to the fact that ‘‘nonnative speakers, when conversing, often transfer the
conversational rules of their first language into the second’’ (p.338).

The use of rules of speaking from one’s speech act community when interacting
or when speaking in a second or a foreign language is known as pragmatic transfer.
Uriel Weinreich (1953) says ‘‘Those instances of deviation from the norms of either
language which occur in the speech act of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity
with more than one language, i.e. as a result of language contact, will be referred to as
interference phenomena. It is these phenomena of speech, and their impact on the
norms of either language exposed to contact, that invite the interest of the linguist’’ (as

What L2 learners must know for successful speech act performance has been
presented in a ‘‘top-down processing’’ manner (Kasper, 1984): ‘‘Learners first have to
recognize the extra-linguistic, cultural constraints that operate in a NS’s choice of a
particular speech act appropriate to the context. They also have to know how to
realize this speech act at the linguistic level and in accordance with L2 sociocultural
norms’’ (p.3). Cohen (1996) terms this ‘‘Sociocultural knowledge’’ as ‘‘speakers
ability to determine whether it is acceptable to perform the speech act at all in the
given situation and, so far, to select one or more semantic formulas that would be
appropriate in the realization of the given speech act’’ (p.254).

The speech act of refusal
Refusals, as all the other speech acts, occur in all languages. However, not all
languages/ cultures refuse in the same way nor do they feel comfortable refusing the
same invitation or suggestion. The speech act of refusal occur when a speaker directly
or indirectly says ‘no’ to request or invitation. Refusal is a face-threatening act to the
listener/ requester/ inviter, because it contradicts his or her expectations, and is often
realized through indirect strategies. Thus, it requires a high level of pragmatic
competence. Chen (1996) used semantic formula to analyze speech act sets of refusal
(refusing requests, invitations, offers and suggestions), and concluded that direct refusal as “NO” was not a common strategy for any of the subjects, regardless of their language background. For example, an expression of regret, common in Americans’ refusals, was generally produced by the Chinese speakers, which might lead to unpleasant feelings between speakers in an American context.

Speakers who may be considered fluent in a second language due to their mastery of the grammar and vocabulary of that language may still lack pragmatic competence; in other words, they may still be unable to produce language that is socially and culturally appropriate. In cross-cultural communication, refusals are known as ‘striking points’ for many non-native speakers (Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliz-Weltz 1990). Refusals can be tricky speech acts to perform linguistically and psychologically since the possibility of offending the interlocutor is inherent in the act itself (Know, 2004). As a face-threatening act, a sensitive pragmatic task and high pragmatic competence concern constructing refusals. As a failure to refuse appropriately can risk the interpersonal relations of the speakers, refusals usually include various strategies to avoid offending one’s interlocutors. However, the choice of these strategies may vary across languages and cultures. For example, in refusing invitations, offers and suggestions, gratitude was regularly expressed by American English speakers, but rarely by Egyptian Arabic speakers (Nelson, Al-batal, and Echols, 1996). When Mandarin Chinese speakers wanted to refuse requests, they expressed positive opinion (e.g., ‘I would like to….’) much less frequently than American English since Chinese informants were concerned that if they ever expressed positive opinions, they would be forced to comply (Liao and Bressnahan, 1996).

**Related Literature**

Several major investigations into the speech act of refusing have been conducted by (Beebe, 1985; Beebe et al., 1985; Beebe and Takahashi, 1987) cited in Wolfson (1989). The finding of their study (Beebe et al., 1985) demonstrates that Japanese learners of English manifest sociolinguistic transfer in refusals by the sequencing of formulas for refusing the actual frequency in use of formulas, and their specific content. One significant finding was that the status of the addressee is a much stronger conditioning factor in the speech of Japanese speaking both in English and in their native language. An example of the related differences status in the behavior of the Japanese is that, unlike English speaking Americans, they did not apologize or
express regret in responses to those of lower position. Additional evidence of status-related differences is manifested in the Japanese responses to invitations from higher-as opposed to lower-status interlocutors. In contrast, Americans in these situations make a distinction along the lines of social distance by responding in a brief and unelaborated fashion to both higher- and lower-status unequal while offering much longer and more detailed responses to peers. In their analysis of strategies for refusing, they classify refusals into direct and indirect refusals. Direct refusals such as “I refuse” or “no” were found to be used by Americans mainly in response to intimates and status unequal or strangers. Indirect refusals, used by Americans primarily to acquaintances of equal status, included three major strategies which were usually found to be used in sequence at the beginning of a refusal. These were (1) an expression of positive opinion such as “I’d like to,” (2) an expression of regret such as “I’m sorry,” and excuse, reason, or explanation such as “My children will be home that night” or “I have a headache”. Other strategies included a statement expressing a wish to be able to comply with the request, the statement of an alternative, a condition for future or past acceptance (e.g., “If you had asked me earlier....”), a promise of future acceptance (e.g., “I’ll do it next time”), a statement of principle (e.g., “I never do business with friends”), a statement of philosophy (e.g., “One can’t be too careful”), an attempt to dissuade the interlocutor, a criticism of the request, a request for empathy, a statement letting the interlocutor off the hook (e.g., “Don’t worry about it”), self-defense (e.g., “I’m doing my best”), an unspecific or indefinite reply, a display of lack enthusiasm, and verbal or nonverbal avoidance such as silence or a topic switch, a hedge, or a joke. In another study of refusals as made by Japanese ESL learners at two levels of proficiency, Takahashi and Beebe (1987) found that low and high proficiency learners differed in the order and frequency of semantic formulas they use.

The lower proficiency learners were also more direct in their refusals than higher-level ESL learners. To investigate the evidence of pragmatic transfer in Japanese ESL learners’ refusals, Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz (1990) compared refusal strategies used by Japanese ESL learners to those used by Americans. They also tested the differences in the order, frequency, and content of semantic formulas used by Japanese and Americans. They found evidence of transfer in all three areas (Beebe et al., 1990). Chen (1996) used semantic formula to analyze speech act sets of refusal (refusing requests, invitations, offers and suggestions) produced by American
and Chinese speakers of English. She found that direct refusal was not a common strategy for any of the subjects, regardless of their language background.

There are few empirical studies on speech act behavior involving the Arabic language or even native speakers of Arabic. Umar (2004) studied the request strategies as used by Advanced Arab learners of English as a foreign language as compared to those strategies used by British native speakers of English. He found that the two groups adopted similar strategies when addressing their request to equals or people in higher positions. In this case, the subjects rely heavily on conventionally indirect strategies. However, when requests are addressed to people in lower positions the Arabic sample shows a marked tendency towards using more direct request strategies in performing their request than the British sample.

El-Shazly (1993) studies the request strategies in American English, Egyptian Arabic, and English as spoken by Egyptian second language learners. The results of this study have indicated that there are differences in the requesting strategies used by these groups. The Arab speakers of English demonstrate a high tendency towards using conventional indirectness which depends on the use of interrogatives. Modifiers are also examined among the groups. No differences are found with respect to use of “Upgraders”. “Downgraders”, however, are found to be more frequently used by native Arabic speakers. They display a noticeable tendency to use more than one downgrader in a single utterance. This group is also found to be unique in using religious expressions as downgraders.

Al-Shawali (1997) studies the semantic formulas used by Saudi and American male Undergraduate students in the speech act of refusal. The finding of his study shows that Americans and Saudis use similar refusal formulas except in the use of direct refusal. Saudi and Americans also differ in the use of semantic formulas in the content of their refusals; Saudis are found to use avoidance strategies (e.g., postponement and hedge) or they give unspecified answers.

This is a sociolinguistic study into the speech act of refusal. This study investigates the strategies of refusal as used by the following subject groups:
-Yemeni learners of English, (YLEs)
-Yemeni native speakers of Arabic, (YANSs), and
-American native speakers of English (AENSs)

The intention is to elicit the pragmatic performance of the YLEs as compared to those of YANSs and AENSs. By tackling the used semantic formulas with its orders and
contents in constructing the refusals styles, this study is intended to address the following questions:

1- When YELs perform the speech act of refusal, are their refusal strategies similar to those used by native speakers of English, AENSs?

2- Does pragmatic transfer occur when YELs make refusals in English?

In this study some of the situations in Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz’s Discourse completion Test (1996) have been reproduced.

Method
Subjects
The participants were 30 graduate students divided to three groups as following:
- Twenty Yemeni native speakers of Arabic (YANSs),
- Twenty Yemeni learners of English (YELs), and
- Twenty Americans native speakers of English (AENSs)

The study included only male subjects because it was conducted abroad, in Delhi, in a context with very few females. The written role-playing questionnaire consists of six situations. The questionnaire on refusal was divided into four categories: refusals to (1) requests, (2) invitations, (3) offers, and (4) suggestions. In each case, the questionnaire was designed so that one refusal will be made to someone of higher status, lower status, or a status equal. The responses of the three groups will be compared to each other to find out to what extent the YELs manipulate their pragmatic competence of the target language to refuse in English.

Procedure
All the subjects were asked to fill out a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) (Appendix A). The DCT is a form of questionnaire depicting some natural situations to which the respondents are expected to respond making refusals. This test was originally designed by Blum-Kulka in 1982 and has been widely used since then in collecting data on speech acts realization both within and across language groups. The questionnaire used in this investigation involves six written situations. They were divided into four groups: two requests, two invitations, one offer and one suggestion. Each type included a status differential: higher, equal, or lower (Appendix B). Each situation could only be answered by a refusal. For the YANSs, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic with the necessary changes in the names of people and places to make them more familiar with the situations.
Data Analysis
The data collected through the Discourse-Completion-Test are analyzed. The analysis was based on an independent examination of each response. The same semantic formulas as employed by Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz (Appendix C) are used. For example, if a respondent refused an invitation to a friend’s house for dinner, saying “I’m sorry, I already have plans. Maybe next time,” this was coded as: [expression of regret] [excuse] [offer of alternative] (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz 1990, p.57). I then coded the order of semantic formulas used in each refusal. In the above example, [expression of regret] was first, [excuse] second, and [offer of an alternative] third (ibid). The total number of semantic formulas of any kind used for each situation was obtained for each of the three subject groups. Then, I counted the frequency of each formula for each situation and listed them. Finally, the similarities between YANSs and YELs responses and the similarities between YELs and AENSs on the other hand were counted and analyzed.

Discussion of the Results

Table (1) typical order of Semantic Formulas in Refusals of Request

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YA</td>
<td>excuse (6) can’t (6) positive opinion (2)</td>
<td>future acceptance (2) excuse (3) alternative (2)</td>
<td>regret (2)</td>
<td>can’t (4) excuse (8) can’t (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YE</td>
<td>excuse (2) positive opinion (2) regret (4) pause filler (12)</td>
<td>can’t (8) positive opinion (2) future acceptance (2) regret (2) excuse (6)</td>
<td>regret (2) future acceptance (2)</td>
<td>excuese (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AE</td>
<td>positive opinion (6) regret (14)</td>
<td>positive opinion (2) can’t (4)</td>
<td>excuse (8)</td>
<td>can’t (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the three groups used excuses in their refusals of requests. The order in which excuse was used is not the same. It varied according to the social status of the requester as in the analysis in tables (1 & 2).
According to the data in table (1) the responses of all groups YANSs, YELs, and AENSs slightly differ in the order of the semantic formulas. YANSs used excuses in the first and the second positions of the semantic formulas; the YELs used excuses in all positions, whereas AENSs used excuses only in the third position. In higher status, the YANSs refusals tended to be more direct than the other two groups. Three responses by the YANSs included direct refusal “can’t” in the first position. The other two groups preferred to use the direct form of refusal “can’t” in the second positions by YELs and in fourth position by AENSs. On the other hand, YELs and mostly AENSs used regret “sorry” to start their refusal styles. YANSs tended to be briefer than the other two groups who extended their strategies to three and sometimes four parts.

Table (2) typical order of Semantic Formulas in Refusals of Request

Refuser status=lower

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YA</td>
<td>excuse (12)</td>
<td>Future acceptance (2)</td>
<td>excuse (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>positive opinion (6)</td>
<td>can’t (8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>regret (2)</td>
<td>regret (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YE</td>
<td>regret (16)</td>
<td>can’t (8)</td>
<td>excuse (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>excuse (2)</td>
<td>excuse (10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>empathy (2)</td>
<td>future acceptance (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AE</td>
<td>regret (14)</td>
<td>excuse (8)</td>
<td>alternative (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>positive opinion (2)</td>
<td>alternative (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>excuse (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>empathy (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In table (2) where the refuser has a lower status, the YELs showed a mixture of pragmatic transfer and pragmatic competence. Pragmatic transfer occurred by the use of the direct refusal “can’t” in the second position by four respondents in each group i.e., YANSs and YELs. On the other hand, none of the AENSs responses included direct refusal in any position of the semantic formula. But in the first position we have something different. From the results in table 2, we find that regret “I’m sorry” was used by most of the YELs and AENSs respondents. This means that the YELs have used the same refusal strategies of the AENSs in refusal. Again with excuse expression, while the YANSs used this expression in the first position, we find that
both of YELs and AENSs postponed their excuses to the second position which gives another hint of pragmatic competence of the YELs.

Table (3) typical order of Semantic Formulas in Refusals of Invitations

Refuser status=Higher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Order of semantic formulas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>excuse (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>positive opinion (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YE</td>
<td>regret (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>positive opinion (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pause filler (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AE</td>
<td>positive opinion (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>regret (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gratitude (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“no” (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>empathy (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the results in table (3) YELs and AENSs tended to be more similar by using the expression of regret “I’m sorry” in the first position, excuse in the second position and extended their excuse expressions to the third position of their refusal styles. The YANSs did not use any form of regret in their refusal at all. They tried to show politeness through excuse in the first and second positions which is indirect refusal. In comparison of the YELs responses among those of YANSs and AENSs, we find that they tried to follow the strategies used by AENSs rather than their native counterparts. The researcher assumes here that the use of “excuse” and not “regret” by the YANSs respondents in refusing and invitation is yielded to the sociocultural norms of the community. Again the YELs give more inclinations of L2 pragmatic competence.

Table (4) typical order of Semantic Formulas in Refusals of Invitations

Refuser status=Equal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Order of semantic formulas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>excuse (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>regret (10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Iranian EFL Journal, February 2008 Vol. 1
When they are in equal status, YELs tended to use their native speech community norms of refusal. Table (4) shows that YANSs and YELs usually use the same content and order of the semantic formula when refusing invitations by peers. However; YANSs’ responses in this situation were somehow unique. For example, the over use of excuse by some respondents such as “I’m busy, I have to visit my parents” or “Oh, I’m tied up. I have an appointment with my doctor”. Sometimes YANSs were vague with their interlocutors of the same status. For example, “Tomorrow I have something to do” or “Sorry, next Sunday I’ll be busy”. Generally speaking, in equal status all the three groups have more similarities than in the other status. They might share some of the sociocultural norms.

Table (5) typical order of Semantic Formulas in Refusals of Suggestions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Order of semantic formulas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YA</td>
<td>positive opinion (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>future acceptance (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>excuse (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>regret (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YE</td>
<td>no (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>regret (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>excuse (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>negative willingness (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gratitude (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AE</td>
<td>excuse (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no (8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again in equal status, all the three groups YANSs, YELs and AENSs tended to use the same strategies for refusal. They used ‘excuse’ expressions in the first and second positions without differences, neither in the content nor in the order of the semantic formula. “No” the direct refusal expression was also used by all the groups in the first
positions and almost by the same number of respondents. Four YELs used their native norms to express ‘regret’ as YANSs did so. Expression of ‘gratitude’ for example, “thank you” appeared in all positions but in different order.

Table (6) typical order of Semantic Formulas in Refusals of Offer

Refuser status=Lower

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Order of semantic formulas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YA</td>
<td>excuse (6) regret (6) title (6) can’t (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YE</td>
<td>regret (10) appreciation (4) pause filler (4) excuse (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AE</td>
<td>regret (12) positive opinion (4) excuse (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In table (6) where the refuser is of lower status rejected an offer by his boss, higher status., the content, order, and frequency of the semantic formula varied from one group to another. The main finding here is that the responses of the YANSs contain the direct refusal “can’t” in different orders. On the other side, some of the YANSs used the title “Sir”, with their interlocutors as a reference to the latter’s superiority as a politeness illusion. Sometimes the YANSs, extended their excuses in two positions as explained in table (4). From the results in table (6) we find that YELs and AENSs tended to use the same styles of refusal by avoiding directness. However; there are similarities among the three groups. Most of the respondents started their refusals using ‘regret’ expression “I’m sorry”, in the first position and then they gave their explanations or reasons in the second and sometimes third position.

**Conclusion**

Different cultures have different perceptions and interpretations of appropriateness and politeness. This study is a contribution to cross-cultural understanding in that it identifies cross-cultural and linguistic differences between Yemeni Arabic native speakers and American English native speakers in the speech act of refuse. Learners
of a second language and in an advanced level of their performance of the target language are highly assumed to share some of the two languages’, i.e., native language and target language, norms of appropriateness and politeness. From this study, it appeared that both of pragmatic transfer and pragmatic competence occurred by the YELs. That was occurred in their refusal strategies according to their social status in the situation, higher, equal, or lower and according to the situation itself, a request, an offer, an invitation or a suggestion. Generally speaking, all the three groups participated in this study mostly used similar strategies of politeness in rejecting offers, invitations, requests, and suggestions except in the higher status of refuser. We find that YANSs used ‘excuse’ in the first position of the semantic formula in rejecting an invitation of lower status. On the other hand, neither YELs nor AENSs used the same expression in the first position which gives inclinations of the L2 pragmatic competence of the YELs. YELs and AENSs tended to use similar contents and orders of the semantic formula. They used ‘regret’ expressions “I’m sorry” or ‘positive opinion’ “It’s nice of you to invite us” in the first position, and ‘excuse’ or ‘regret’ in the second and third positions.

The less use of direct refusal “no” or “can’t” in the first position by all the three groups refers to the same perception of adopting politeness strategies. They tended to be more direct with peers in rejecting their suggestions. However; YANSs used direct refusal style in the first position when they are in higher status. Hints of pragmatic transfer appeared in the lower status situation of the refuser. There we find the use of direct refusal expressions in the first position followed by statements of excuse in the second and third positions of the refusal semantic formula.

The main finding of the study is that the subject in question, YELs, afforded enough indications of pragmatic competence of the target language. English Grammatical accuracy of the YELs was not examined as the main concern of the present study was the sociolinguistic behavior of the subjects.

**References**


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**Appendix A**

Discourse Completion Test (DCT)

**Instruction:** Please read the following 12 situations. After each situation you will be asked to write a response in the blank after “you.” Respond as you would be in actual conversation.

1. You are the owner of a bookstore. One of your best workers asks to speak to you in private.
   
   **Worker:** as you know. I’ve been here just over a year now, and I know you’ve been pleased with my work. I really enjoy working here, but to be honest, I really need an increase in pay.
   
   **You:** __________________________________________________________
   
   **Worker:** then I guess I’ll have to look for another job.

2. You are the president of a printing company. A salesman from a printing machine company invites you to one of the most expensive restaurants in New York.
   
   **Salesman:** we have met several times to discuss your purchase of my company’s product. I was wondering if you would like to be my guest at Lutece in order to firm up a contract.
You:

Salesman: Perhaps another time.

3. You’re at a friend’s house watching TV. He/She offers you a snack.
You: Thanks, but no thanks. I’ve been eating like a pig and I feel just terrible. My clothes don’t even fit me.
Friend: Hey, why don’t you try this new diet I’ve been telling you about.
You:

Friend: You should try it anyway.

4. A friend invites you to dinner, but you really can’t stand this friend’s husband/wife.
Friend: how about coming over for dinner Sunday night? We’re having a small dinner party.
You:

Friend: O.K., maybe another time.

5. You’ve been working in an advertising agency now for some time. The boss offers you a raise and promotion, but it involves moving. You don’t want to go.
Today, the boss calls you into his office.
Boss: I’d like to offer you an exclusive position in our new office in Hicktown. It’s a great town-only 3 hours from here by plane. And, a nice raise comes with the position.
You:

Boss: Well, maybe you should give it more thought before turning it down.

6. You are at the office in a meeting with your boss. It is getting close to the end of the day and you want to leave work.
Boss: If you don’t mind, I’d like you to spend an extra hour or two tonight so that we can finish up this work.
You:

Boss: That’s too bad. I was hoping you could stay.
Appendix B

Classification of Discourse Completion Test (DTC)
Stimulus According to Status of Refuser

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stimulus type</th>
<th>Refuser Status (relative to interlocutor)</th>
<th>DCT item</th>
<th>situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Request</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>#12</td>
<td>Stay late at night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request</td>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Request raise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invitation</td>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>#10</td>
<td>Dinner at friend’s house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invitation</td>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>#3</td>
<td>Fancy restaurant (bribe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>#11</td>
<td>Promotion with move to small town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestion</td>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Try a new diet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix C

Classification of Refusals

I- Direct

A. Performative (e.g., “I refuse”)
B. Nonperformative statement
   1. “No”
   2. Negative willingness/ability (“I can’t.” “I won’t.” “I don’t think so.”)

II- Indirect

A. Statement of regret (e.g., “I’m sorry…”, “I feel terrible…”)
B. Wish (e.g., “I wish I could help you….”)
C. Excuse, reason, explanation (e.g., “My children will be home that night.”; “I have a headache.”)
D. Statement of alternative
   1. I can do X instead of Y (e.g., “I’d rather do…””I’d prefer”)
   2. Why don’t you do X instead of Y (e.g., “Why don’t you ask someone else?”)
E. Set condition for future or past acceptance (e.g., “If you had asked me earlier, I would have…”)
F. Promise of future acceptance (e.g., “I’ll do it next time”;” I promise I’ll…” or “Next time I’ll…”- using “will” of promise or “promise”)
G. Statement of principle (e.g., “I never do business with friends.”)
H. Statement of philosophy (e.g., “One can’t be too careful.”)
I. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor
   1. Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester (e.g., “I won’t be any fun tonight” to refuse an invitation)
2. Guilt trip (e.g., waitress to customers who want to sit a while: “I can’t make a living off people who just order coffee.”)
3. Criticize the request/requester, etc. (statement of negative feeling or opinion); insult/attack (e.g., “Who do you think you are?”; “That’s a terrible idea!”)
4. Request for help, empathy, and assistance by dropping or holding the request.
5. Let interlocutor off the hook (e.g., “Don’t worry about it.” “That’s okay.” “You don’t have to.”)
6. Self-defense (e.g., “I’m trying my best.” “I’m doing all I can.”)

J. Acceptance that functions as a refusal
   1. Unspecific or indefinite reply
   2. Lack of enthusiasm

K. Avoidance
   1. Nonverbal
      a. Silence
      b. Hesitation
      c. Do nothing
      d. Physical departure
   2. Verbal
      a. Topic switch
      b. Joke
      c. Repetition of part of request, etc. (e.g., “Monday?”)
      d. Postponement (e.g., “I’ll think about it.”)
      e. Hedging (e.g., “Gee, I don’t know.” “I’m not sure.”)

Adjuncts to refusals
   1. Statement of positive opinions/feeling or agreement (“That’s a good idea...”; “I’d love to...”)
   2. Statement of empathy (e.g., “I realize you are in a difficult situation.”)
   3. Pause filler (e.g., “uhh”; “well”; “uhm”)
   4. Gratitude/appreciation
The Relationship between Syntactic Clustering of Obligatory/Null Subject Parameters and Proficiency Levels in L2 Acquisition: New Evidence from a Grammaticality Judgment Test

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University of Isfahan

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Abstract
This action research investigates Persian learners’ clustering acquisition of overt obligatory subjects and PRO in infinitival clauses in English as L2. In L1 acquisition research, the correlations between superficially unrelated linguistic phenomena are analyzed in terms of clustering effects. For instance, in German L1 acquisition, there is evidence for a clustering acquisition of subject-verb agreement and the decrease of (incorrect) null subjects (Clahsen and Hong, 1995). The developmental connection between these two phenomena in L1 acquisition has been interpreted as clustering appearance of syntactic properties of non-pro condition. Thus, the present research will report on a grammaticality judgment test (GJT) investigating the clustering appearance of obligatory overt subjects and PRO in infinitival clauses in 60 Persian learners of English divided into three proficiency levels, each level consisting of ten early starters and ten late starters. Our main finding is that the two phenomena covary in the Persian learners indicating that properties of overt obligatory subjects and PRO in infinitival clauses are acquired through parameter resetting, rather than separately. Moreover, we observed no difference between the performance of early and late starters with respect to clustering acquisition of the above linguistic variables.
Keywords: clustering effects, developmental correlations, finite clauses, infinitival clauses, non-finite clauses, null subject, obligatory overt subject, parameter (re)setting, parametric variation, PRO

Introduction

The idea that adult L2 acquisition might be similar in nature to child L1 development was one of the starting points for the systematic investigation of L2 acquisition in the 1970s. At that time a number of researchers (Dulay et al., 1982) observed that L2 learners systematically pass through developmental stages, similarly to what had been found for children acquiring their mother tongue (Brown, 1973). It was concluded that L1 and L2 acquisition are parallel in major ways; the extent of the parallelism, however, was controversial.

Several L2 acquisition researchers have taken the stance that L2 learners have access to clustering acquisition of the syntactic systems in much the same way as children learners of L1 do (Schwartz and Sprouse, 1994). But, despite the accumulation of new data and models in recent years, it has proved difficult to resolve this question (Clahsen and Muysken, 1989). So, concerning clustering acquisition of L2 syntax, two approaches are discussed most extensively in current research:

1. The strong clustering hypothesis: In L2 acquisition, there are developmental correlations between superficially unrelated linguistic phenomena which are analyzed in terms of clustering effects.

2. The weak clustering hypothesis: In L2 acquisition, the parametric properties are acquired separately from one another, rather than through clustering appearance.

The two approaches make different predictions for grammatical phenomena that fall under UG parameters, and one way of empirically testing them involves three requirements. Firstly, two grammatical phenomena (A and B) which are connected in a UG parameter (P) must be investigated where A is the trigger for the clustering acquisition of B. Secondly, L1 acquisition research should have demonstrated that A and B developmentally correlate, which can be explained in terms of developmental clustering. Thirdly, to rule out transfer effects, it seems necessary to find a group (G) of L2 learners who do not have A and B in their native language. If, under these three conditions, one would demonstrate that the two grammatical phenomena (A and B)
developmentally coincide in that group, parallel to what has been found for child L1 learners, then this parallelism would indicate that the process of clustering effects is operative both in L1 and in L2 acquisition, thus supporting the strong clustering view. If, however, the acquisition of A and B in the group does not co-occur under the three conditions mentioned above, then we have reason to believe that L2 learners acquire A and B separately from one another and that clustering appearance is not functioning in L2 learners in the same way as in child L1 learners (Clahsen and Hong, 1995).

This article is structured as follows. We will first briefly describe the major differences between Persian and English with respect to obligatory/null subjects and infinitival clauses. We then summarize results from the previous studies. We next go on to formulate the research questions and hypotheses as well as to explain the method of the present study. Finally, the findings and results will be discussed to come up with some conclusions and pedagogical implications.

**Obligatory/Null Subjects**

Persian is a pro-drop language which allows empty subjects in main and embedded clauses. These empty arguments are identified by inflectional suffixes. In Rizzi’s (1986) theory of pro, two parameters are hypothesized to account for the distribution of empty subjects: 1. licensing of pro, and 2. identification/recovery of the content of pro. The licensing of the empty subject can be accomplished through government by inflection or agreement. In English which is a non-pro-drop language, inflectional possibilities do not license pro; whereas in Persian, German, and Italian it does. The following examples will clarify the differences between Persian and English:

1. pro Arabi harf mizanad ama nemidan-am dar cheh sathi. (pro in main clause)
   S/he Arabic speech hits but don’t know I at which level.
   (S/he speaks Arabic but I don’t know the level.)
2. Modir-e madreseh goft ke hala pro dar kelas hast-and. (pro in embedded clause)
   The principal of school said that now in class are they.
   (The principal said that they are in class now.)
3. Har mah che ghadr hoghogh pro migir-i? (pro in interrogative clause)
   Every month how much salary get you?
   (How much salary do you get every month?)
As illustrated in (1-3), inflectional resources like suffixes at the end of Persian verbs specify tense, person, number and nominative-case features. More specifically, the verb suffix ‘am’ in (1) indicates present tense, first person singular and nominative case; the verb suffix ‘and’ in (2) shows present tense, third person plural and nominative case; finally the verb suffix ‘i’ in (3) conveys past tense, second person singular and nominative case. The empty category in specIP of such clauses as above, in fact, is a null pronoun bearing Nominative case which is typical of subject-less pro-drop languages such as Persian. Whereas, in English that is a non-pro language the same syntactic properties as person, number and case are specified through overtly independent resources like subject pronouns.

Infinitival Clauses

There are some interesting differences between Persian and English in the realization of non-finite clauses. Whereas English licenses non-finite clauses, Persian complement clauses are all finite. That is, the verb in - Root clauses inflects for Person / Number and Tense. These features are manifested in terms of inflectional suffixes:

1. *pro* Tasmim gereftand *pro* khaneh ghadimi ra be-foroosh-and.
   They decision took house old-Acc Sub sell they.
   (They decided PRO to sell the old house.)
2. *pro* Talash kardam ke *pro* yak moalem englisi shav-am.
   I effort made that one teacher English become I.
   (I tried PRO to become an English teacher.)
3. Ali ghol dad ke *pro* beravad.
   Ali promise gave that go he.
   (Ali promised PRO to go.)

The distribution of PRO in English was normally assumed to be restricted by the principle A of the Binding Theory: PRO is ungoverned, allowing PRO to appear in the subject of non-finite clauses (1-3) as there is no governor for this position. There are several reasons (Radford, 1998) to believe that there really is a subject in infinitive clauses, which is ‘invisible’. Put more technically, there is an element in subject position of infinitive clauses which is not visible in the phonetic representation of the
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clause. While in Persian, all verb complements (1-3) other than NP and PP are tensed CPs. In fact, Persian complement clauses do not instantiate INFL specifications such as [-finite], [-tense], [+null case], [-person], and [-number] found in English for PRO.

Theoretical Background
Certain theoretical hypotheses have been adopted on the nature of the ability to process the linguistic input with respect to L2 acquisition (Brown, 1973; Bloom et al. 1975; Clahsen & Hong, 1995; Carroll, 2001; Hulstijn, 2002; Gregg, 2003). Yet, a close investigation of them would reveal a controversial issue about how language learners manage to re-set parametric variations of different domains of target system in real life situations. A number of SLA researchers (Epstein, et al., 1993b) argue for a strong UG or Full Access Hypothesis (FAH) claiming that UG in its entirety constraints language acquisition. While a second group of psycholinguists (Felser & Roberts, 2004) support a weak UG or Fundamental Difference Hypothesis (FDH) claiming that L2 acquisition is governed by cognitive faculties that are distinct from the domain-specific language faculty termed as UG. In fact, the latter group attributes the empirical differences between child and adult language processing to other factors such as the child's limited memory span and cognitive resources. Along similar line(s), they believe that some striking differences exist between non-native (adult L2) and native speakers in terms of sentence processing. They suggest that these differences can be explained by presupposing that the syntactic representations computed by L2 learners during comprehension are shallower and less detailed compared to those of native speakers.

Research evidence from English L1 acquisition confirms an initial stage of omitting subjects and inflections (Gregg, 2003). Epstein (1998) reports developmental relationship between some tense inflections and obligatory subjects. Clahsen and Hong (1995) also claim that in German L1 acquisition, there is evidence for a clustering appearance of subject-verb agreement and the use of obligatory subjects. Youhanaee (2004) also reports that he could find some properties associated with the null-subject parameter such as V-S constraint and subject-verb agreement cluster developmentally in L1 acquisition by Persian-speaking children before the age of 6.

As for L2 acquisition, research has resulted in controversial findings and conflicting suggestions with respect to the clustering effects of syntactic variables. Hilles (1991) found statistically significant correlations between inflectional suffixes and the
increase of overt pronominal subjects in some of the Spanish learners of English. The reliability of Hilles’ findings, yet, may be criticized as the role of L1 transfer is not clear in her study. Along similar line(s), Vainikka and Young-Scholten (1994) carried out a research on developmental clustering effects in the acquisition of German by 6 Korean and 11 Turkish learners. The findings indicate that the acquisition of subject-verb-agreement paradigm is developmentally correlated to the correct obligatory subjects at advanced (stage 3) level. They further conclude that what they found in the acquisition of German as L2 is parallel to what has been found in German child language acquisition. However, since this correlation is what they could observe just for advanced learners, it might be logically argued that the two linguistic structures appeared in the learners as a result of their separate learning rather than developmental clustering effects.

On the other hand, certain studies have suggested counterarguments against the clustering effects in L2 acquisition. Lakshmanan (1991) carried out a longitudinal study on null subjects and subject-verb agreement in the performance of three learners of English with different L1 backgrounds. The results show that the development of correct use of obligatory subjects is not well accompanied by using correct subject-verb-agreement paradigm. Moreover, Clahsen and Hadler (2004) carried out an experimental study to evaluate the clustering effects of null subjects and subject-verb agreement in 33 Korean learners of German as L2. The reaction time (RT) software recorded the subjects’ grammatical judgments as well as the time spent on each item. The results indicated that 20 subjects did not demonstrate good correlations of the two linguistic phenomena, in fact, they acquired either just one of them or none. Meanwhile, 13 subjects connected the two phenomena indicating that they had acquired both of them. In spite of their findings, the researchers conclude that the correlations of the phenomena do not provide sufficient evidence for the clustering effects.

Start Age of L2 Acquisition
The most popular theory connecting age factor to second language development refers to the ‘Critical Period Hypothesis’ (CPH) initially based on the claims of Penfield and Roberts (1959) and further developed by Lenneberg (1967). There are different interpretations of the CPH with respect to second language, nevertheless, most of
them agree on the assumption that after the onset of puberty it would be impossible for the learner to have access to target competence at the level of a native speaker. While experts commonly believe in a ‘critical period’ for developing one’s first language, there has been extensive discussion about the role of such a period for a second language so that it has changed into a controversial issue. As a result, in the last few decades a number of important studies were carried out on the CPH and second language acquisition. Scovel (2000) reports that during the 1980s SLA researchers’ interest swung away from CPH. This shift of opinion was brought about as a reaction to the negative evaluation of early L2 learning at school (Burstall et al., 1974) indicating that what early starters had gained at primary school was largely lost within a few years at secondary school. However, it seems that in recent years SLA practitioners have begun a second round of studies on the relationship between various aspects of L2 competence such as syntax and CPH (Singleton and Lengyel, 1995).

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

1. Do clustering effects of null and overt obligatory parameters appear in the interlanguage of Persian learners of English?

2. Is the emergence of clustering effects of parameters of null/overt obligatory subjects observed at all levels of L2 proficiency?

3. Is there a significant relationship between the start age of L2 acquisition and the clustering learning of parameters of null/overt obligatory subjects?

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference between English natives and Persian L2 learners in terms of linguistic knowledge of parameters of null/obligatory subjects.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no relationship between the L2 proficiency levels and the clustering of null/overt obligatory subject parameters.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is no relationship between the start age of L2 acquisition and the clustering effects of null/overt obligatory subject parameter.

**Research Design and Methodology**
Participants
The present study includes a total of 60 university freshman students who are majoring in Persian literature, social sciences, management, psychology and law in Guilan University. They were randomly selected based on the information received from the results of a proficiency TOEFL test administered to 750 students in the Faculty of Humanities in Guilan University. Subsequently, based on the results of a questionnaire distributed among the population, 30 students with an early start age and 30 students with a late start age were selected and divided into three main groups. In this study we refer to them as pre-intermediate (TOEFL scores ranging from 350 to 400), intermediate (TOEFL scores ranging from 400 to 450) and post-intermediate (TOEFL scores ranging from 450 to 500). Each main group is composed of two sub-groups of different start-age of L2 acquisition. The first half, or the early starters, whose start age varies from 5 to 7 were initially exposed to English in a private language institute or in the Primary School. The other half consists of late starters to learn English whose start age varies from 12 to 13. The late starters were first exposed to English in grade 1 or 2 in the Guidance school. Moreover 10 native speakers of English, between 24 to 49 years old, took part in this study as the control group. Furthermore, a one-way ANOVA was computed on the results of the TOEFL test. The value of F observed in the ANOVA equals 1471 which is significant at the probability level of .05.

Research Design
The present study adopts a causal-comparative design to compare three experimental groups of different proficiency levels (pre-intermediate, intermediate and post intermediate) with a control group of native speakers in terms of syntactic clustering of Obligatory/null subject parameters. Further analyses are computed to find out the differences between the early / late starters at different proficiency levels with respect to the clustering acquisition of obligatory/null subject parameters in English and their different performance on each linguistic variable.

Materials:
A GJT with 32 items was constructed containing 8 grammatical sentences for each possible combination of various types of English obligatory subjects including obligatory referential, quasi and expletive subjects in main/embedded clauses.
Example: Tom says that he usually goes to the students’ club.
Considering 8 ungrammatical counterpart items for the above-mentioned structures there would be a total of 16 items with respect to the first syntactic variable, namely overt obligatory subjects.

Example: * Do you have much time to continue or is to late?
Recall that infinitival clauses in English are non-finite structures without obligatory subject pronouns and tense or agreement inflections. This is in contrast to verb clauses in Persian which are finite structures with overt or inflected subjects. So, eight grammatical English sentences were constructed on infinitival clauses as well as eight ungrammatical counterpart sentences as illustrated by the following sentence pair.
Examples: They told John to invite his classmates.
- They want that change my job.

Also, 8 filler items were used to make sure that the participants were in fact performing the task accurately and then all of items were randomized. Each item is followed by three choices as G (Grammatical), U (Ungrammatical) and NS (Not Sure). One or zero points would be awarded depending on the correct judgment and correction of each item made by the testees. More specifically, the participants would receive one score for each correct judgment of Grammatical items. In the case of Ungrammatical sentences, the correct judgment should be followed by correction in order to gain the participants’ one score. They would not receive any score for choosing NS choice at all.

**Results**
In this section, the results of the data analyses are presented and tabulated as an attempt to find answers to our research questions. The results obtained from a TOEFL test and the GJ task used for Persian learners and English natives are presented in summary tables and graphs. The GJT contained 32 testing items representing two different syntactic properties namely obligatory subjects and infinitival clauses. The aim was to investigate whether the subjects who are from different proficiency levels and start-age have clustering knowledge in both or acquired just one of the properties. In the meantime, we administered a TOEFL test to divide the Persian learners into three proficiency levels of pre-intermediate, intermediate and post-intermediate.
Moreover, the subjects in each level are composed of equal number of early starters and late starters.

**Figure 1:** Mean percentage of all groups’ performance on grammaticality judgment test

![Figure 1: Mean percentage of all groups’ performance on grammaticality judgment test](image)

Figure 1 presents the results of the subjects' performance on GJT in terms of mean percentage. As illustrated, the two start-age groups in each proficiency level demonstrated similar performance on the task. The only exception is observed in the intermediate level. More specifically, the intermediate late starters received a mean percentage of 58, while their early-starter counterparts gained 48. The post-hoc Scheffe test indicates that this difference is significant at the level of .05 probability. As for the pre-intermediate level, the early starters could achieve slightly higher scores (28) than the pre-intermediate late starters (23). The two sub-groups in the post-intermediate level also performed almost equally with a difference of 3 percentage in the mean scores (72 for early starters vs. 75 for late starters). As it was expected, the English natives gained the highest score in GJT. In other words, they could achieve perfect mean percentage in the test. Another important point illustrated in the figure refers to the matching of the mean percentages on GJT of the groups' levels in a hierarchical order. Among the Persian learners the post-intermediate level received the highest mean score while the pre-intermediate level gained the lowest one and the intermediate level falls between. In the meantime, the English natives could obtain the highest mean score among all subjects.

**Figure 2:** Mean percentage of all groups’ performance on obligatory and null subjects
Figure 2 presents the performance of all groups on obligatory and null subjects. In the first place, the results show that the subjects of each proficiency level gained comparatively different scores on both variables. While the English natives could gain the highest scores on both phenomena, the post-intermediate group received the best scores among the Persian learners. Likewise, the intermediate group could get better result than the pre-intermediate group that gained the lowest scores. The figure also illustrates two symmetric columns representing the subjects' achievements on the two syntactic properties. This will, in turn, serve as a good piece of evidence for clustering appearance of the obligatory and null subjects in our study sample. Secondly, the achievements of the two start-age sub-groups indicate that there should be positive relationships between the two start-age sub-groups at all three proficiency levels.

More specifically it follows that the early and late starters at the pre-intermediate and post-intermediate levels performed almost equally well on GJT. However, at the post-intermediate level it is the other way round, that is post-intermediate late starters could perform better than their early counterparts. However, to know whether the difference between the sub-groups at the intermediate level is significant we would further need to analyze the data through ANOVA method.
## Table 1: The post-hoc Scheffe test for performance of the sub-groups on obligatory and null subjects

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<th>Std. Error</th>
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* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.
Table 1 shows the inter/intra level comparisons on their achievements in obligatory and null subjects. First of all, the results of a one-way ANOVA indicate that the Fs observed equal 147 and 274 for obligatory subjects and null subjects, respectively. They are both significant at the probability level of .05. In the second phase a post-hoc-Scheffe test (Table 1) revealed that all the start-age sub-groups are significantly different on obligatory subjects except for the following pairs: (a) pre-intermediate early and late starters (.507), (b) intermediate late and post-intermediate early starters (.21), and (c) post-intermediate early and late starters (.831). Likewise, the comparisons of the start-age sub-groups on null subjects indicate that they significantly differ except for the following pairs: (a) pre-intermediate early and late starters (.84), (b) intermediate early and late starters (.27), and (c) post-intermediate early and late starters (.1). So, here it would be legitimate to claim that there is a positive relationship between the two start-age sub-groups at each level based on their achievements for the obligatory subjects, on the one hand, and for the null subjects, on the other hand.

Table 2: The post-hoc Scheffe test for the performance of the main groups on obligatory and null subjects

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<th>Dependent Variable</th>
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<th>(J) Proficiency level</th>
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* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Table 2 illustrates the differences among the main groups of three different proficiency levels on the obligatory and null subjects. In the first step, a one-way ANOVA was computed and we found that the Fs observed equal to 162 and 834 for
obligatory and null subjects, respectively. Both of them are significant at the .05 probability level. Secondly, a post-hoc Scheffe test was administered and the results demonstrated that all main groups of different proficiency levels are significantly different from one another at the probability level of .05. This would serve to claim that the interlanguage of the Persian learners of English is totally dynamic in nature in spite of some sub-group differences concerning their achievements of the syntactic properties of L2.

**Discussion**

In the first place, we might argue that the acquisition of the two phenomena 'obligatory subjects' and 'null subjects' do in fact covary in L2 learners. The results of our GJT with Persian learners of English show that in these learners there is clustering effect between overt obligatory subjects and infinitival clauses. This is in agreement to what was found for child L1 acquisition as well as our control group in this study. Since this experiment is based on cross-sectional data, we can claim that these learners acquired the two linguistic variables at the same time rather than separately. In other words, the Persian learners of L2 in different groups demonstrated clustering appearance with respect to obligatory and null subjects. This may imply that L2 learners go through somehow similar processing mechanism to that of native speakers to the syntactic input of the target system. However, our finding that in Persian learners of English, the acquisition of the obligatory-subject parameter is crucially tied to the acquisition of the infinitival paradigm does not necessarily entail that this is the only way to acquire the L2 parameters. Since there is nothing that forces the relation to be a biconditional one, L2 learners might have full access to UG parameters, but simply use different triggers from those used by children to set L1 parameters.

Secondly, according to what we observed in this research, clustering acquisition happened for all three levels of L2 proficiency. This is demonstrated by correlational studies (Figure 2). The highest clustering was observed at the post-intermediate level while the lowest one belongs to the pre-intermediate level. In the meantime, the post-intermediate subjects received the highest mean score on GJT among the groups of Persian learners of L2. Accordingly, here we might argue that the post-intermediate subjects have access to other learning strategies as well as to clustering. Alternatively,
we might argue that some of the post-intermediate subjects may have gone through an earlier stage at which 'obligatory subjects' and 'infinitival clauses' have been fully linked. This means that our post-intermediate subjects must have lost one of these properties later in development. This possibility cannot be totally excluded, but it seems to be ad hoc, and additional considerations would be required to explain why, how and when those learners should have lost one of the two properties. Moreover, the evidence available from other L2 studies (see review of literature) does support the idea that the L2 learners' acquisition of obligatory subjects is developmentally connected with the correct use of verb forms.

Finally, according to the ANOVA data, the early and late starters of L2 acquisition in this study did not manifest significant differences with respect to obligatory subjects and infinitival clauses in the GJT. The only exception was attributed to the intermediate level in which the late starters could perform significantly better than their early-starter counterparts. More analyses indicate that the intermediate late starters gained more scores on both variables compared with the intermediate early starters. One possible justification would be that an early-start age cannot be regarded an advantage in L2 acquisition with respect to clustering acquisition.

**Conclusion and Implications**

We conducted a grammaticality judgment test (GJT) with Persian learners of English at three proficiency levels of pre-intermediate, intermediate and post-intermediate to examine the clustering acquisition of obligatory subjects and infinitival clauses. According to a questionnaire, half of the members in each group were the early-starters who started L2 learning at 5-7 years old and the other half were late-starters who started L2 learning at 12-13 years old. We found that the pre-intermediate learners acquired the two variables in clusters and there was no significant difference between the early and late starters. In the intermediate learners, the correlation showed almost perfect connection between the two variables. Moreover, the intermediate late starters gained significantly better achievement than their early-starter counterparts. Finally, the post-intermediate group acquired the obligatory subjects and infinitival clauses fully, and the correlational coefficient between them is almost high. We conclude that our results support the strong clustering view.
according to which processes such as parameter resetting are operative in L2 development.

Our findings may be relevant and applicable to the field of language teaching and useful to language teachers by deepening their understanding of the nature of L2 acquisition. As (far as) L1 acquisition is concerned, the Logical Problem Hypothesis (White, 1989, pp 4-5) offers a convincing argument as to how young children manage to have access to the complex system of their mother tongue within a short period of time. Along similar line(s), L1 research evidence has brought about a general consensus that children go through a psycholinguistic process of clustering effects resulting from setting a particular parameter of Universal Grammar. As for the process of L2 acquisition, certain theories have been formulated the most attractive of which are Full Access Model (FAM) or Strong Clustering View and Fundamental Difference Hypothesis (FDH) or Weak Clustering View. The results of the present study show that the learners at all proficiency levels somehow develop a systematic competence of English obligatory/null subject parameters during their language learning process. More specifically, our findings are in harmony with the view that adult and child L2 learning happens through clustering mechanism compatible with Strong Clustering Hypothesis, but with learners coming up with a system somehow different from that of native speakers.

Finally, another dimension of the present study deals with the start-age of L2 acquisition which can be of important implications for policy makers in our educational system in Iran. Age has always been a controversial issue and people often ask questions about the optimal age of L2 acquisition. Summaries of studies on age and rate of attainment in L2 (Krashen et al., 1982) confirm that older children and adults initially acquire many aspects of the L2 faster than younger children. While, with acquisition of pronunciation and influence of the socio-affective filter adults sometimes experience problems with second language acquisition. In general, it is hypothesized that younger acquirers tend to attain higher levels of proficiency in second languages than those who begin SLA as adults. At present, L2 learners in Iran formally start at the age of about 13 (the second grade in Guidance Schools. The present research indicates that in general there are no significant differences between the early and late starters with respect to the pattern of clustering acquisition of the target system in L2. The pedagogical implications, therefore, are that we do not need drastic changes concerning the present start age of L2 acquisition in our country.
References


**Appendix**

**Grammaticality Judgment Test (GJT)**

1. I left without giving an explanation.
2. Don’t you feel the house shaking?
3. Robert wondered what he to say.
4. I knew what wanted to do next.
5. Have you decided to answer the letter?
6. Yesterday sold the house at a very good price.
7. Mary will remember that she locking the door later.
8. They want to repair the broken chair I was sitting on.
9. They predicted that might snow heavily.
10. Who did Bill go to Paris that to visit?
11. This book is very interesting to read.
12. This will lead us to decide what follows.
13. Mary says that she often visits the museum.
14. Does John plan he studying in a university?
15. She types both fast and accurately.
16. The teacher cancelled the picnic to punish us.
17. Mary knows that should behave herself.
18. Preparing breakfast in a hurry burned the toast.
19. Is this the letter which arrived yesterday?
20. You had better to stay in bed with your cold.
21. We agreed that we waiting until next week.
22. What year was it when Islamic revolution happened in Iran?
23. John promised to be on time tomorrow.
24. Which candidate can you guess people will vote as president?
25. Did the lawyer agree helps the arrested man?
26. Do we have much time to continue or is it too late?
27. They seldom go to the movies.
28. I decided I changing my job.
29. To be invited at the party it was a great opportunity.
30. They prefer very much to go on a picnic.
31. From now and on I will study hard.
32. Susan wore a raincoat because was raining.
33. They told Smith to invite his classmates.
34. Chuck and Liza intend that marry very soon.
35. Usually is a TV set in every classroom.
36. The doctors advised her to take more rest.
37. What’s the cost of this watch?
38. Mary asked how writes a business letter.
39. Which book would you recommend reading?
40. They are trying hard to pass the exam.
The Key for Successful Reader-writer Interaction: Factors Affecting Reading Comprehension in L2 Revisited

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Bio Data:

Karim Sadeghi has a PhD in TEFL/TESOL (Language Testing) from the University of East Anglia in Norwich, UK. He is currently lecturing and researching in Urmia University, Iran. His contributions have appeared in the Asian EFL Journal, The Reading Matrix, Reading in a Foreign Language and Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy.

Abstract

Language comprehension in general and reading comprehension in particular are very complex processes, and in order to find out how readers manage to decode written symbols on the page, it seems imperative that the process underlying the activity and the variables underpinning the product of that process be scrutinised. There is an amazingly large body of literature and research on the issue of how the goal of comprehension is arrived at; however, there seems to be no systematic framework incorporating the vast array of factors involved in affecting the communication between the reader and the writer. The extract in the title from a university EFL learner’s comment during a final term-exam on Advanced Reading Skills in January 2008 at Urmia University (Iran) forces us to re-examine our conceptions about what it is that may contribute to arriving at comprehension and whether reading without comprehension may still be called reading. This paper is accordingly an attempt to provide a comprehensive framework for better appreciating the interplay of variables playing a part in the reader’s success to grasp the intended message, with a particular focus on EFL encounters.

Key words: reading comprehension, reader-writer interaction, L2 reading, TEFL/EFL/ESL

Background

Reading is one of the ‘most complex forms of information processing’ (Kolers, 1973, p. 29) and is probably the ‘most extensively researched’ language skill (Bachman,
2000, p. x). Reading can be claimed to date back to the invention of writing at least 5000 years ago (Orasanu & Penny, 1986, p. 1). Jennings (1982, p. 3) even asserts that ‘reading is older than printing or writing or even language itself.’ The complex processes involved in reading, however, remained largely uninvestigated until the mid-19th century (Vernon, 1984, p. 48).

Since then, different scholars have looked at the same entity from different angles and have reached somewhat different conclusions about the nature of reading. Discrepancy of views has partly been the result of the different purposes with which researchers have approached reading. While some have studied reading to uncover the underlying processes, others have tried to identify its sub-skills for teaching and testing purposes. Although many researchers have endeavoured to reveal its true nature, all attempts to do so have only partially been successful; and the literature on reading is lacking an organized model accounting for the success or failure of communication attempts between the text-producer and the receiver. The present paper, therefore, aims to help better understanding of reading through illustrating the intricate relationships which exist between so many variables affecting the success of the reader-writer interaction, namely reading comprehension.

Generally speaking, two factors may influence reading comprehension: internal and external. Internal factors, called reader variable here, refer to everything related to the reader such as his/her cognitive abilities and strategies, background knowledge, and affective characteristics. External factors, called text variable, context variable, and writer variable in this study, refer to all factors external to the reader. Text variable includes such elements as text modality and text-characteristics (lexical density, structural complexity, etc.). Context variable refers to all situational elements such as the time of reading and the place of reading, as well as the larger socio-economic context. Writer variable refers to the text-producer. Each variable is discussed in some detail in turn.

**Reader variable**

There is little dispute among researchers that the reader plays the central role in an act of reading. While the reader was once believed to be a passive receiver of information, he/she is now considered an active participant in a reading activity. The emphasis on the role of the reader, however, does not mean that other variables have no influence
on reading comprehension. Rather, the ultimate product is the result of interaction between the reader and other variables. Based mainly on the research and arguments of Goodman (1968; 1970; 1973) and Smith (1971; 1973a, b), it is now accepted unanimously that the reader contributes more than ‘the visual symbols on the page’ do (Grabe, 1991, p. 377). However, each reader’s contribution will be different from that of others because readers are different in their ‘shared knowledge, language skills, strategies ... and “other personal characteristics” ’ (Alderson, 2000, p. 128).

Although visual input is necessary for reading to take place, it is not enough for successful comprehension. Non-visual information, or what the reader already has, plays a major role (Smith, 1973a). This non-visual information, or what the brain imposes upon the eye (Smith & Holmes, 1973, p. 50), has generally been known as background knowledge. This knowledge, also referred to as content schemata (Singhal, 1998, p. 2), refers to one’s knowledge of the world, the culture, and the language. According to Anderson and Freebody (1981, p. 84) ‘background knowledge is crucial for reading comprehension.’ Johnston (1983, p. 30) distinguishes between qualitative and quantitative background knowledge. While the former refers to inappropriate background knowledge leading to a ‘completely inappropriate model of text meaning’ (p. 31), the latter refers to a reader’s lack of related background knowledge (e.g., a rural student reading about city metros). It has been shown that differences in background knowledge ‘may indeed account for a significant portion of variance in comprehension performances in normal reading situations’ (Jenkins & Pany, 1981, p. 167), and that such differences affect the ease or difficulty with which one understands a text (Singhal, 1998, p. 2).

In discussions on background knowledge, particular attention has been given to schema in organising and activating the reader’s background knowledge. Schema theory, which comes from cognitive psychology, owes much to the work of Bartlett (Rumelhart, 1981, p. 3) and Piaget (Orasanu & Penney, 1986, p. 6). Schemata, the plural form of schema, also called ‘building blocks of cognition’ (Rumelhart, 1981, p. 3), refer to ‘abstract knowledge structure[s] stored in memory’ (Garner, 1987, p. 4). In fact, ‘The role that background information plays in comprehension has been formalised in schema theory’ (Kitao & Kitao, 2000, p. 2). ‘According to schema theories all knowledge is packed into units … [which] are the schemata. Embedded in these packets of knowledge, in addition to the knowledge itself, is information about how this knowledge is to be used’ (Rumelhart, 1981, p. 4; Rumelhart, 1984, p. 2). In
schema theory, comprehension of a text involves activation of relevant schemata, which are initiated as a result of ‘bottom-up observation’ (Rumelhart, 1981, p. 18), and proceeds through a constant process of testing the activated schemata, evaluating their suitability, and refining or discarding them (Johnston, 1983, p. 17; Rumelhart, 1984, pp. 3, 6). The schemata or old information which ‘provide general “ideational scaffolding” for new information’ (Garner, 1987, p. 7) are activated to make new incoming information comprehensible. According to Alderson (2000, p. 17) schemata act as ‘filters’ for new information. Despite the fact that schema theory ‘is not a well-defined framework for the mental representation of knowledge’ (Grabe, 1991, p. 389), ‘it has been an extremely useful notion for describing how prior knowledge is integrated in memory and used in higher-level memory processes’ (p. 390).

A similar theory to schema, proposed mainly to account for learning, is ‘constructivism’. The theory of constructivism is generally attributed to Jean Piaget, who articulated mechanisms by which knowledge is internalized by learners. As its name implies, constructivism emphasises the building (i.e., constructing) that occurs in people's minds when they learn. Based on this theory, what a learner intakes depends more on what is already stored in that his/her brain than on what is actually read, heard or observed. In other words, every individual constructs a unique mental image by combining information in their heads with the information they receive using their senses. Proponents of this theory contend that human beings are not passive recipients of information; namely, learners actively take knowledge, connect it to previously assimilated knowledge and make it theirs by constructing their own interpretation (Cheek, 1992). A similar phenomenon may be claimed to take place while a reader is trying to decipher written symbols.

Singhal (1998, p. 2) distinguishes between three types of schema: content schema, which refers to one’s background or world knowledge; formal schema, also known as textual schema, which refers to one’s knowledge about a text’s organisational and rhetorical structure; and language or linguistic schema, which refers to one’s knowledge of lexicon, syntax, and semantics. The implication is that while L2 readers bring their L1 content and formal schema to L2 situations, they need to develop L2 language schema from the beginning.

Sometimes the existence of the relevant schema may distort rather than facilitate comprehension (Rumelhart, 1981, p. 21). The reason may be that they rely too much
upon what one might know. Lack of relevant schemata has also been reported to hinder comprehension. Studying 7-year-old pupils’ story comprehension, Rosowsky (2000, p. 46) reported that while all the pupils ‘unanimously “understood” the word “heroine” in a story they were reading … What they did not understand was how and why this class A drug had turned up in a story about heroes.’

A component of background knowledge, called cultural knowledge in this study, is responsible for distortions in reading comprehension as a result of a mismatch in L1 and L2 cultural schemata. Cultural knowledge gains importance when a reader reads a text with cultural elements with which he/she is less familiar. Steffenson, Joag-Dev and Anderson (1979) and Steffenson and Joag-Dev (1984) report that cultural knowledge differences between American and Indian readers led to different interpretations of texts about marriage in these cultures. Comparing Iranians and Americans on their comprehension of culturally-biased folklore stories, Johnson (1981, p. 169) found that ‘the cultural origin of the story had more effect on the comprehension of the ESL students than the level of syntactic and semantic complexity.’ Rosowsky’s (2000, p. 50) study with Asian bilingual students studying in the UK also revealed that reading comprehension was much influenced by ‘cultural bias’.

Accordingly, a beginning Iranian EFL learner may become puzzled on reading that Johnny goes to school on Fridays and that the school is closed on Saturdays and Sundays. The simple reason for this is that he/she uses his/her L1 cultural knowledge in understanding the text but since there is a mismatch between L1 and L2 situations in this regard, the attempt for comprehension fails. (In Iran, and many other Islamic counties, weekend days are Thursday and Friday, rather than Saturday and Sunday). Likewise the notion that the Iranian calendar week starts with the first weekday (Saturday), whereas in L2 situation (American culture) it starts with a weekend day (Sunday) rather than the first weekday, may cause some comprehension problems. Also an Iranian EFL learner reading texts about traffic regulations may find it hard to understand that drivers should keep left rather than right while driving, as is the normal practice in the UK and some other countries. Similarly, Iranian EFL readers may have problems in understanding why plugs and sockets are three- rather than two-pinned; how it is possible to hear a public phone ringing in the street; how one can have his/her photo taken using a machine with nobody else to take the photo; and
so on. No doubt, some of these cultural differences are related to differences in progress made in technology.

Another element of reader variable is knowledge of language, or linguistic knowledge. According to Alderson (2000, p. 80), linguistic knowledge includes ‘phonological, orthographic, morphological, syntactic, and semantic information’ and ‘discourse-level knowledge, including … text organisation and cohesion, text types and associated conventions, as well as metalinguistic knowledge’. An example of phonological-orthographic language knowledge is the knowledge that not all types of consonant cluster in English can occur at the initial or final word positions (Zakaluk, 2000, p. 8). The observation that there are obvious differences in the phonological and orthographic pattern of Iranian EFL readers’ L1 and L2 may introduce some problems at least for beginning readers. For example, no consonant clusters can occur at the initial word position and none with more than two phonemes anywhere else in a word in Farsi, the official language of Iran.

Along the same lines, one’s knowledge of morphological and syntactic patterns of the language will facilitate the comprehension and reading speed (Anderson & Freebody, 1981, p. 80). In the case of L2 learning, similar patterns brought from the L1 situation will help at all linguistic levels (i.e., phonological, orthographic, etc.). Semantic knowledge, or the knowledge of words and relationships between them, plays the most important role compared to other linguistic knowledge types. There is no dispute among researchers that vocabulary knowledge is crucial to reading comprehension (Anderson & Freebody, 1981, p. 77; Jenkins & Pany, 1981, p. 176; Johnston, 1983, p. 14; Grabe, 1991, p. 392; Schoonen, Hulstijn & Bossers, 1998, p. 98; Khaldieh, 2001). Coleman (1971) reports that lexical complexity of texts account for 80% of the variance in reading comprehension (in Anderson & Freebody, 1981, p. 80), implying that the higher one’s degree of lexical knowledge, the higher the degree of comprehension. Schoonen et al. (1998, p. 87) bring evidence that in the case of L1, 60% of the variance in reading comprehension is related to vocabulary knowledge, and that ‘FL [Foreign Language] vocabulary is the best predictor of FL reading comprehension’ (p. 89).

One’s knowledge of discourse and text structure has also been reported to affect reading comprehension. For example, understanding coherence, or superficially non-existent relations between sentences, is a determining factor in reading comprehension (Taylor, 1985, p. 2). A difference in text-organisation in L1 and L2 is
a potential source of misunderstanding. An instance of this is the system of writing addresses in Farsi and in English: while Farsi speakers move from more general to more specific in writing addresses and do not begin each heading on a separate line, the reverse is true in English.

Readers from a different linguistic environment and speaking a non-standard dialect may face problems in reading not only because of sub-culture differences but also because of differences in linguistic knowledge. As Zakaluk (2000, p. 8) points out, in some non-standard dialects there are differences in pronunciation of special items between standard and non-standard codes, such as ‘test’ pronounced as ‘tess’, ‘mend’ pronounced as ‘men’, ‘find’ pronounced as ‘fine’, and ‘cold’ pronounced as ‘coal’. However, whether such differences in pronunciation pose any reading difficulties has not been shown (p. 9). In a nutshell, it seems that even though cultural and background knowledge play a great role in reading comprehension, without linguistic knowledge, no reading may exist at all.

Another reader characteristic that influences reading comprehension is one’s cognitive abilities. Readers with normal cognitive abilities vary slightly in their performances and this is perhaps why some scholars relate reading to thinking. Goodman (1970, p. 108), for example, notes that efficient reading results from ‘an interaction between thought and language.’ Others have emphasised readers’ cognitive strategies and meta-cognitive knowledge in affecting reading comprehension (Baker & Brown, 1984, p. 34; Aslanian, 1985, p. 20; Johnson, 1998, p. 23; Schoonen et al., 1998, p. 75).

The point is not, however, having a certain type of knowledge; rather the reader’s ability and success in activating and using that knowledge and relating new information to old information seem to be vital for understanding. The reader’s (cognitive) ability to link all sources of information to one another in order to construct the writer-intended meaning has been recognised by Trabasso (1981, p. 56), Lorch and van den Broek (1997, p. 214), and Johnson (1998, p. 22). Lorch and van den Broek (1997, p. 244), for instance, assert that ‘Individual differences in working memory capacity have been demonstrated to be good predictor of variance in both overall reading ability … and specific reading skills.’ Similarly, Rumelhart (1984, p. 19) compares reading comprehension to ‘a detective act’ where the reader has to use his/her cognitive ability to connect all the relevant information in the situation to solve the problem. This implies that one’s degree of comprehension is not only
affected by his/her background, cultural, and language knowledge but also by his/her cognitive abilities including intelligence. The resulting comprehension is the product of the interaction among these and other factors elaborated in the following pages.

An often-neglected aspect of the reader is his/her affective state. The affective state refers, on the one hand, to a reader’s purposes, perspectives, motivation, emotional mood, etc., prior to reading. On the other hand, it refers to the affective responses brought about by the text while reading. A reader may read the same text at different times for different purposes and with different kinds of attention paid to information on the page, and therefore, with different degrees of comprehension. The influence of one’s goals, views, and emotional states on reading comprehension has been documented by Garner (1987, p. 7), Lorch and van den Broek (1997, p. 237), Pressley (1997, p. 248), and Alderson (2000, p. 80). The way affective responses during reading may affect the direction of reading and the extent of the reader’s cognitive involvement have been discussed by Carroll (1970, p. 30), Lorch and van den Broek (1997, p. 233), and Alderson (2000, p. 83).

Based on the discussion in the preceding paragraphs, it becomes evident that several factors contribute to shaping the ultimate comprehension. First, all aspects of the reader variable interact with one another; secondly, they interact with textual and contextual factors; and finally, there is an interaction between the reader and the writer. All of these affect the success of communication. The interaction between the reader and the text has been documented by Smith (1971, p. 195), Johnston (1983, p. 21), Alderson and Urquhart (1984, p. xvi), Aslanian (1985, p. 20), Geva (1992, p. 734), and Alderson (2000, p. 3). The reader-writer interaction has been pointed out by Smith (1971, p. 13) and Colley (1987, p. 113). It seems almost impossible, however, to clearly understand the exact degree of contribution of each variable to the final product.

**Text variable**
The second important variable which considerably affects reading comprehension is text variable, since without written material, there will be no reading at all. Nuttall (1982, p. 15) believes that text is ‘the core of the reading process’. Text, or written discourse, is the product of the writer’s thought expressed through some visible shapes, whether alphabetic or ideographic, printed or hand-written, something kinesthetic or written in Braille, written on a piece of paper, carved on a stone, or
No doubt the first text characteristic is whether the symbols and the code used are familiar to the reader or not, i.e., whether it uses Latin symbols, Chinese symbols, Arabic symbols, etc., and whether the code or language is familiar. Although there should be a complete match between the symbols and the language used in the text and those possessed by the reader, this is by no means a guarantee for the reader’s success. Goodman (1973, p. 26) believes that because readers read for meaning and with minimal use of graphic cues, the differences in L1 and L2 in terms of direction of reading (right-to-left in Farsi, top-to-bottom in Japanese, left to right in English) will not affect ‘the basic reading process’ considerably. While Grabe (1991, p. 387) agrees that direction of reading will not influence reading comprehension, Kitao and Kitao (2000, p. 4) contend that Japanese English readers may face problems for this reason. It seems that while such differences may be problematic in early stages of reading, they will become less important as readers get more exposure to and fluency in L2 reading (Grabe, 1991, p. 387).

Similarly there has also been some attention paid to whether para-linguistic features of a text, i.e., capitalisation, underlining, paragraph headings, and subtitles have any influence on reading comprehension. According to Johnston (1972), these graphic cues signal meaning, but ESL students do not give such cues due attention; instead, they focus on ‘phonologically related graphic aspects of individual words’ (in McLeod & McLaughlin, 1986, p. 115). Lorch, Lorch and Klusewitz (1995, p. 51) report that underlining, or ‘light signalling’, helps the reader’s recall in comparison with no underlining and ‘heavy signalling’ in which important information is underlined along with some non-important information. Their findings also indicate that while capitalisation reduces reading speed, it improves the memory for recalling capitalised information.

Jenkins and Pany (1981) cite studies by several researchers, in some of which paragraph and title headings helped readers to ‘answer more comprehension questions correctly’ (p. 169), and in others, carried out with children, adolescents and adults separately, ‘no advantage was found for passages with paragraph headings’ (p. 170). Pictures in text have been recognised as having a positive effect on reading comprehension for the reason that they give the reader ‘broader and deeper
background knowledge’ (Jenkins & Pany, 1981, p. 171). On the other hand, Maxwell (1994, p. 69) brings evidence from a study done by Grant and Davey (1991) in which paragraph or title headings did not seem to influence ‘overall comprehension’.

More important text characteristics in affecting comprehension include lexical density, syntactic complexity, and semantic abstractness. The influence of new information and lexical density as well as passage length on reading comprehension has been emphasised by Johnston (1983, p. 21) and Alderson (2000, p. 127). Complexity of structure accompanied by sentence length has also been reported to reduce text comprehensibility (Pearson & Camperell, 1981, p. 33). An issue in structural complexity has been the transformational distance between a sentence’s surface and deep structures, i.e., the shorter the distance, the easier the comprehension. Therefore, kernel sentences (simple, active, and declaratives) are expected to be understood more easily and rapidly than non-kernel transformed sentences such as interrogatives and passives (Pearson & Camperell, 1981, p. 32). Differences in syntactic structures between L1 and L2 have also been reported as a source of reading problems for L2 learners. For example, German EFL readers might face problems because they ‘attend more to function words’ in their language, while English readers ‘attend more to content words’ (Grabe, 1991, p. 388).

To reduce the degree of lexical density and syntactic complexity, some have suggested simplification, arguing that linguistic simplification increases readers’ comprehension (Yano, Long & Ross, 1994, p. 189). ‘Elaborate modification’ has been used as another alternative to reduce text difficulty, in which texts are elaborated with the hope that ‘redundancy and explicitness compensate for unknown linguistic items.’ Simplification has, however, proved to be a better tool than elaboration (Yano et al., 1994, p. 211). Alderson (2000, p. 82), however, questions the former on the grounds that simplification ‘not only does … disauthenticate the text, it also risks making the texts harder to understand.’ As an alternative, he suggests developing easier tasks or test questions.

Structural complexity, also called micro-structure variation, is different from macro-structure variation in that the former operates on the intra-sentential level, but the latter deals with organisational variation on the inter-sentential and discourse level. The changes in a text’s macro-structure, e.g., changing the place of main and subordinating ideas, have been reported to disturb comprehension (Pearson & Camperell, 1981, p. 32). Johnson (1981, p. 169) notes that organisation of ideas in a
text affects reading comprehension more than its language complexity. Johnston (1983, p. 25) cites a study by Freebody (1980) in which ‘the order in which subjects read passages affected their comprehension.’ Grabe (1991, p. 338) mentions a study done by Carrell (1984) with readers from Spanish, Asian, and Arabic language backgrounds in which different cultures favoured different organisational structures, which in turn affected readers’ recall and comprehension. Similarly, Maxwell (1994, p. 68) reports a study by Dee-Lucas and Larkin (1990) in which the change of rhetorical organisation affected the degree of reading comprehension. Singhal (1998, p. 4) confirms that ‘differences in text structure can lead to differences in reading.’

Semantic abstractness refers to the notion of whether ideas expressed in the text are easy enough for the reader to understand, an issue also connected to the reader’s background knowledge. Apart from semantic abstractness, the ‘density of arguments in propositions’ also affects reading comprehension (Johnston, 1983, p. 22).

Text type, topic, genre and writer’s style have also been recognised as factors affecting reading comprehension (Alderson, 2000, pp. 83, 127). Welrich (1998) distinguishes five text types: descriptive, narrative, expository, argumentative, and instructive (ibid.). To be added to this list is poetry. Clearly, the kind of reading and the degree of attention each type requires are somehow different from others. As Johnson (1998, p. 22) points out, while narrative texts are mainly read for enjoyment, expository texts have the goal of giving information, and therefore, ‘narrative texts can never be comprehended; they can only be experienced.’

Another text-related factor important for comprehension is coherence and cohesion. Text-related context, or co-text, has been shown to facilitate comprehension, recall, and reading speed (Smith, 1973a, p. 75; Smith & Holmes, 1973, p. 60; Zakaluk, 2000, p. 15). Text meaningfulness is usually conveyed through local coherence, or cohesion, and global coherence, simply called coherence (Colley, 1987, p. 129). The existence of logical relation markers or discourse markers, such as conjunctions has been reported to facilitate reading comprehension (Geva, 1992, p. 731). Coherence has been recognised as more crucial than cohesion because, as Nuttall (1982, p. 16) points out, a text which is not coherent will be nonsense, although it may be cohesive.

The way new and old information is organised in the text has also been shown to affect reading comprehension. For example, Colley (1987, p. 130) observed that if ‘the given information and its antecedent are separated by intervening material,’ cohesion is reduced or lost, making it difficult to comprehend the text. Therefore,
foregrounding the given information rather than backgroundering it, i.e., keeping it active in the mind of the reader by keeping it as close as possible to its antecedent, makes the text more cohesive and easier to understand.

One of the text characteristics is how far it presumes the reader to have the necessary background knowledge. Some texts have been reported to lead to incomprehension or misunderstanding because they do not provide the reader with effective bottom-up clues to activate the related schemata (Rumelhart, 1981, p. 22, & 1984, pp. 7, 19; Kitao & Kitao, 2000, p. 2). Another text-related factor is the nature and the number of inferences the text invites the readers to make (Lorch & van den Broek, 1997, p. 219). The time it takes a reader to make inferences, such as referential and causal inferences, and the ease with which these inferences are made may be potential factors affecting the speed and the degree of reading comprehension. In L2 reading, inferences can be made using L1 or L2 cues or a combination of these (Ringbom, 1992, p. 100).

**Context variable**

Although researchers have mainly emphasised the role of reader and text and also the interaction between the two (Alderson & Urquhart, 1984, p. xvi, for example), the role of context has largely remained unnoticed. Context refers to something beyond the text itself, and therefore, is not to be mistaken with textual context or co-text. Generally, context variable refers to all reader-, writer-, and text-external factors, such as environmental and situational elements, and the larger socio-economic context. As Walberg, Hare and Pulliam (1981, p. 154) rightly emphasise, comprehension may not be blocked due to the absence of linguistic or background knowledge but ‘due to environmental distractions’. Comprehension may, therefore, be affected by the time of reading, i.e., early in the morning, after a day’s work, etc.; and also by the place of reading, i.e., in the library, in the classroom, in an exam session, in a car, etc. Although such environmental elements may be considered trivial, their potentiality for affecting comprehension, small as it may be, should not be neglected.

There seems to be little research addressing the above issues. Studying 368 Nigerian primary students, Williams (1981, p. 31) found that environmental elements like school type (whether private or public, for example), degree of exposure to mass media, and subjects’ language environment contributed significantly to their reading performance in ESL. Walczyk, Kelly, Meche and Braud’s (1999) study on the effect
of time-limit on reading comprehension reveals that with no time-limit, ‘readers are not probably being optimally challenged’ (p. 158), and with severe time pressure, readers do not think critically (p. 157), and that ‘the best reading comprehension was observed under mild time pressure’ (p. 156) because of the readers’ being probably more mindful (p. 164).

Another contextual factor is the social setting in which the act of reading takes place. Reading does not take place in a vacuum (Alderson, 2000, p. 25) and the situation in which it occurs may have an impact on how it is comprehended. For instance, the sign ‘No entry’ means ‘Please, do not enter.’ However, the situation in which a reader reads it may change its meaning. If one notices the sign on a private room, it tell ‘outsiders’ not to enter the room, but not to the occupier himself/herself. However, if one notices the same sign at the entrance to a street, it means different things depending on whether one is driving or walking. To use Widdowson’s (1978) terms, while the sign has a single significance, it has different values depending on settings in which it occurs. The kind of comprehension gained through the interaction between the text and the context, which may be called pragmatic comprehension, indicates how differences in situational contexts can result in different understandings, and are, therefore, a potential source of miscomprehension if the reader does not attend to contextual elements. Similarly, the meaning of ‘prayer’ depends on whether it is said in a church or in a mosque. Here, the difference both in situation and in culture contributes to the value of the word.

The influence of pictures, charts, etc. was examined in the discussion under text variable as para-linguistic elements. Goodman (1968, p. 21), however, believes that such cues are external to language and reader, thus forcing them to come under our category of contextual elements. However, they are, in essence, different from our definition of context which covers environmental, situational, and social elements.

**Writer variable**

Undoubtedly, the essence of a text owes much to its producer, i.e., the writer. Although the writer does not influence the reading act as directly as other variables do, he/she contributes the most to the reading act, indirectly though. The kind of interaction that the reader has with the writer may not be similar to the kind of interaction he/she has with the text, or the kind of communication a listener has with a speaker, as in both these latter cases both of the communication or interaction parties
are present. However, the reader and the writer can be supposed to have some abstract form of interaction/communication, because when producing the text, the writer most certainly takes the characteristics of his/her readers into account (Nuttall, 1982, p. 14; Johnston, 1983, p. 14).

Similarly, while reading a text, the reader intuitively constructs a picture of who the writer had in mind; and the more the reader is familiar with the writer’s style and purposes, the more successful he/she will be in ‘getting’ his/her message, which in turn leads to a successful communication between the two. In reading, the reader cannot consult the writer to clarify ambiguities, which is why readers ultimately get less or more than the intended message, and that the ‘intended meaning is ultimately unknowable’ (Johnston, 1983, p. 11). Taylor (1985) argues that there is an active cooperation between the reader and the writer in that the reader tries to get the meaning out of the text by bringing meaning to the written material.

Obviously, the writer’s assumptions about the reader will not always come true, and because no two people may have exactly the same background knowledge, ‘there always is a mismatch of some kind’ between the writer’s and the reader’s background and expectations (Nuttall, 1982, p. 7). Nonetheless, the writer should still be as helpful as possible, adhering to what Grice (1975) called ‘co-operative principle’ for oral discourse (Pearson & Camperell, 1981, p. 30; Johnston, 1983, p. 27). Therefore, the degree of reading comprehension depends on the ‘active collaboration between writer and reader’ (Taylor, 1985, p. 5) on the one hand, and the interaction of other factors previously described on the other.

**L1-L2 relationship**

All the variables discussed so far influence reading comprehension in any language. When a reader can already read in a language and tries to read in a second language, another element, i.e., the relationship between L1 and L2, is added to the previous factors. The following is a short review of research and arguments about the relationship between L1 and L2 reading.

Most of our understanding about reading in a second language comes from research in first language (Alderson & Urquhart, 1984, p. xv; Grabe, 1991, p. 378; Chun & Plass, 1997, p. 61), and therefore, the majority of findings from L1 situations have been readily generalised for L2 situations with little consideration given to potential differences. However, such generalisations may not always be true and, as Grabe
The relationship between L1 and L2 reading has been studied from two different perspectives. While some researchers have focused on the differences and similarities between reading in the first language and in a second or foreign language, other researchers have studied the role of L1 reading ability in L2 reading comprehension. Studies in the former group have pointed out that although there are many similarities in the process of reading in L1 and in L2 and virtually in any other language (Singhal, 1998, p. 3), they have also discovered that there are certain dimensions to reading which are unique to a second language (Wade-Woolley, 1999, p. 448). Researchers in the latter group have spoken up for a balance between linguistic interdependence and threshold hypotheses (Ulijn & Salager-Meyer, 1998, p. 83; Taillefer & Pugh, 1998, p. 98; Yamashita, 2002, p. 92).

In terms of similarities between L1 and L2 reading, Goodman (1973, p. 27) argues that reading is ‘much the same for all languages’ implying that a good reader in L1 will also be a good reader in L2. Such a similarity between L1 and L2 not only in terms of reading but also other language skills and mainly spoken skills has been proposed by second-language acquisition researchers (e.g., Krashen, 1981). MacLean (1984) reports another similarity between L1 and L2 reading in terms of the speed of reading. His longitudinal study with one subject who read a variety of texts in L1 and L2 showed that she read all passages at nearly the same speed and that ‘she exhibited minimal flexibility in her reading rate across the passages’ (p. 61).

Jonz’s (1994, p. 305) study showed that non-native speakers were less sensitive than natives to textual sequence and he concluded that ‘the non-natives depended more on bottom up processing … than on top down processing’. It should be mentioned, however, that the comprehension processing Jonz is talking about is based on reading cloze-format texts rather than normal texts. Singhal (1998, p. 1) argues that reading in either language requires the possession of certain types of schema (content, formal, linguistic); in both cases reading is done for the construction of meaning; and both L1 and L2 readers use similar reading skills and strategies.

While Singhal’s last assertion seems to have been confirmed by studies done by Block (1986; 1992), who found that L1 and L2 readers used similar reading strategies and comprehension-monitoring processes (Li & Munby, 1996, p. 201), his claim that effective readers in L1 and L2 use both top-down and bottom-up processes (p. 1),
does not seem to have been substantiated by Jonz’s study above. In either case, however, reading comprehension involves the interaction of many variables.

While Alderson and Urquhart (1984, p. xv) suggest that the differences between L1 and L2 reading are less clear, many other researchers have pointed out differences and explained the reasons for these differences. For example, Chun and Plass (1997, p. 63) note that while L1 readers are mainly involved in higher-level processing such as generating inferences, L2 readers ‘pay more attention to lower-level processes’. They divide differences between L1 and L2 reading into three groups: background knowledge differences; language processing differences; and social context differences, i.e., ‘expectations about reading and how texts can be used’ (p. 62).

One of the differences between L1 and L2 reading is that while L1 readers are already proficient enough in the spoken language, having acquired 5,000 to 7,000 words and a working knowledge of the grammar by the time they start reading (Grabe, 1991, p. 387), L2 readers only start learning these aspects of the target language at the time they start reading. However, many L2 learners already do have the experience of reading in their own language from which they will have built up additional ‘world knowledge’ (Chun & Plass, 1997, p. 62). The case is different for L2 readers who do not know reading in L1 (Alderson, 2000, p. 24). An L2 reader’s L1 can help or disturb his/her reading depending on the similarities or differences in orthographic, lexical, syntactic and discourse systems between the two languages (Ringbom, 1992, pp. 88, 90; Chun & Plass, 1997, p. 62).

Cziko (1994, p. 151) cites a study done by Hatch, Polin and Part (1974), who found that while L1 readers mainly relied on contentives, L2 readers relied both on contentives and syntactically redundant elements in comprehending cloze passages. His own study showed that only advanced non-native readers as well as L1 readers could use semantic constraints in cloze tests while less advanced L2 students were able to use syntactic constraints only (p. 154). According to Ulijn and Salager-Meyer (1998, p. 81), while L2 reading problems are attributed to L2 language problems, L1 reading problems are attributed to problems within reading itself. According to Li and Munby (1996), translation, which may take the form of mental conversion, is a reading strategy unique to L2.

To summarise the research findings discussed so far, several reasons have been put forward by different researchers for the differences between L1 and L2 reading (Grabe, 1991, p. 387; Singhal, 1998, p. 3; Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p. 61). The above
researchers have identified the following reasons for the differences between L1 and L2 reading:

1) L2 learners are cognitively mature;
2) L2 learners already know at least one other language;
3) L2 learners have different kinds of motivation for reading in L2 than L1 learners have for L1 (L2 learners are motivated both instrumentally and integratively) (Mitchell & Myles, 1998);
4) L1 readers already have a big vocabulary repertoire and know grammar when beginning to read, while L2 readers begin from scratch;
5) Older L2 readers have a more well-developed conceptual sense of the world;
6) L2 readers make elaborate logical inferences from the text;
7) L2 readers make more use of meta-cognitive strategies (Grabe, 1991);
8) L2 learners draw upon strategies of first-language learning, knowledge of likely language systems, and knowledge of how language operates socially;
9) L2 readers operate in a different linguistic context (use different vocabulary and grammar);
10) L2 readers may not have the relevant cultural/background knowledge (Singhal, 1998).

The above differences between L1 and L2 makes the task of the L2 reader different from that of the L1 reader; and comprehension failure may occur for an L2 reader if he/she is either not fully competent in the language and/or there is a mismatch between the cultural knowledge he/she processes and that required to function successfully in L2 context (Wallwork: 1978, p. 83; Montgomery, 1986, pp. 174-75).

A controversial issue regarding the relationship between L1 and L2 reading is how far reading ability in L2 is affected by L1 reading ability. The linguistic interdependence hypothesis or reading universals, assumes that the process of reading in all languages is the same (Goodman, 1973, p. 27) and once the related ability is acquired in one language, it is easily transferable to all other subsequent languages; that ‘we really only learn to read once’ (Taylor, 1985, p. 4); and that L2 readers do not need to gain proficiency in L2 reading ability if they have acquired such an ability in L1 (Chun & Plass, 1997, p. 63).

81), was introduced by Alderson (1984; 2000). In this hypothesis, before L1 reading ability can be successfully transferred to L2 situation, a certain language threshold level needs to be attained by L2 reader (Alderson, 2000, p. 23). In this view, both L1 reading ability and L2 linguistic knowledge contribute to the reading ability in L2 (Alderson, 2000, p. 122). Both hypotheses presuppose that reading ability in any language is different from linguistic ability or language-specific knowledge, and therefore, a good reader in L1 would be a good reader in L2 (Schoonen et al., 1998, p. 73).

Empirical studies, however, have not found a high degree of relationship between reading comprehension in L1 and L2, indicating that not all L1 reading ability is transferable to L2 situations. For example, Groebel (1980) conducted a study with 454 university students (L1 was Hebrew and L2 was English for most subject in the study). The correlation between reading comprehension in L1 and L2 ‘which was statistically significant’ was 0.315 (p. 57). She concludes that when reading involves higher levels of comprehension, there is a correlation between L1 and L2 reading comprehension (p. 59). Studying Dutch EFL learners, Schoonen et al. (1998, p. 96) found that L1 and L2 reading comprehension ‘correlate substantially, but not highly; about 38% … of the variance is common.’ They also report other studies in which a low degree of correlation has been found between reading ability in L1 and L2 (p. 73). Schoonen et al. (1998, p. 74) rightly emphasise that even if L1 reading ability transfers to L2 reading, not all that ability is transferable because the reading ability is composed of both L1 linguistic knowledge and language-independent general reading skills, of which only the latter are transferable.

Taillefer and Pugh (1998) studied the L1-L2 reading relationship with 39 subjects for whom French was L1 and English was L2. Their findings suggested that strong L1 readers who were weak in L2 linguistic knowledge were poor L2 readers, but they were better readers than those who were poor L1 readers and also weak in L2. They also found that those readers who were strong in L1 reading and in L2 linguistic knowledge were equally efficient readers in either L1 or L2 (p. 96). They conclude that good L1 readers ‘who are good “linguists” in L2’ have no difficulty in transferring their L1 reading strategies to L2. They also assert, based on their findings, that ‘reading is not “just” reading’ for those L2 readers who are weak in either L1 reading or L2 linguistic knowledge or both (p. 105).
Reviewing a few studies on the relationship between L1 and L2 reading, Yamashita (2002, p. 82) concludes that ‘the contribution of L1 reading ability increases when learners’ L2 proficiency level becomes higher’ and that ‘L1 reading ability is more likely to be transferred when the [L2] reading task is less demanding.’ She cites a study carried out by Carrell (1991) with English Spanish readers and Spanish English readers, in which it was found that Spanish language proficiency was more important than English reading ability for the former group, but the Spanish reading ability was a stronger predictor for the latter group. Such a finding seems to support Taillefer and Pugh’s (1998, p. 98) claims that the relative importance of each predictor variable varies depending on the ‘directionality of learning’ (i.e., L1 English to L2 Spanish vs. L1 Spanish to L2 English), and also on ‘the nature and cognitive demands of the task itself’.

Yamashita’s (2002, p. 81) own study with 241 Japanese EFL students, in which the compensatory relationship between L1 reading ability and L2 linguistic knowledge in L2 reading comprehension was studied, showed that there was a mutual compensation between the two independent variables in arriving at the highest comprehension in L2 reading. Yamashita (2002, p. 92) concludes that there is a complex interaction between L2 linguistic knowledge and L1 reading proficiency or cognitive ability. The same idea is supported by Ulijn and Salager-Meyer (1998, pp. 82-83) who state that researchers now call for a ‘balanced blend’ of the threshold hypothesis and linguistic interdependence hypothesis. They assert that ‘empirical research has largely resolved the debate about whether L2 reading is a linguistic or a cognitive problem. It is neither one, but both of these’ (p. 83).

In brief, the general consensus seems to be that while L1 reading ability affects L2 reading comprehension, the role of L2 linguistic knowledge seems to be much more significant at least for low-proficient L2 readers (Chun & Plass, 1997, p. 62; Taillefer & Pugh, 1998, p. 98; Ulijn & Salager-Meyer, 1998, p. 82; Alderson, 2000, p. 23; Yamashita, 2002, p. 92). A somewhat different finding has been reported for the relationship between L1 and L2 writing by Schoonen, van Gelderan, de Glopper, Hulstijn, Simis, Snellings and Stevenson (2003, p. 166), in which L2 writing proficiency correlated highly with L1 writing proficiency, which was more than its correlation with L2 linguistic knowledge.

Conclusion
To reiterate, four broad variables were discussed as factors affecting the process and the product of the act of reading: the reader, the text, the context, and the writer, each with some other inter-related elements. It was also made clear that none of these variables or their elements act separately; rather, the resulting outcome, be it comprehension or miscomprehension, is the product of the interaction among all the variables on the one hand, and all the factors within each variable on the other hand. To arrive at comprehension, therefore, all variables and elements inside them have a share with different degrees of contribution. In the case of L2 learning, in addition to the above variables, another variable enters the scene, i.e., the relationship between L1 and L2 on the one hand (similarities or differences), and the degree of L2 readers’ literacy in L1 on the other. The success of the communicative activity in question here owes much to a proper interplay of all the factors discussed above. The implications for both reading/literacy teachers and researchers are far-reaching: they need to regard their students’ or subjects’ reading process not as a simple activity but a complex multi-faceted process, and when analysing their comprehension failure or success, teachers and researchers should not neglect the potential interactive role of so many factors mentioned above.

References


A Survey on the Relationship between English Language Proficiency and the Academic Achievement of Iranian EFL Students

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**Abstract**

One of the most serious problems that Iranian EFL students face in their field of study is their inability to communicate and handle English after graduating from university. This is due to their weaknesses in general English, which influence their academic success. The intent of the present study was to examine the strength of the relationship between English language proficiency and the academic achievement of Iranian EFL students. Accordingly, the relation between English language proficiency and academic achievement was examined in this study, and a significant connection
was found between proficiency and grade point averages of academic achievement. Similarly, the results revealed significant correlation between English language proficiency and achievement in English speaking and writing subjects.

**Key Words:** Language proficiency, General English, EFL Writing and speaking

**Introduction**

Many students who are majoring in English language in Iran have chosen their field of study with little degree of capability in language use and its components, in other words, they have low ability or proficiency in English language use and usage when they begin to study. The term "capability" can refer to the ability of the examinee to recognize, comprehend, or produce language elements, in other words, "... at a given point in time the language learner may be a listener, speaker or both" (Farhady et al., 1994).

Having difficulties in grasping fully the contents and concepts of the course given in the target language seems to be one of the most serious problems that EFL students face in their particular course of study. This might be due to their weaknesses in general English, which may have a drastic impact on their academic success. Passing some courses successfully is not a determining yardstick in assessing students’ overall language ability. Having passed some courses and having graduated, Iranian EFL students in general seem not to be as proficient and qualified in language use and components as might be expected (Farhady, et al., 1994). In other words, they fail to understand fully the context of language use – the contexts of discourse and situations. Savignon (1983) states that communication takes place in an infinite variety of situations and success in a particular role depends on one’s understanding of the context and on the prior experience of a similar kind (pp. 8-9). Therefore, the overall performance of EFL students in language use depends on their English language proficiency. To determine whether this proficiency affects the academic achievement of the EFL students, we decided to conduct the present research. The intent of this study was to examine the strength of the relationship between English language proficiency and the academic achievement of Iranian EFL students.

In this connection, the following research questions were proposed:
1. Is there any relationship between English language proficiency and the academic achievement of Iranian EFL students?

2. Does English language proficiency have a significant impact on achievement in English speaking subjects (lessons) of Iranian EFL students?

3. Does English language proficiency have a significant impact on achievement in English writing subjects (lessons) of Iranian EFL students?

On the basis of the above-mentioned research questions, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

1. There is no relationship between English language proficiency and the academic achievement of Iranian EFL students.

2. English language proficiency does not have a significant impact on achievement in English speaking subjects (lessons).

3. English language proficiency does not have a significant impact on achievement in English writing subjects (lessons).

Review of Literature
According to Stern (1983), proficiency can be looked at as a goal and thus be defined in terms of objectives or standards. These can then serve as criteria by which to assess proficiency as an empirical fact, that is, the actual performance of given individual learners or groups of learners. He states that “proficiency ranges from zero to native-like proficiency. The zero is not absolute because the second language learner as speaker of at least one other language, his first language, knows language and how it functions. Complete competence is hardly ever reached by second language learners” (p.341). Bachman (1990) defines language proficiency as the language ability or ability in language use. Oller (1983) states that language proficiency is not a single unitary ability, but that it consists of several distinct but related constructs in addition to a general construct of language proficiency. Farhady, et al. (1983) state that the term 'proficiency' refers to the examinee’s ability in a particular area of competency in order to determine the extent to which they can function in a real language use situation.

According to Best and Kahn (1989) achievement tests attempt to measure what an individual has learned. They are particularly helpful in determining individual or
group status in academic learning. Achievement test scores are used in diagnosing strengths and weaknesses and as a basis for awarding prizes, scholarship, or degrees. They are used also in evaluating the influences of courses of study, teachers, teaching methods, and other factors considered to be significant in educational practice. Graham (1987) pointed out the problems associated with research that attempts to delineate the relationship between language proficiency and academic performance, including the nature of the measures used to define L2 proficiency; the definition of academic success, especially when the reported GPA may be based on unequal numbers of courses or on dissimilar courses; and the possible influence of other variables in determining academic success.

Butler and Castellon-Wellington (2000) compared student content performance to concurrent performance on a language proficiency test. This study established a correlation relationship between English language proficiency and performance on standardized achievement tests in English. Ulibarri, et al. (1981) compared the performance of 1st, 3rd, and 5th-grade Hispanic students on three English language tests with their achievement data for reading and math; they found that the language test data were not very useful in predicting achievement in reading and math.

Stevens et al. (2000) investigated the relationship between the language and performance of seven-grade English language learners on two tests- a language proficiency test and a standardized achievement test. They stated that the correspondence between the languages of the two tests was limited. Bayliss and Raymond (2004) examined the link between academic success and second language proficiency in the context of two professional programs. They conducted two studies. First, they investigated the link between ESL scores on an advanced ESL test and the grade point average (GPA) obtained over two semesters. Second, they investigated the link between French second language scores on an advanced L2 test and both the number of courses failed and the first semester GPA. In recent years, researchers have examined the relationship between language proficiency and such various areas as intelligence, aptitude, and language skills. Garcia-Vasquez et al. (1997) compared the reading achievement scores of Hispanic middle and high school students with measures of their proficiency in English and found that the highest correlations were between English proficiency and English academic achievement (r = 0.84). Lower,
significant correlations were observed between Spanish reading and English reading
\( (r = 0.24) \), and no correlation was found between Spanish proficiency and English
academic achievement \( (r = 0.03) \). Ulibarri et al. (1981) demonstrated that English
language proficiency is the best predictor of English reading achievement for students
with lower levels of English proficiency, even when students are just beginning to
read. De Avila (1990) observes that the relationship between academic achievement
and language proficiency disappears as students approach native-like proficiency
levels.

**Methodology**

**Participants**

EFL students majoring in English translation at the Islamic Azad University, Takestan
campus, were randomly selected to participate in this study. The selection procedures
yielded a sample of 50 students, all in the last semester of their course of study. Of the
50 participants, 80% were female and 20% were male.

**Procedure**

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this study was to find out the relationship
between language proficiency and academic achievement of Iranian EFL students. So,
in order to achieve this goal, a standardized TOEFL paper test was first administered
to the participating students, so as to decide their overall English language
proficiency. The subtests included listening, reading comprehension, grammar and
written expressions, and vocabulary. To test the speaking ability of the subjects, we
also arranged an interview. The grading criteria for assessing the interview were
pronunciation, style, vocabulary, grammar, suitability, fluency, and accuracy, to all of
which equal points were assigned. Data on academic achievement was obtained from
students’ cumulative folders. After administering the TOEFL paper test and
conducting the interview, the results of different parts of the test and the interview
were used in total as an indicator of each student’s estimated English language
proficiency score. Grade point averages (GPAs) included those specialized subjects,
which were in the areas of language learning and teaching. The computed GPA was
comprised of content areas such as linguistics, methodology, testing, English
literature, phonology, and advanced writing which students had passed in subsequent
semesters. Then the coefficient of correlation between two sets of scores obtained
from the students’ GPAs and the results of language proficiency test was calculated.
To decide whether the calculated proficiency scores have a significant impact on the students' achievement in speaking and writing subjects, the authors computed two different GPAs for each student. The first GPA was comprised of oral contents, that is, those subjects that had been assessed orally such as oral reproduction of a story etc. The second GPA was restricted to the written language, that is, those subjects which had been evaluated in a written form.

Later, the correlation analysis was used to determine the relations between scores on language proficiency and achievement in speaking and writing subjects. This was done to demonstrate the impact of language proficiency on achievement in speaking and writing subjects respectively.

Results
The results of descriptive analysis of the data showed that the mean of the language proficiency score of participating students was 9.49, and the standard deviation was 1.62. This indicates that the language ability of almost all students was low. The mean of the English speaking and writing subjects (lessons) scores were 14.68 and 13.60 while the standard deviations were 1.72 and 2.14 respectively. This demonstrates that these EFL students performed much better on English speaking subjects than on English writing subjects (see Table 1).

The result of the correlation revealed a significant relation between English language proficiency and academic achievement (GPA). The correlation coefficient of the two sets of scores was 0.48. This suggests that as English proficiency increases, so does academic success. In other words, there is a positive correlation between the two variables.

Significant correlations were also observed between English proficiency and achievement in speaking and writing subjects. The results of the Pearson correlation revealed that the English language proficiency of Iranian EFL students correlates positively with achievement in speaking subjects (0.36) and achievement in writing subjects (0.40) respectively (see Table 2). These findings indicate that proficiency in English influences achievement in English writing subjects of students more than achievement in English speaking subjects.

Table 1 - Descriptive Statistics of Data
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Tr Mean</th>
<th>St Dev</th>
<th>SE Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Proficiency</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>9.49</td>
<td>9.75</td>
<td>9.43</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>0.315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking Subjects Score</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>14.684</td>
<td>14.675</td>
<td>14.588</td>
<td>1.728</td>
<td>0.249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Subjects Score</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>13.608</td>
<td>13.745</td>
<td>13.595</td>
<td>2.141</td>
<td>0.309</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 - Correlation Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Language proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic achievement</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing subjects</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking subjects</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

The results of data analysis demonstrated that the first null-hypothesis of this study, which asserts, “there is no relationship between English language proficiency and the academic achievement” was rejected at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, there is a relationship between these two variables; in other words, the English language proficiency correlates positively with the academic success.

This study presents some evidence that success in completing university assessment tasks may be related to proficiency in English, especially for students studying English. Students with lower levels of proficiency in English had low academic performance. This suggests that there is a direct relationship between academic success and language proficiency. Researchers have long noted that there seems to be a correlation between first and second language proficiency, and academic achievement in the first and second language. Feast (2002) found a significant and positive relationship between English language proficiency as measured by IELTS test scores, and performance at university as measured by Grade Point Average (GPA).

Although, it is logical to assume that English proficiency influences scores on academic achievement grade point average, the findings of this study revealed that the goals of educating language learners to be proficient have not been fulfilled. Stern
(1992) states that proficiency goals include general competence, mastery of the four skills, or mastery of specific language behaviors. The low results of the administered TOEFL test indicated that the EFL students in undergraduate programs of Iranian universities are not sufficiently proficient and capable to act as English language experts. Their weak overall language ability affects drastically the academic success of the students in subsequent semesters. It seems that present general English courses have not been sufficient or successful in preparing students for their future careers. Graves (2001) points out that the tests that measure proficiency are also a part of needs assessment because they help determine what students already know and where they are lacking. Accordingly, we believe that the Iranian University Entrance Examinations for the admission of EFL students should be reviewed critically; otherwise, the academic achievement of the admitted EFL students may not meet the intended course goals.

The results of statistical analysis of data also showed that the second and third null-hypotheses of this study, which assert that "English language proficiency does not have any significant impact on achievement in English speaking and writing subjects, were rejected at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, there is a positive correlation between English language proficiency and achievement in English speaking and writing subjects. In other words, it should be asserted that, in the light of this finding, as English language proficiency increases, so doe’s performance of EFL students on English speaking and writing subjects.

Another important point which is worth highlighting is that language proficiency had greater impact on achievement in writing subjects than in speaking subjects. That is, those with higher language proficiency had higher achievement scores in written language compared with spoken language. However, this does not undermine the significance of proficiency in relation to student’s spoken language, as Farhady (1983) observed performance on language proficiency tests was closely related to students’ educational background, major field of study, sex, and nationality. So, the students’ performance and proficiency are related, even though a variety of parameters such as subjectivity of scoring, affective variables, physical conditions, and backwash effect of test produce varying scores.

**Conclusion**
In summary, English language proficiency is a good indicator and predictor of academic achievement for those students who are majoring in English (the EFL area), at least in the Iranian context. It is also representative of the performance of EFL students in written and spoken subjects respectively. In the Iranian case, EFL students with higher proficiency perform much better in writing subjects than speaking subjects. It seems that the deficiency is due to non-standardized university entrance screening tests that need to be corrected. Therefore, it is recommended that the selection process be appraised and changed carefully. This requires the attention of higher education authorities in Iran and elsewhere in order to choose more proficient candidates from the very beginning. Such a measure will have potential implications in all areas of academic development. Also, general English should be given special attention at university level not only for EFL students, but also for students majoring in other fields.

References


Ulibarri, D., Maria, M., Spencer, L., & Rivas, G. A. (1981). Language proficiency and academic achievement: A study of language proficiency tests and their relationships to school rating as predictors of academic
Language Learning Style Preferences: A Students Case Study of Shiraz EFL Institutes

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Abstract
This study aimed at investigating the language learning style preferences of Iranian EFL learners, and the degree of teachers’ awareness of them. To this end, two hundred and nineteen language learners (121 males and 98 females) from different levels of instruction and different ages (14-44), studying at two language institutes took part in the study. As a further step, 14 teachers working with the same students were called for cooperation. A 13-item language learning preference questionnaire adopted from Brindley (1984) was employed to elicit information for the study. The data obtained through the questionnaire were subjected to Chi-square tests in order to check the significance of the difference between the responses. Results showed the learning preferences of students in different areas. Results also indicated that teachers are aware of their students’ learning preferences in some cases, but unaware in some others. Therefore, there needs to be a closer cooperation between teachers and students in some instances.
1. Introduction

In recent years with the shift from an instructional paradigm to a learner-oriented approach towards language learning/teaching, understanding the way people learn is of crucial importance and is the key to educational improvement. There is no doubt that students take in and comprehend information in different manners. Some like to see and others like to hear. Some prefer to learn individually, independent of others, while others enjoy interaction and relationship with their peers. It is widely believed (e.g. Reid, 1987; Celcc-Murcia, 2001) that the different ways of how a learner takes in and processes information are collectively referred to as learning styles or learning preferences. To achieve a desired learning outcome, teachers should provide teaching interventions and activities that are compatible with the ways through which learners like to learn the language or any other subject matter. When mismatches exist between learning styles of the learners in a class and the teaching style of the teacher, the students may become bored and inattentive in class, do poorly on tests, get discouraged about the courses, the curriculum, and themselves, and in some cases change to other curricula or drop out of school (Felder, 1996).

Most teachers are not aware of the ways their students prefer to learn the language, or even if they are, they pay little, if any, attention to them. Although most teachers believe that their students come to language classroom with different interests and preferences, they are still reluctant to consult learners in conducting language learning activities, hence being unable to meet the learning needs of individual students. Teachers, therefore, need to discover their students’ preferred way of learning the language. This way they can teach in a way that is appealing to most students, if not all, and do what works best for them. Such information can also help material designers and syllabus planners to devise a language learning syllabus that is in line not with their own perceptions and experiences, but with what is most likely to meet with the students’ approval. And as Spratt (1999) argues, often, those involved in syllabus, materials, and activity design predict what learners like or dislike on the basis of their own experience or by consulting the relevant literature. It has been proved that such an approach would have failed to capture many of the students’ learning preferences, and how useful it is to consult learners and involve them in the teaching/learning design process. It is, therefore, crucial to find out the ways through which students prefer to learn the language, hoping that such information can help
teachers, in general, and Iranian EFL teachers, in particular, to be more effective in their career.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Categorization of learning styles

Reid (1995) divides learning styles into three major categories: cognitive learning styles, sensory learning styles, and personality learning styles.

Cognitive learning styles

Field-independent vs. Field-dependent: Field-independent learners learn more effectively step by step, beginning with analyzing facts and proceeding to ideas. Field-dependent learners, in contrast, prefer to learn in context and holistically.

Analytic vs. Global: Analytic learners learn individually, and prefer setting goals. Global learners, on the other hand, learn more effectively through concrete experience, and by interaction with other people.

Reflective vs. Impulsive: Reflective learners learn more effectively when they have time to consider options before responding. This is while, impulsive learners are able to respond immediately and take risks.

Sensory learning styles

Perceptual learning styles

Auditory learner: learns more effectively through the ear (hearing)

Visual learner: learns more effectively through the eyes (seeing)

Tactile learner: learns more effectively through touch (hands-on)

Kinesthetic learner: learns more effectively through body experience (movement)

Haptic learner: learns more effectively through touch and body involvement

Environmental learning styles

Physical vs. Sociological: Physical learners learn more effectively when variables such as temperature, sound, light, food, time, and classroom arrangement are considered. Sociological learners, in contrast, learn more effectively when variables such as group, individual, pair, and team work, and level of teacher authority are regarded.

Personality learning styles
Extroversion vs. Introversion: Extroverted learners are interested in concrete experience, contact with outside, and relationship with others. Introverted learners, on the other hand, are more interested in individual, independent situations.

Sensing vs. Perception: Sensing learners learn best from reports of observable facts and happenings, and rely on their five senses. This is while, perception learners learn more effectively from meaningful experiences and relationships with others.

Thinking vs. Feeling: Thinking learners learn best from impersonal circumstances and logical consequences. On the other hand, feeling learners prefer personalized circumstances and social values.

Judging vs. Perceiving: Judging learners learn by reflection, analysis, and processes that involve closure. Perceiving learners, in contrast, learn through negotiation, feeling, and inductive processed that postpone closure.

Ambiguity-tolerant vs. Ambiguity-intolerant: Ambiguity-tolerant learners learn best when opportunities for experience and risk, as well as interaction, are present. Ambiguity-intolerant learners, however, learn most effectively when in less flexible, less risky, and more structured situations.

Left-brained vs. Right-brained: Left-brained learners tend toward visual, analytic, reflective, self-reliant learning. Right-brained learners, on the contrary, are more interested in auditory, global, impulsive, interactive learning.

2.2. Learners’ learning preferences

Over the past three decades researchers have started to work on the learning preferences. Research that identifies and measures perceptual learning styles relies primarily on self-reporting questionnaires by which students select their preferred learning styles. Reid (1987), for example, based on the findings of a survey, distinguished four perceptual learning modalities:

1) Visual learning (for example, reading and studying charts)

2) Auditory learning (for example, listening to lectures or audiotapes)

3) Kinesthetic learning (involving physical responses)

4) Tactile learning (hands-on learning, as in building models)
Results of Reid's study showed that ESL students strongly preferred kinesthetic and tactile learning styles. Most groups showed a negative preference for group learning. Reid came to the conclusion that the learning style preferences of nonnative speakers often differ significantly from those of native speakers; that ESL students from different language backgrounds sometimes differ from one another in their learning style preferences; and that variables such as sex, length of time in the United States, length of time studying English in the U. S., field of study, level of education, TOEFL score, and age are related to differences in learning styles.

Wintergerst, DeCapua, and Marilyn (2003) tried to explore the learning style preferences of three different populations (Russian EFL students, Russian ESL students, and Asian ESL students). Findings revealed that these three groups of language learners clearly preferred group activity above individual work, with the Russian EFL and Asian ESL students favoring group work and project work. The researchers further suggested that at least some cultural influences were at play. Both quantitative and qualitative studies in cross-cultural settings support a relationship between culture and learning and contend that culture, ethnicity, class, and gender play important roles in shaping the learning preferences and learning styles of students (see Anderson, 1993).

In an attempt to investigate the issue of learners' preferences of the methodology of learning a foreign language, Kavaliauskiene (2003) drew three main conclusions from this research. First, slightly more than half of the learners favor a communicative approach to perfecting their language skills by working in pairs/small groups, taking part in projects and practicing English by talking to their peers. Second, given assignments 93 percent of learners support the idea of homework against 7 percent who reject it. Third, a short-term approach to studying a foreign language prevails. Learners seek passing their exams and getting good marks, and are not concerned with improving language skills and competence for the future usage.

To conclude, it is very important to understand and explore each individual’s learning style. Analyzing one’s own particular learning style can be very helpful and beneficial to the student by aiding them in becoming more focused and an attentive learner, which ultimately will increase educational success. Discovering this learning style will allow the student to determine his or her own personal strengths and weaknesses and learn from them.
2.3. Comparing students’ and teachers’ opinions

Various studies have shown that there can be considerable discrepancies of opinion between learners and their teachers or syllabus experts. A divergence of opinion between these two groups has been noted in relation to what learners need, what they prefer, and the nature of language and language learning (Brindley, 1984).

The teachers in Barkhuisen’s (1998) survey were frequently surprised to learn about the thoughts and feelings of their students. In other words, the students’ perceptions did not match those of teachers. The implication of this piece of research is that if teachers are aware of where their learners are coming from, how they approach language learning, what they feel about their language learning experiences, and how they like to learn the language, they will be able to facilitate desired learning outcomes in the classroom. Learners must be encouraged to express their learning preferences, both for themselves and teachers. Doing so would allow learners to consider why they are participating in certain activities, how these activities help them learn English, and what use they can make of them both for academic purposes and outside classrooms.

Spratt’s (1999) study, too, showed a considerable lack of correspondence between the learners’ preferences and teachers’ perceptions of them. It was seen that teachers’ perceptions of learners' preferences corresponded in approximately 50% of cases with learners' actual preferences. It was also found that there is no obvious pattern to the correspondences or lack of them. This means that it is hard to discern reasons for why they occurred and hard too to predict where they might occur.

Finally, Stapa (2003) concluded that students' preferences do indeed correlate with those of teachers in many instances. The findings of his study reveal significant results suggesting a need for a closer cooperation between students and teachers as to how learning activities should be arranged and implemented in the classroom.

Along with all the studies stated above, the present study strived to investigate the learning styles preferred by the Iranian EFL learners. More importantly, it attempted to examine the extent to which teachers are aware of the students’ learning preferences. This second issue has been worked upon by quite a few researchers in a number of settings. It has not, however, been duly delved into in the Iranian context, particularly in the context of language institutes which are home to myriads of language learners across the country. As a result, a detailed and comprehensive study of the learning preferences of Iranian EFL learners seemed to be of paramount
necessity and importance. To this end the present study with the following goals and objectives was designed.

3. Objectives of the study
The present study intended to investigate the language learning preferences of the Iranian EFL students and the extent of teachers’ awareness of them. Specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions:
1. What are the learning style preferences of the Iranian EFL learners?
2. To what extent, if any, are teachers aware of their students’ learning preferences?
3. How can these students be categorized in terms of learning styles typologies?

4. Method
4.1. Participants
Two hundred and nineteen language learners (121 males and 98 females) from different levels of instruction (Elementary, Intermediate, and Advanced levels) and different ages (14-44) took part in the study. Moreover, 14 teachers working with the same students were asked to express their views regarding the extent of their awareness of their students’ learning preferences. The data were collected from 14 intact classes of two language institutes. The first institute was Shiraz University Language Center (SULC), and the second was Navid Language Institute.

4.2. Instrument
The instrument used in this study was a 13-item language learning preference questionnaire adopted from Brindley (1984). It consisted of two versions: version 1 was designed for students and version 2 for teachers. In the students’ version, the students were supposed to state how they prefer to learn the language. In the teachers’ version, the teachers were asked to express their opinions as to how they feel their students prefer to learn the language (See the Appendix for a copy of the questionnaire). Since one of the objectives of the study was to examine the degree of agreement between teachers and students in terms of language learning preferences, this questionnaire was employed due to the fact that it has two versions, taking into account both teachers’ and students’ responses.
4.3. Procedures for data collection and analysis
The required data were collected in one session. The questionnaire was given to students during their class session. Instruction as to how to complete the questionnaire was given in Persian. At the same time and during the same session, the teachers were provided with the questionnaire (teachers’ version) to complete.
The data obtained through the questionnaire were subjected to Chi-square tests in order to define the significance of the difference between the responses.

5. Results and Discussion
Results of some of the items in the questionnaire are presented in this section. Some of the responses received rendered significant results, while some others did not. This section will briefly present those responses which were statistically significant. However, it should be noted that for the purpose of not making this paper lengthy and hence difficult to read, only some of the most prominent responses (that is, items 2, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 13) are briefly discussed.

In item 2, students were asked to express whether they preferred working individually, in pairs, in small groups, or in a large group. Results are presented below:

Table 1: Learning Mode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Individually</th>
<th>observed</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>expected</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td>19.29</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>219</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown, only 35.2% of students expressed their preference for working individually. This is while, 64.8% of the students preferred other modes of learning the language, such as learning in pairs or in groups.

It can be concluded from the results of this item that learners seem to favor a communicative approach to language learning by showing reluctance to working on their own. It seems they feel more comfortable, productive, and relaxed by working in
other ways, e.g. in pairs, or in groups where their voices would be heard, and views listened to and valued.

In the teachers’ version, teachers were asked whether their students liked working individually, in pairs, or in groups. The following table illustrates the pertaining results:

**Table 2: Teachers' view on students' learning mode**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Individually</th>
<th>observed</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>expected</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in the table above, 78.6% of teachers were of the opinion that their students liked working individually, while 21.4% did not hold such a belief. Teachers generally believe that students do not like to have interaction with their classmates and form groups. Instead, they think their students prefer to work by themselves independently of their peers. Evidently, teachers are not aware that their students do not like to work on their own, and prefer to work in other ways such as in pairs or in groups. In other words, there seems to be disagreement between students and teachers with respect to this issue.

Item 6 asked whether students liked learning by listening, reading, repeating what they hear, listening and taking notes, copying from the board, and making summaries. Results can be seen below:

**Table 3: Preferring listening and taking notes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listening &amp; taking notes</th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>expected</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td>71.34</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>219</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Preferring reading and taking notes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading &amp; taking notes</th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>expected</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td>27.07</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>219</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Listening and taking notes” received high percentage from students (78.5%). “Reading and taking notes,” too, received rather high percentage from students (67.6%).

What can be inferred from the results displayed in Tables 3 and 4 above is that students do not want to adopt a totally passive role in the learning process, since they could have otherwise focused on the first two options, “Listening” or “Reading.” They are inclined to be involved in classroom interactions and not just sit and see what is going on. This is a message for language teachers to take steps that would enable students to be as much involved in what is happening in classroom as possible.

Item 7 aimed to find out how students would like to learn new vocabulary. The options were: (1) by using the word in a sentence, (2) by thinking of relationship between known and new, (3) by saying or writing words several times, (4) by avoiding verbatim translation, (5) by guessing the unknown, and (6) by reading with no dictionary help. Table 5 displays the results:

Table 5: Using new words in a sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Using the word in a sentence</th>
<th>observed</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>expected</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td>149.59</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>219</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As is clear from results in the table, the majority of students (91.3%) give priority to using new words in a sentence. This shows that learners prefer to learn the new vocabulary by making a sentence with them and using them in a context. This obligates teachers to help students make sentences with new words in order to enhance their vocabulary learning. Such finding is in congruence with Stapa’s (2003) study in which learners, who were doing an ESP course in Malaysia, preferred to learn the new words when they are contextualized.

Another option for learning new words was “Avoiding verbatim translation.” Results received for this choice are tabulated below:

Table 6: Avoiding verbatim translation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoiding translation</th>
<th>observed</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>expected</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td>11.87</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>219</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown, 61.6% of the learners expressed their reluctance towards verbatim translation as a way of learning the new vocabulary.

It can be understood from the results that students do not generally favor translating new words to learn them. One reason for this finding can be the institutes from which the data were obtained which claimed to follow a communicative approach to language teaching/learning. In recent years with a trend towards communicative language teaching it appears that our students are more and more oriented towards using authentic materials and do not like to make use of translation in their learning.

In the teachers’ version, teachers were asked about their students’ preference for learning vocabulary. The following table presents the pertaining results:

Table 7: Avoiding verbatim translation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoiding translation</th>
<th>observed</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>expected</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As is clear from the table above, 21.4% of teachers believed that their students do not like verbatim translation, while most teachers (78.6%) held that students were inclined to learn new vocabulary through translation. It can be inferred that most teachers think of translation as an effective way of teaching vocabulary, and that their students are fond of such strategy.

Another option which received relatively high percentage from students is “Guessing the unknown.” Results of this option can be observed in the following table:

Table 8: Guessing the unknown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guessing the unknown</th>
<th>observed</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>expected</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td>71.34</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>219</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be observed, a good number of students (78.5%) expressed their preference towards guessing the unknown word as a way of learning the new vocabulary. Results show that learners are not reluctant to guess the meaning of new vocabulary or infer the meaning from the context. This shows that students are not willing to learn new words in isolation, nor by simple rote memorization. It is important that new vocabulary items be presented in contexts rich enough to provide adequate clues for students to guess a word’s meaning. The reason behind such tendency may be the fact that in students’ view, meaningful information is retained longer and retrieved more easily.

Item 8 asked students how they would prefer to be corrected by their teachers, whether they would like to be corrected immediately in front of everyone, or later at the end of the activity in front of everyone, or later in private. Results are displayed in the table below:
As is apparent from the results, only 37.9% of the learners preferred to be corrected later in private. This is while, 62.1% of the students did not hold such a belief. This shows that students are against delayed correction and prefer other kinds of error correction such as what exists in the first two options of this item. The reason is hidden in the fact that students think of immediate correction to be more effective than delayed correction.

It seems that students do not mind having their instructors correct them immediately in front of everyone, although correcting students’ errors directly may not necessarily lead to more correct language usage in the future, and even worse, it may result in negative affective feelings that interfere with learning. However, the results of this item reveal that students consider the teacher as an authority and would rather be corrected on the spot, though this may be embarrassing to some students, especially the shy ones.

As a tool for language teaching/learning, media have undoubtedly always facilitated the task of language learning and teaching. All language teachers seem to agree that media can and do enhance language teaching and learning (Brinton, 1997). Such being the case, item 10 asked students whether they like learning from (1) television/video/films, (2) radio, (3) tapes/cassettes, (4) written material, (5) blackboard, or (6) pictures/posters. Results are tabulated below:

### Table 9: Students' preference for feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Later feedback</th>
<th>observed</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>expected</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td>12.82</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 10: Television/video/films

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Television/video/films</th>
<th>observed</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td>151.32</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What can be inferred from the results above is that television and video, being powerful media, are most popular with language learners. The reason, according to Celce-Murcia (2001), may be the fact that such media motivate students by bringing a slice of real life into the classroom and by presenting language in its more complete communicative context. Another reason may be the fact that students like to see what they hear, and such media are more vivid and attention-catching than radio or tapes.

The following table presents the teachers’ responses to this very option:

**Table 11: Teachers' view on students' preference for Television/video/films**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Television/video/films</th>
<th>observed</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results indicate that most teachers think that their students prefer television/video/films to other media. It is promising that teachers are aware of their students’ media preference, and hence should make more effective use of such media in their teaching. In fact, since students in their daily lives are surrounded by technology, they expect to see it in their language classroom as well.

Another option to be discussed here is “Tapes/Cassettes.” Table 12 displays the results of this option:

**Table 12: Using tapes/cassettes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tapes/cassettes</th>
<th>observed</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td>34.56</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>219</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be inferred from the results that students tend to listen to tapes either in classroom environment or outside the classroom. The rationale might be the fact that
tapes are relatively cheap and easy to use and carry. Furthermore, they are the main source (other than the teacher) of spoken language texts in most classrooms.

Item 11 delves into the activities learners find very useful in classroom. These include role play, language games, songs, talking with and listening to other students, memorizing dialogues, getting information from guest speakers, getting information from planned visits, writing a learning diary, and learning about culture. One option which received rather high percentage from students is "Talking with and listening to other students." The results are cited in the table below:

**Table 13: Talking with and listening to other students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interacting with others</th>
<th>observed</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>expected</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>81.7</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td>74.23</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>219</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The striking point about these results is that in students’ view, student-to-student interaction is highly beneficial to their learning. Students would like to talk to and listen to other students. One explanation for such preference may be the fact that when language learners interact with each other, they experience some difficulties as they attempt to use the target language to communicate. As a result, they become aware of what they need to know in order to express themselves effectively. They, then, may ask their fellow students for help. Needless to say, such interaction makes the classroom a more pleasant and friendly place.

The last option of the item was "Learning about culture." Table 14 illustrates the results received for this option:

**Table 14: Learning about culture**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning culture</th>
<th>observed</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>expected</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td>34.85</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>219</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It can be inferred from the results presented in Table 14 that most of the students (71.7%) believe that culture and language are interwoven and should be treated as such. Although teachers devote a good deal of time, effort, and attention to the teaching of language skills, gaining linguistic competence is not adequate for many learners to achieve their goals. To be able to communicate effectively, learners need to attain foreign language cultural competence. Results of this option prove that students are eager to attain such knowledge and are aware of culture involvement in learning. So, the burden is upon the shoulder of all EFL/ESL teachers to acquaint their students with cultural values, concepts, and norms on people’s speech and behavior.

The following table shows teachers’ responses to this very option:

**Table 15: Teachers' view on students' preference for learning about culture**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning culture</th>
<th>observed</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>expected</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the results presented in the table above, most teachers believed that students are willing to learn about culture, and are aware of the importance of developing cultural competence when learning the language. There seems to be agreement between teachers and students in this regard. Teachers are apparently aware that their students are eager to attain knowledge regarding cultural issues.

Item 12 asked about assessment. Here, the learners were asked how they would like to find out how much their English is improving. The choices were: (1) through written tasks set by the teacher, or (2) the ability to use language in real-life situations. Results are illustrated below:
Table 16: Using language in real-life situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Using language in real situations</th>
<th>observed</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>expected</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td>149.59</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>219</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An overwhelming majority of the students (91.3%) stated that they would evaluate themselves and their knowledge based on their performance in authentic communications. They would prefer to judge their L2 improvement on the basis of their capability to use the language effectively in real-life communicative events, rather than being assessed formally by the teacher. Evidently, students see tests as a threat to their competence, because they are afraid that they will not perform well. Perhaps, that is why the students of the study were more willing to assess themselves based on the extent to which they are successful in real-life situations. Such finding contradicts the findings of Stapa’s (2003) study in which most of the students showed their preference towards being assessed formally by the teacher.

Item 13 asked students if they get a sense of satisfaction from (1) having their work graded, (2) being told that they have made progress, or (3) feeling more confident in situations they found difficult before. Only the third option proved significant. Results can be seen below:

Table 17: Feeling more confident in situations you found difficult before

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense of satisfaction</th>
<th>observed</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>expected</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td>71.34</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>219</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A quick look at the data presented in the table reveals that a great number of learners (78.5%) feel satisfied in seeing themselves performing successfully in situations which they felt less successfully before. There is no doubt that the satisfaction learners get from their L2 performance differs from one student to another. Some are after high marks; some after command of L2; and some after both. From the results of this choice, it is apparent that most of the students are after command of English, and feel content if they can communicate easier and more efficiently than before.

The findings are in sharp contrast with those of Kavaliauskiene’s (2003) study which reported that learners seek passing their exams and getting good grades, and are not concerned with improving language skills and competence for future usage.

In conclusion, one can say that most of learners in the study seem to favor a communicative approach to perfecting their language skills by working in pairs/groups, tending to be actively engaged in classroom discussions, practicing their English by talking to their peers and having interaction with other people. This is in line with Spratt’s (1999) and Kavaliauskiene’s (2003) studies which reported similar results.

Another point which can be inferred from the results is that students’ preferences do correlate with teachers’ perceptions in some instances, but not in some others. This is consistent with Barkhuizen’s (1998) research which showed that teachers were frequently surprised to learn about the thoughts and preferences of their students. Simply, the students’ perceptions did not match those of teachers in several cases. This study, too, showed that teachers’ perceptions are consistent with those of students in some areas. This, of course, does not mean that the situation of language teaching/learning is perfect and totally satisfactory. There still needs to be closer cooperation between teachers and students as to how language learning activities should be arranged and implemented in classroom.

6. Conclusions
Some major points concluded from the study are summarized below:

1) Regarding studying style, students do not like working individually, but teachers did not know this.

2) Types of learning that emphasize receptive skills only were not appealing to students. Students expressed their views towards class content that focuses on
receptive and productive skills equally. They did not like to be sitting passively in classroom, but to be actively engaged in classroom practices.

3) Students’ most favored vocabulary learning strategies were using words in a sentence, and guessing the meaning of unknown words, not looking them up in dictionary. Teachers wrongly thought that their students like to learn the new words through translation.

4) Being corrected immediately in front of every one did not seem to bother students. Students did not like to be corrected later in private.

5) In terms of media, students would like to see more television programs and video films which make language learning more exciting and meaningful. Teachers appeared to endorse their students’ opinion. Moreover, learners showed tendency to pictures/posters, since they would like to see what they are learning. However, some learners were more interested in listening to tapes. The former group can be labeled “visual” learners, while the latter are referred to as “auditory” learners (using two terms in Reid’s (1995) classification).

6) “Language games” did not highly catch the attention of the students. But, most students enjoyed talking with and listening to other students and having interaction with each other (global learners).

7) “Learning about culture” caught the interest of both students and teachers, showing that they were aware of the crucial importance of developing cultural competence when teaching or learning the language.

8) Students would feel satisfied with their achievement in English if only they could use the language effectively in real-life situations.

9) Finally, students got a sense of satisfaction not just by getting high grades, but by seeing that they were more successful than before in using the language to communicate.

To sum up, in order to answer the third research question, learners, based on Reid’s (1995) classification, were classified into several categories. However, it should be noted that this classification is partly in keeping with that of Reid; that is, it includes some of the categories touched upon by her.
**Visual learners:** by enjoying reading and seeing the words; enjoying seeing what they are hearing, and learning by looking at pictures/posters

**Auditory learners:** by enjoying conversations and the chance for interactions with others, as well as listening to tapes

**Global (Relational) learners:** by learning more effectively through interactions with other people

**Extroverted learners:** by having tendency to work in groups and have relationship with others

### 7. Pedagogical Implications

It was pointed out earlier that one of the reasons for conducting this study was to come across findings that could feed into classroom practice, and provide guidance for students and teachers as well as material designers and syllabus planners. Having the findings at hand, one can suggest sound implications as follow:

1) The first implication is for students. The findings of this study are helpful to students in demonstrating the importance of learning style identification. Students are recommended to identify the best way(s) through which they can learn the language more fruitfully. Knowledge of one's learning style may be beneficial in that the learner will now be aware of his or her strengths and weaknesses in terms of learning experiences. Therefore, future learning may be enriched if the learners maintain their strengths and improve on their weaknesses. Aside from that, this process will improve one’s self esteem because now the students will feel more comfortable and prepared to take on the learning challenge, also gives students the confidence needed to achieve their goals.

2) Teachers should keep in mind that students do not like working individually. So it is strongly recommended that teachers exert their utmost effort to encourage students to form groups and share ideas.

3) It is essential that teachers assign some work for students to do outside the classroom, either in the form of reviewing the day’s work or preparing for the next session.

4) Teachers need to organize the lesson content in a way that equally emphasizes both receptive and productive skills.
5) It is a good idea that teachers motivate their students to use the new words in a sentence, or try to infer the meaning of the new vocabulary. Furthermore, they should remember not to translate new words into Persian since learners do not like such vocabulary learning strategy.

6) The way error correction is done is much more important than the error itself. Teachers must be very careful and tactful in correcting errors and try to employ encouraging correction.

7) Teachers should bear in mind that students like to watch television programs or video films since they like to see what they hear. Also, they like to learn from pictures/posters.

8) Teachers ought to be aware that students like to interact with each other and be actively engaged in classroom debates.

9) Teachers should not think that their students learn English just to get grades or a degree, but also to attain command of L2.

10) Teachers should keep in mind that students would like to be evaluated on the basis of their progress and their improvement in English. They get satisfaction from their achievement in English if they see they can use the language effectively in real-life communications.

11) Teachers should help students discover their own learning preferences and provide constructive feedback about the advantages and disadvantages of various styles. Also, teachers should respect the learners’ present preferences and encourage their development, while at the same time creating opportunities for students to try different ways of learning.

12) The outcomes of the study can, too, contribute to materials and syllabus design by indicating which activities or areas of language are most likely to meet with students’ approval. Hence, the pivotal role of the students in the actual processes of materials and syllabus design must not be ignored.

13) Moreover, researchers may make use of the results of the present study to conduct some pieces of research as to the effect of variables such as gender, age, level of education, and cultural influences on the students’ choice of learning styles.

References


Appendix 1: Questionnaire (Version 1)

HOW DO YOU LIKE LEARNING?
Please put a circle around your answer.

Name:
Age:

1 Male
2 Female

1) Are you satisfied with your achievement in English? YES NO
2) In class do you like learning
   a) individually? YES NO
   b) in pairs? YES NO
   c) in small groups? YES NO
   d) in one large group? YES NO
   e) other (specify please) ..............................
3) Do you want to do homework? YES NO
   If so, how much time do you spend
   for homework outside class hours? ...... hours a day or ...... hours a week.
4) How would you like to spend this time?
   a) preparing for the next class? YES NO
   b) reviewing the day's work? YES NO
   c) other (specify please)..............................
5) Do you want to
   a) spend all your learning time in the classroom? YES NO
   b) spend some time in the classroom and some time
      practicing your English with people outside? YES NO
   c) other (specify please)..............................
6) Do you like learning
   a) by listening? YES NO
   b) by reading? YES NO
   c) by copying from the board? YES NO
   d) by listening and taking notes? YES NO
7) When learning new vocabulary, do you like learning
   a) by using new words in a sentence
       YES  NO
   b) by thinking of relationships between
       known and new
       YES  NO
   c) by saying or writing words several times
       YES  NO
   d) by avoiding verbatim translation
       YES  NO
   e) by guessing the unknown
       YES  NO
   f) by reading without looking up words
       YES  NO
   g) other (specify please)..............................

8) When you speak do you want to be corrected
   a) immediately, in front of everyone?
       YES  NO
   b) later, at the end of the activity, in front
       of everyone?
       YES  NO
   c) later, in private?
       YES  NO
   d) other (specify please)..............................

9) Do you mind if other students sometimes correct your written work?  YES  NO
    Do you mind if the teacher sometimes asks you to correct your own work?  YES  NO

10) Do you like learning from
    a) television/video/films?
       YES  NO
    b) radio?
       YES  NO
    c) tapes/cassettes?
       YES  NO
    d) written material?
       YES  NO
    e) the blackboard?
       YES  NO
    f) pictures/posters?
       YES  NO
    g) other (specify please)..............................

11) Do you do the following in your class?
    a) Role play
       YES  NO
b) Language games
   YES  NO

c) Songs
   YES  NO

d) Talking with and listening to other students
   YES  NO

e) Memorizing conversations/dialogues
   YES  NO

f) Getting information from guest speakers
   YES  NO

g) Getting information from planned visits
   YES  NO

h) Writing a learning diary
   YES  NO

i) Learning about culture
   YES  NO

12) How do you like to find out how much your English is improving?
   a) By written tasks set by the teacher?           YES  NO
   b) By seeing if you can use the language you have learnt in real-life situations?
      YES  NO
   c) other (specify please)..............................

13) Do you get a sense of satisfaction from
   a) having your work graded?        YES  NO
   b) being told that you have made progress?    YES  NO
   c) feeling more confident in situations that you found difficult before?
      YES  NO
   d) other (specify please).........................

Appendix 2: Questionnaire (Version 2)

HOW DO YOUR STUDENTS LIKE LEARNING?

Please put a circle around your answer.

Name:
Age:

1 Male
2 Female

1) Are you satisfied with your students' achievement in English?
   YES  NO

2) In class do your students like learning
   a) individually?        YES  NO
   b) in pairs?            YES  NO
c) in small groups? YES NO
d) in one large group? YES NO
e) other (specify please).............................

3) Do they want to
a) spend all their learning time in the classroom? YES NO
b) spend some time in the classroom and some time practicing their English with people outside? YES NO
c) other (specify please).............................

4) Do they like learning
a) by listening? YES NO
b) by reading? YES NO
c) by copying from the board? YES NO
d) by listening and taking notes? YES NO
e) by reading and making notes? YES NO
f) by repeating what they hear? YES NO
g) by making summaries? YES NO
h) other (specify please).............................

5) When learning new vocabulary, do they like learning
a) by using new words in a sentence YES NO
b) by thinking of relationships between known and new YES NO
c) by saying or writing words several times YES NO
d) by avoiding verbatim translation YES NO
e) by guessing the unknown YES NO
f) by reading without looking up words YES NO
g) other (specify please).............................

6) When they speak do they want to be corrected
a) immediately in front of everyone? YES NO
b) later, at the end of the activity, in front of everyone? YES NO
c) later, in private? YES NO
d) other (specify please).............................

7) Do they mind if other students sometimes correct their written work? YES NO
Do they mind if you as the teacher sometimes ask them to correct their own work? YES NO

8) Do they like learning from
a) television/video/films? YES NO
b) radio? YES NO
c) tapes/cassettes? YES NO
d) written material? YES NO
e) the blackboard? YES NO
f) pictures/posters? YES NO
g) other (specify please)..............................

9) Do you do the following in your class?

a) Role play YES NO
b) Language games YES NO
c) Songs YES NO
d) Talking with and listening to other students YES NO
e) Memorizing conversations/dialogues YES NO
f) Getting information from guest speakers YES NO
g) Getting information from planned visits YES NO
h) Writing a learning diary YES NO
i) Learning about culture YES NO

10) How do you think students like to find out how much their English is improving?
By ..... a) written tasks set by you? YES NO
b) seeing if they can use the language they have learnt in real-life situations? YES NO
c) other (specify please).........................

11) Do you think students get a sense of satisfaction from
a) having their work graded? YES NO
b) being told that they have made progress? YES NO
c) feeling more confident in situations that they found difficult before? YES NO
d) other (specify please)..............................
A Survey of the Students and Interns’ EFL Writing Problems in Shiraz University of Medical Sciences

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Mohammad Hossein Fallahzadeh
Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Iran

Bio Data:
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Mohammad Hossein Fallahzadeh is a professor in pediatric Nephrology, lecturing in the Medical School of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences. He is widely published and has presented at several international conferences.

Abstract
Writing is a complex process reflecting the writers' communicative skills. To help EFL students write in English appropriately, the teachers must take their major problems in writing into account if they are expecting a favorable outcome. This research is concerned with EFL writing problems at the university level, trying to point out the major difficulties with which Iranian students face when writing their reports. This study aims at determining the defects in writing skill of medical students. The specific objective of this study is to determine whether language skills or writing skills are the major problem areas to which our fifth year medical students and interns are confronted. In order to compare these students, 101 admission and progress notes written in the internal medicine and pediatrics wards by these students were surveyed based on systemic sampling approach. The notes were scored for language skills comprising spelling, vocabulary, grammar and syntax, and writing skills including punctuation, cohesive devices, coherence and organization. Implications of the findings for EFL writing instruction are discussed. Data analysis indicates that Iranian EFL medical students have problem both in language and writing skills, but with a higher percentage of problem in writing skills. Although grammar, vocabulary and syntax are essential for a well written report, other more important areas are significant as well. Language accuracy, although very significant cannot alone result in effective writing; what our students need is also writing skills.
Introduction

Writing is a complex activity, a social act which reflects the writer’s communicative skills which is difficult to develop and learn, especially in an EFL context. Research in this field has examined the nature and types of writing task and by providing better understanding of ESL/EFL students’ writing needs, there has been an effort to help the development of this major skill theoretically and pedagogically (Zhu, 2004; Carson, 2001; Hale et al, 1996). Examining the features of EFL writing tasks and the students’ problems in performing the task would certainly be pedagogically beneficial. As stated by Atkinson (2003), EFL students' writing in a language classroom context shows their ability to solve a rhetoric problem and their awareness of their own communicative goals, of the reader, and of the writing context. In spite of numerous approaches to the teaching of writing (communicative language teaching (CLT), process-based approach, product-based approach, genre-based approach, etc….), having evolved from different teaching methods, tackling EFL writing is still one of the challenging areas for teachers and students. The students of medicine in Shiraz University have to pass more English courses than those studying in other national medical universities and there is a 3 unit writing course specifically offered for graduate students. Nevertheless, these students still have many problems in their reports, notes and case histories. On the surface, when looking at the notes and reports written by students and interns involved in the clinical period and studying at Shiraz University, many EFL teachers think that grammar and vocabulary are the main problem area and that their writing would improve with remedial grammar/voc lessons. If looked more deeply, we see that the students and interns do not set out to write a good report in the first place, but a specific number of words which are organized loosely in sentences. As Widdowson (1995) points out, we need to consider the larger discourse context or the meaning that lies beyond grammatical structure. To go beyond grammar, language should be looked at as a form of social practice (Fairclough, 1992).

Despite the need to write notes and also the increase in the number of medical students who write their theses in English, in Iran, there are very few researches into the difficulties encountered, or on writing courses designed to help such students write the thesis and notes to an acceptable standard. Many studies have been done in the area of EFL writing problems but only a few of them have pinpointed and found actual problems in both areas of language skills and writing skills.
Therefore this research is concerned with EFL writing issues at the university level, trying to point out the major difficulties with which our students at Shiraz University of Medical Sciences face when writing their reports. It is hypothesized that medical students have problem in writing notes in the medical charts in the hospitals. The academic language has specific features and follows specific purposes and it requires the students to be trained to write in this particular social context. Such ESP courses require specific instructional and curricular approaches applied to our university writing classes. Also, language accuracy, although very significant, cannot alone result in effective writing; what our students need is also writing skills. Based on the hypotheses made, the following research questions are pursued:

1. Are grammar, vocabulary and syntax the main problem areas in EFL writing? In other words, would the EFL students’ writing improve with remedial grammar/vocabulary lessons?
2. Is lack of writing skill the main problem to which our students and interns are confronted?
3. Is there any difference between the fifth year medical students and interns in their skill in writing?

The findings of this research will hopefully have implications for teaching and will reduce the difficulties of our students in writing in English.

Material and method

Study setting
The study reported in this article was conducted at the medical school of Shiraz University in the south of Iran, which enrolls approximately 120 medical students each year. Writing requirements for these students include a three unit course, consisting of three hours weekly during the term. This course is offered by English language experts in the English department of the university. During this course, the students are required to learn basic English structures as well as paragraph writing with different purposes and are encouraged to write both in class and through homework. After finishing their basic sciences period, these students enter the hospitals to start their clinical period as student first and then extern and intern. During this period they have to visit patients and write reports and notes in their files. This study examined 101 notes written by the fifth year medical students and interns.
in pediatric and internal wards of a teaching hospital of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences. Upon entering the university, these students have to take part in a placement test based on which they are put in pre-university, general English I or II. The other English courses required are ESP and academic writing. Except academic writing, the other courses aim at improving the students' reading comprehension. Based on the students' scores in our English courses, their level of English ranges from lower to upper intermediate.

These notes were written in the academic year of 2004 in the hospitalized patients' charts as well as those filed in the medical record of the hospital. The notes were selected by systematic sampling from the admission and progress notes which are usually more complete than other types of notes and those written in other wards. Moreover, on-service, off-service and discharge notes were excluded due to their shortness. Therefore, the instruments of this study were the existing data while guest students, externs and foreigners were excluded from the studies. The subjects' name remained confidential by codes given to each note. Finally some of the students were interviewed to see what they view as their problems.

**Analysis**
The notes were analyzed to identify the major problems in EFL writing. They were examined from the point of view of language skills, i.e. spelling, grammar, syntax and vocabulary as well as for the writing skills, i.e. punctuation, cohesive devices, coherence and organization. As to spelling, any type of mistake was considered, for example writing "admession" instead of "admission" or "daybetic" instead of "diabetic". As to grammar, such sentences as "She developing a knee pain since one month ago" were considered as wrong. In syntax, the students sometimes did not follow the rules of grammar used for ordering and connecting words to form phrases and sentences. An example of the wrong use of vocabulary was using "breast" instead of "chest", and sometimes forgetting the word for "knee" and leaving it blank. Sometimes, there were no close relationship, based on grammar or meaning, between different parts of a sentence or between one sentence and another (cohesion). In some cases, there was no consistency or natural and reasonable connection between the parts of their notes (coherence). All such cases were considered as a mistake.
The data were then analyzed to see whether any one of the factors mentioned is the cause of the main problem in writing then a comparison was made between students and interns’ skill in writing. The statistical tests used for analysis of the data were descriptive statistics and chi-squares test.

**Results**

To achieve the first and second research questions of this study, the data were first analyzed descriptively and the frequency tables, the percentage of errors for the 8 components described in the previous section were obtained (Table 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Percent of errorless notes</th>
<th>Mean errors</th>
<th>S.D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>1.821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Voc.</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesive Devices</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coherence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As reflected in Table 1, descriptive statistics reveal that the highest errorless scores are given to organization, use of vocabulary and spelling while grammar, syntax, punctuation, cohesive devices and coherence comprise the most problematic areas, with cohesive devices being the maximum problem. The percentages of no error cases are very low. The use of vocabulary is better than that of correct cases in other components. The same picture is true with organization which had a higher percentage of errorless cases.

On the other hand, the results displayed in the table reveal that the means of the errors in each component are very close to each other, indicating that there is problem in all components. The mean errors of spelling, punctuation, cohesive devices and coherence are higher than others.
To further investigate whether most of the errors were generally found in the **language skills** (spelling, vocabulary, grammar and syntax) or writing skills (punctuation, cohesive devices, coherence and organization), descriptive statistics were performed. It was revealed that for language skills, the maximum of errors was 26 overall (mean=11) and for writing skill, it was 30 (Mean=11.31). Obviously, the difference between the means of the first four factors and the second ones is not statistically significant.

To answer the third research question of this study and determine whether there is a difference between the students and interns’ skill in EFL writing, crosstabulation and chi-square tests were carried out. As shown in Table 2, a higher percentage of interns had less than 22 errors than the students and a lower percentage of them had more than 22 errors. The results of the chi-square test for their total writing revealed a significant difference between students and interns (P=.01), with the interns showing a higher skill in their writing.

**Table 2** Comparison between both groups in their total writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Less than 22 errors</th>
<th>More than 22 errors</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>students</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interns</td>
<td>59.6%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To further investigate the difference between these two components of writing, chi-square test was carried out for both groups in the two components. The outcome of the crosstabulation and chi-square test revealed that the difference between the two groups of students and interns for language skills (the first four factors) was not significant (2 sided=.07) and also it was non-significant for the writing skill (2 sided=.163) (Tables 3, 4)

**Table 3** The comparison of both groups in their performance in 4 components of language skills
Table 4 The comparison of both groups in their performance in 4 components of writing skill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Less than 11 errors</th>
<th>More than 11 errors</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
<td>6.28%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interns</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although in their total writing (Table 2) and in the first four factors of language skill (Table 3) they have performed differently and the differences were statistically significant, the difference between the mean score of errors (Table 1) and also the difference between the first and second four factors (Table 4) were non-significant.

Finally to compare both groups’ performance in each component individually, the results of the chi-square tests revealed a significant difference between them only in the first component of language skill, i.e. spelling (P=0.022) but not in all other 7 components (P=0.209, 0.216, 0.632, 0.129, 0.453 and 0.608, respectively). Tables 5 and 6 summarize different parts of this section. First the differences in 8 components individually and then the differences in the components of language skill and writing skill separately and finally the difference in their total mean scores of the errors were obtained.

Table 5 Students’ performance in all individual components, in language and writing skills and their total writing
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. spelling</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. use of vocabulary</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. grammar</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. syntax</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. punctuation</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. cohesive devices</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. coherence</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. organization</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language skill components</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>writing skill components</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total performance</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 Interns’ performance in all individual components, in language and writing skills and their total writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. spelling</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. use of vocabulary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. grammar</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. syntax</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. punctuation</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. cohesive devices</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. coherence</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. organization</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language skill components</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>writing skill components</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total performance</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As explained previously, the mean errors of the students in each individual component of language skill and writing skill are very similar to those of interns. As to the comparison of language skill and writing skill and in general, the students performed less favorably than the interns. The mean errors in the students’ writing were higher than those of the interns (language skills: 1.3 V.S. 9.61, writing skill: 11.94 V.S. 10.96 and total writing: 24.2 V.S. 20.30). This indicates that although statistically non-significant, the interns have performed better in their writing.

**Discussion**

In order to help medical students perform EFL writing task in their academic career, understanding of the nature of writing task and students’ writing needs and problems seems to be essential. The study reported here presents an effort to understand these. Although before the writing course, we offer 3-4 more other courses in reading skills, the development of which is indispensable for the development of writing skills, the students still have problems. This study identified the percentages of errors in each component of EFL writing. According to Table 1, some components of both language and writing skills cause problem for students and interns while trying to write in English. The percentages of no error cases are very low, indicating that, overall, there is a major problem not only in language skills but also in writing skills. The use of vocabulary is better than the use of correct cases in other components. That’s probably because the medical students have a good knowledge of technical terms. However, their writing reveals that in the use of general vocabulary, they have more problems. The same picture is true with organization which had a higher percentage of errorless cases. The reason is that there is a stereotype organization for writing reports starting with the patient’s personal information, the complaints, symptoms, diagnosis and the drugs prescribed. But in practice we see that in writing a well organized paragraph, they still have some problems.

On the other hand, the results reveal that the means of the errors in each component are very close to each other, indicating that there is problem in all components. The mean errors of spelling, punctuation, cohesive devices and coherence are higher than others. This may suggest that discoursal aspects of writing should be more emphasized in our writing classes.

The descriptive statistics performed revealed that the difference between the means of language and writing skills was not significant, indicating that there is a major
problem not only in language skills but also in writing skills. This finding was confirmed when the mean score of errors by the students and interns were compared statistically in all 8 components of writing. There was no significant difference. However, when descriptively examined, there was a difference between the scores, with the interns performing better. Therefore, they all have problem in the 8 components under the study and their writing will improve not only with remedial grammar/vocabulary lessons but also by focusing on writing skills. Of course, it can not be claimed that grammar, vocabulary and syntax are not essential for a well-written report or patient’s note. Other more equally important areas such as cohesive devices, coherence, organization and even punctuation are important as well which might be ignored while overconcentrating on grammar and vocabulary. Based on the interactive approach to writing, the writer is “involved in a dialogue with his/her audience” (Johns, 1990) and he has to write effectively to have communication. A piece of writing might be good in terms of language; yet, it might not succeed the goal it has been written for and is unable to produce an effective text. In this regard, the study of Gabrielatos (2002) confirms our results, denoting that language accuracy, although important, cannot alone lead to efficient writing which needs writing skills to be developed as well. According to him, in most cases, learners have problems both in language and writing skills.

As to the comparison of both groups in the total writing, the results of the chi-square test indicated a significant difference between them in general. The interns showed a better skill in writing. What is consistent with this finding is the fact that the difference between the two groups in the 4 components of language skill was significant; however, it was non-significant for writing skill components. Although interns write better in terms of language skills, both groups performed similarly regarding the writing skills. The difference between both groups was only significant for spelling but in all 7 other components, there was no statistically significant difference. These results were in the same line with the other results obtained in the study. Therefore, both groups had problems although interns performed better in language part. Of interest is their mean errors in each individual component of writing (8 components under the study) which were mostly similar. When these 8 components were divided into language and writing skills, the mean scores revealed that the students had more errors than the interns although these differences were statistically non-significant. Moreover, although for writing skill they were not significantly
different, they showed a difference in language skills as well as the total writing which proved to be significant. In all, they had problem in all areas of writing and both aspects of writing must be focused in our classes. Better performance of interns may suggest that their more exposure to English texts during the clinical period for 2-3 years more than the students has enabled them to perform better. Therefore, in our classes we need to emphasize extensive reading.

As to the results of the interview with the subjects, it was indicated that, as expressed by themselves, the students do not have enough time to devote to writing courses and in general to their English courses due to the simultaneous offering of their specialized courses. To them, it would be more beneficial not to spend more time on English language and EFL writing classes. Secondly, their courses are not presented in English and they don’t have to write their tests in English. Moreover, they suffer from insufficient knowledge of general vocabulary so that they can write appropriately.

The results of this part, the interview as well as the author's experience with these students lead us to the conclusion that some problems go back to our classes and method of teaching and some to our students’ low knowledge of vocabulary and finally their low motivation for learning writing. In order to be able to help EFL students write in English appropriately, there is a need for teachers to take the processes involved in good writing and the favorable outcomes of a writing program into account. In our classes, the teachers mostly focus on sentence level problems and try to correct the compositions sentence by sentence. As stated by Nelson and Carson (2002, p.18), this causes the students not to be able to transform their thoughts into writing and tends to privilege product over process. In a study done by Hayland (2000, p. 46), it is recommended that correcting errors does not necessarily produce learning. Based on the results of this study, if ESL writing is one of the skills of language learning, first of all vocabulary and grammar is important. The need for EFL composition instructors, therefore, is not to cast-aside sentence level learning but to find new and better ways to do it.

In addition to grammar and vocabulary work, our students’ practical needs must be emphasized more; theoretical teaching does not suffice. The students must have more opportunity to write. We teachers need to facilitate the planning and production stages of writing for adult students of English as a foreign language. The problems in our classes is exactly what Holmes (2004) mentions;” Teachers have trapped the students
within the sentence and respond to the piece of writing as item checkers not as real readers. As he suggests, we need to develop a more top-down and student-centered approach to the teaching of writing. What is lacking in our classes is enough attention to the relevant issues of discourse and genre in our traditional, largely syntax-focused classrooms.

Secondly, through examining the notes, it emerged that although in using technical words, they have no problem, they do not have access to a normal range of vocabularies to be able to write a well-organized and appropriate note, for example using the term "febrile" instead of "temperature" as used inappropriately in a specific context. In many cases, when they need a general word like "consistency", the students apparently do not remember the word and leave it blank. Lack of vocabulary probably causes more syntactic difficulties than any other single problem. As revealed in their interview, when they don’t know the word for something, they use one of two strategies: they either use a bilingual dictionary and choose a word they have not acquired and therefore have no feeling for, or they “write around” the gap, describing the concept they are groping toward. The first strategy usually ends up with a word with inappropriate connotations, and the second often produces a complex and tangled sentence structure. What seems to be lacking is knowledge of general words since they know the technical terms in their field well, which seems to be necessary to be expanded to provide the learners with the means to access various types and levels of writing. So lexical remediation with respect to general language is recommended. As Muncie (2002) indicates, limited vocabulary is a major obstacle to students’ learning to write in a foreign language. He concludes that vocabulary learning is very important to the development of ESL writing and that ESL writing instructors need to recognize and encourage vocabulary learning. Kosuth in University of Minnesota Dutch (2004) explains learning to write as reciprocally and simultaneously integrated with learning to read. Therefore, their range of vocabulary can be extended in reading comprehension classes.

Moreover, our students do not have enough motivation to learn writing during the first years of university when they have to pass their writing course. We have to justify their future need to writing to be able to overcome this lack of strong motivation. Actually when syllabus and time constraints come to the fore, there is not enough provision for practice of the writing skill in our classes, the problem that must be solved anyway.
To solve these problems in the way of effective teaching of writing some recommendations are presented hereafter. First of all, as the language teaching approaches have moved toward discoursal aspects of the language, we, as teachers of writing, need to develop a more top-down approach in our writing classes. We need to change our one-dimensional focus, i.e. reinforcement of grammatical and lexical patterns to the content and self expression. As stated by Holmes (2004), we need to change our focus from “writing to learn” to “learning to write” (p.118, developing teachers.com). To do this, Gabrielatos (2002) suggests awareness raising in which learners are guided to discover/identify specific elements of good writing and features of different text types. Awareness raising procedures can include the following: analyzing a poorly formulated text in order to identify problems, propose remedies, analyzing learner texts for merits/shortcomings, for style/register, ordering jumbled sentences to create a paragraph/text, etc. Of interest is what stated by the proponents of social interactionist view of language literacy that holds that a learner's early attempts at writing are grounded in speech and that the development of written language is best enhanced within a supportive conversational environment (Weissberg, 1994). Therefore, it is concluded that more class hours are needed to offer the students the chance to use and experiment with the features of good writing discussed in classroom. It is recommended that the authorities and curriculum planners arrange the medical courses in a way that in the first year of the university the students be exposed to English language and other general courses before they start their specialized courses. Furthermore, more courses and, as a result, more hours are needed to be allocated to EFL and specifically to writing courses.

As to the students' low motivation, we have to react thoughtfully to their writing. This could be of great significance because careless reaction could discourage the students from actively developing their writing “power”. Excessive stress on grammar and focus on content accuracy may make them feel burdened (Graves, 1983).

What our students in writing classes need is recycling and enough practice on activities such as analyzing the text for elements of good writing, identifying problems, ordering jumbled sentences to make a paragraph or jumbled paragraphs to make a text, finding topic and supporting ideas. To achieve this goal, more individualized work is essential if our classes are to be effective. The problem is that our classes are too crowded to do it. Moreover, a 3 unit course does not seem to be sufficient for developing such skills. As Gabrielatos (2002) points out, learners need
to be involved in the process of learning since what is taught is not necessarily what is learned. In this process, recycling is essential for learning. Writing, according to Fairclough (1992) is power. To gain such power, our learners learn to write and write to learn. Fortunately, researchers have suggested solutions to writing problems of ESL/EFL writing. For more details, refer to Muncie 2002, Kasper & Petrello, 1996, Hans 2002 and Riazi & Mir, 2002.

As an example, recycling method of Gabrielatos (2002) can be used to give students enough practice in good writing in the actual classroom. He proposes a writing skill program in a developmental cycle based on learning procedures proposed by some researchers in writing (Altrichter et al 1993, Kolb 1984). According to him, special writing lessons are necessary during which the teacher guides the learners to be aware of all elements of good writing, give examples, create chances for practice and give them feedback. The cycle involves awareness, feedback, support, practice and feedback.

Limitations of this study must be taken into account when interpreting the findings. Firstly, this study examined the notes written at two wards and one university only. Different medical schools offer different courses and even most of them offer no writing course. Secondly, the data were examined by two researchers only. Further research could involve more researchers to examine the notes. In spite of the limitations noted here, this study provides useful information concerning the major problems these students encounter when writing in English.

Conclusion
Therefore, to help EFL learners write effectively, a distinction must be made between language accuracy and writing skills. It is not only language problems to which EFL learners are confronted when trying to write; the writing problems which lie beneath the surface must be looked at as well. It is also concluded that our students need more hours of EFL and writing classes. It is concluded that different approaches to teaching writing cannot be applied in our EFL context successfully unless we take our students' social and academic context, needs and purpose of writing into account. Considering our students' problems based on the results of this study, it seems that the model proposed by Badger and White (2000), entitled as "process genre approach" would be appropriate to be used in our university writing classes. In this model, writing is viewed as involving knowledge about language (as in genre and product approaches)
and knowledge of the context in which writing happens and specially the purpose of writing (as in genre approach). Therefore, writing development happens by drawing out the learners' potential and providing input to which the learners respond. Our students need to get familiar with the academic discourse and workplace, so our teachers must emphasize the link between discourse, community and knowledge in an attempt to offer a new insight on EFL writing.

References


Standards and Competence in English as an International Language Pedagogy

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Abstract
The global spread of English has resulted in varieties of English in different sociolinguistic and sociocultural contexts. The emergence of varieties of English in diverse settings has raised the issue of whether to adopt a single standard English for all English contexts or to recognize a variety of standards. This paper aims to investigate the issue of standards in teaching English as an international language. While the native standard English is advocated as the model in the expanding circle, it is argued that raising the students’ awareness of varieties of English should also be recognized in EIL pedagogy. The issue of standards is furthermore discussed in relation to the concept of competence in English as an international language pedagogy.

Key words: English as an International Language, EIL and competence, in Kachru’s expanding circle
Introduction

The global spread of English has brought English to new un-English sociolinguistic and sociocultural contexts. With the development of new norms in these sociolinguistic contexts the current discussions have begun to revolve around the issues of English language standards and defining proficiency in the English language. While some (Quirk, 1985) argue that a single standard English (American or British English) should be promoted the whole world over, others (e.g. Kachru, 1985) argue that new standard Engisheses have arised in new sociolinguistic and sociocultural contexts and these sociolinguistic reality of English should be recognized. While the former defines proficiency in terms of the native speaker, the latter argues that “the native speaker is not always a valid yardstick for the global uses of English” (Kachru, 1992, p.358) and focuses on non-natives’ proficiency in the light of bilingualism or multilingualism.

The discussions on the issues of standards and proficiency, however, are not restricted to these two opposing camps but extend to several other models of English labeled by different terminologies such as ‘English as a Lingua Franca’ (Jenkins, 2000, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2001, 2004), ‘World Standard Spoken English’ (Crystal, 2003), ‘English as an International Language’ (Modiano, 1999a, 1999b), ‘English as an International Auxiliary Language’ (Smith, 1983), ‘Nuclear English’ (Quirk, 1982), ‘General English’ (Ahulu, 1997) and ‘English as a Family of Languages’ (Canagarajah, 2006). This paper aims to present different definitions of EIL, focuses on diverse discussions on the English language standards, and on defining competence in relation to English as an international language.

1. Defining terminologies

The term “English as an International Language” does not refer to a single phenomenon but is used by different researchers to refer to a different entity. Furthermore, there are other terminologies circling around within the discussions of the status of English in the global context among which are ‘World Englishes’, ‘World English’ (in the singular), ‘International English(es)’, ‘World Standard Spoken English’, ‘English as a Lingua Franca’, ‘English as an International Auxiliary Language’, ‘Nuclear English’, ‘General English’, ‘English as a Family of Languages’ etc.
Some (e.g. Kachru, 1991) makes a distinction between English as an intranational language (the use of English in countries traditionally referred to as ESL countries, where English is used for internal purposes) and English as an international language (the use of English across different nations traditionally referred to as EFL countries, where English is used for external purposes), still others (e.g. McKay, 2002) do not make such a distinction and use the term English as an international language to refer to the uses of English in both contexts.

Smith (1976), for example, defines the term ‘international language’ as “one which is used by people of different nations to communicate with one another” (p. 38, in McKay, 2002, p.11). EIL, in this definition, is used in a global sense rather than a local one. McKay (2002), on the other hand, uses the term EIL both in a global and a local sense as it is used by speakers from both the outer and the expanding circle speakers as she notes that

In examining the use of English as an international language, an important question is whether or not the use of English within multilingual countries like South Africa and Kenya is an example of the use of English as an international language. I would argue that in some sense it is. If one assumes that one of the essential characteristics of English as an international language is that English is used to communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries, often in more formal contexts, then there seems little reason to require that these boundaries must coincide with national borders (p. 38).

McKay (2002), however, notes that the use of EIL in a local sense in the outer circle countries “has not become de-nationalized but rather its ownership has become re-nationalized” (p. 12).

Kachru (1985), on the other hand, seems to use the term EIL to refer to the function of English in the expanding circle countries:

The third circle, termed the expanding circle, brings to English yet another dimension. Understanding the function of English in this circle requires a recognition of the fact that English is an international language and that it has
already won the race in this respect with linguistic rivals such as French, Russian and Esperanto, to name just two natural languages and one artificial one” (p. 12).

Kachru, furthermore, presents the global spread of English under the general term world Englishes as depicted with his three concentric circles of world Englishes. Thus while McKay uses the term EIL as an umbrella term to cover both the global and the local uses of English in the world, Kachru depicts this situation with the term world Englishes.

Jenkins (2003, 2006a) and Seidlhofer (2001, 2004), on the other hand, use the term world Englishes in a strict sense to refer to the outer circle Englishes, and English as a lingua franca (ELF) to refer to the use of English in the expanding circle. It is also important to note that both authors also use the terms EIL and ELF interchangeably to refer to the same entity.

More recently, Jenkins (2006a) citing Bolton (2004) has presented three possible interpretations of the term world Englishes:

Firstly, it serves as an “umbrella label” covering all varieties of English worldwide and the different approaches used to describe and analyse them. Secondly, it is used in a narrower sense to refer to the so called new Englishes in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean (Kachru’s outer circle)…Thirdly, it is used to represent the pluricentric approach to the study of English associated with Kachru and his colleagues, and often referred to as the Kachruvian approach, although there is considerable overlap between this and the second interpretation of the term. The first use is also sometimes represented by other terms, including World English (i.e., in the singular), international English(es), and global Englishes, while the second is in fact more commonly represented by the terms nativised, indigenised, institutionalised, and new Englishes or English as a second language (p. 159).

There are still other terminologies used by different researchers to denote different entities. Smith (1983), for example, uses the term “English as an International
Auxiliary Language” to refer to a type of English which is formed of features of world Englishes of the outer circle and the native speaker standard English and Quirk (1982) proposes the concept of “Nuclear English” to refer to what may be called a simplified form of native speaker standard English.

Crystal (2003), on the other hand, uses the term “World Standard Spoken English” to refer to a global standard English which he believes will develop above the current local Englishes. This concept is somewhat similar to Modiano’s (1999a, 1999b) use of the term “English as an International Language” which refers to a global standard for English which comprises the features of English which can be easily understood by both native and non-native speakers.

2. Standards for English in the outer circle

The most famous debate over standards was between Randolph Quirk and Braj Kachru, first at a conference held in London in 1984 to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the British Council and then in the pages of the English Today, which is known as the English Today debate.

In the discussions on the issue of standards, Quirk (1985) argues that

The relatively narrow range of purposes for which the non-native needs to use English (even in ESL Countries) is arguably well catered for by a single monochrome form that looks good on paper as it sounds in speech. There are only the most dubious advantages in exposing the learner to a great variety of usage, no part of which he will have time to master properly, little of which he will be called upon to exercise, all of which is embedded in a controversial sociolinguistic matrix he cannot be expected to understand” (p. 6).

Quirk’s position mainly indicates a view of variation (in the non-natives’ use of English) from the native standard English as mistake or error, and of non-native varieties of English as interlanguage on the way to native speaker standard usage and accordingly as inappropriate pedagogical models in non-native contexts. Thus, for Quirk, a common Standard of use is warranted in all contexts of English language use” (McKay, 2002, p. 50).
Kachru (1985), on the other hand, presents the sociolinguistic profile of English in terms of three concentric circles “representing the types of spread, the patterns of acquisition and the functional domains in which English is used across cultures and languages” (p. 12). These are labelled as the inner circle, the outer circle and the expanding circle. The inner circle comprises the countries where English is the primary language such as the USA, UK, Canada, Australia etc., the outer circle comprises the institutionalized non-native varieties of English in such countries as India, Nigeria and Singapore, and the expanding circle comprises such countries as Russia, Israel and China, where performance varieties are used.

Kachru (1985) also classifies the English-using speech fellowships in the three circles as norm providing, norm developing and norm dependent. While native speaker Englishes (inner circle Englishes) are classified as norm providing, outer circle Englishes are argued to be norm developing and expanding circle Englishes are classified as norm dependent. In Jenkins’ (2003, p.16) words:

> English-language standards are determined by speakers of ENL, but while the ESL varieties of English have become institutionalized and are developing their own standards, the EFL varieties are regarded, in this model, as ‘performance’ varieties without any official status and therefore dependent on the standards set by native speakers in the Inner circle.

Thus, while Quirk rejects the endocentric norms for English in the outer circle and hence the legitimacy of outer circle Englishes, Kachru argues for the recognition of variations (in the use of English in the outer circle) from the native standard English as innovations rather than mistakes or errors, of outer circle Englishes as local standard Englishes rather than interlanguages and ultimately urges for these Englishes to be taken as pedagogical models in these local contexts. In this sense, the notions of “ambilingualism” (in the sense of native speaker proficiency), “interlanguage” and “fossilization” are irrelevant in the consideration of the proficiency of the non-native speakers and their Englishes in the outer circle.

While Quirk (1985) and Kachru (1985) put forward diverse views on the legitimacy of non-native Englishes in the outer circle, they are in agreement on the issue of
standards for English in the expanding circle and argue that expanding circle countries are dependent on the norms set by the native speakers. This position, however, is rejected by some ELF researchers (e.g., Jenkins, 2006a and Seidlhofer, 2001) who claim that expanding circle Englishes are also norm developing just the same as the outer circle Englishes.

3. Standards for English in the expanding circle: English as a lingua franca

The study of English as a lingua franca in the expanding circle has arisen as a new research area in applied linguistics. With its emphasis on the existence of ELF varieties such as Euro-English and East Asian English, and other specific varieties such as Korean English, China English and German English, ELF research is argued to be an alternative approach to English as a foreign language. When making the distinction between EFL and ELF Jenkins (2005) argues that

Speakers of EFL use their English chiefly to communicate with NSs of English, often in NS settings. They need at the very least to be intelligible to NSs, to understand them, and often to blend in with them. Their learning goal is therefore to approximate as closely as possible a NS variety of English, generally Standard British or American English. The norms of EFL, then, are NS norms. Speakers of ELF, on the other hand, use their English primarily (or entirely if one takes the ‘purist’ interpretation of ELF) to communicate with other NNSs of English, usually from first languages other than their own and typically in NNS settings. They need therefore to be intelligible to, and to understand, other NNSs rather than to blend in with NSs and approximate a NS variety of English. Instead, ELF speakers have their own emerging norms (retrieved from http://www.hltmag.co.uk/mar05/idea.htm).

Thus, what this research field suggests is that variations in the use of English in this circle should not be considered as mistakes or errors but rather as innovations or legitimate English usages, that expanding circle Englishes should not be considered as interlanguages but rather as ELF varieties in their own right, that native speaker standard English should not be taken as the only model of correctness and native
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speaker proficiency should not be the ultimate level of achievement for the English learners in the expanding circle.

The two most widely known ELF research projects are that of Jenkins (2000) on phonology and Seidlhofer (2001) on lexicogrammar. Jenkins (2003) proposes the Lingua Franca Core, with her own words, “the most fully researched and detailed attempt that has as yet been made to provide EIL speakers with a core intended to guarantee the intelligibility of their accents” (p. 126) Some of these core features are as follows:

- some substitutions of /θ/ and /Ő/ are acceptable (because they are intelligible in EIL)
- rhotic ‘r’ rather than non-rhotic varieties of ‘r’
- British English /t/ between vowels in words such as ‘letter’, ‘water’ rather than American English flapped /r/
- allophonic variation within phonemes permissible as long as the pronunciation does not overlap onto another phoneme, e.g. Spanish pronunciation of /v/ as /β/ leads in word-initial positions to its being heard as /b/ (so ‘vowels’ is heard as ‘bowels’ etc.) (Jenkins, 2003, p.126).

Seidlhofer’s corpus study, VOICE (Vienna Oxford International Corpus of English) aims to “find out which items are used systematically and frequently, but differently from native speaker use and without causing communication problems, by expert speakers of English from a wide range of L1s” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 169).

Some of these items that Seidlhofer (2004, p. 220) has specified in her corpus study VOICE are:
- non-use of the third person present tense –s (“she look very sad”)  
- interchangeable use of the relative pronouns who and which (“a book who,” “a person which”)  
- omission of the definite and indefinite articles which are obligatory in native speaker English and insertion where they do not occur in native speaker English  
- use of an all-purpose question tag such as isn’t it? or no? instead of shouldn’t they? (“They should arrive soon, isn’t it?”)
increasing of redundancy by adding prepositions (“We have to study about…” and “can we discuss about…?”), or by increasing explicitness (“black colour” vs. “black” and “How long time?” vs. “How long?”)

-heavy reliance on certain verbs of high semantic generality, such as do, have, make, put, take

-pluralisation of nouns which are considered uncountable in native speaker English (“informations”, “staff”, “advices”)

-use of that-clauses instead of infinitive constructions (“I want that we discuss about my dissertation”) (Jenkins, 2006, p.170).

Thus, Jenkins (2000) argues that some sounds that are often found in native speakers’ speech but that are difficult for non-native speakers to produce are not necessary for international intelligibility and similarly Seidlhofer (2004) maintains that some lexicogrammatical features that are present in native standard Englishes but that are absent in nonnative English use such as the third person singular present tense ‘-s’ marking are not necessary for international intelligibility through English as a lingua franca.

3. Beyond the three circle model of English:
The discussions on the issue of standards for English in the global context extend beyond the three circle model of English and lead to different proposals as to what constitutes the nature of English as a global language. These proposals range from the concept of a global standard English for the entire world (e.g. Crystal, 2003; Modiano, 1999a, 1999b; Smith, 1983; Quirk, 1982) to the notions of “General English” (Ahulu, 1997) and “English as a Family of Languages” (Canagarajah, 2006).

Towards a global standard English
There has been efforts to conceptualize a global standard English to be used among native and non-native English speakers, and different proposals have been put forward as to what constitutes the nature of this code resulting in different labels to characterize it e.g. “Nuclear English” (Quirk, 1982), “English as an International Auxiliary Language” (Smith, 1983), “English as an International Language” (Modiano, 1999a, 1999b), “World Standard Spoken English” (Crystal, 1997), “Global English” (Languapedia, 2007).
Quirk (1982) proposes the concept of Nuclear English for international communication. Quirk’s Nuclear English, however, is not a new global standard English covering new norms used by non-native speakers in non-native settings but rather is a simplified form of native standard English which would be easier to learn and use as an international language. Thus, Nuclear English is the native standard English which is stripped of features which can be dispensable such as:

- items which are ‘disproportionately burdensome’ such as question tags, e.g. ‘I’m late, aren’t I?’ ‘She used to work here, didn’t she’?
- items which are ‘semantically inexplicit’ such as non-defining relative clauses, e.g. ‘I chatted with the captain, who was later reprimanded’ (= and he was later reprimanded or as a result he was later reprimanded?);
- items which are completely ambiguous such as many model verbs, e.g. ‘Able Baker 123 may land at O’Hare in five minutes’ (= the flight will possibly land or has permission to land?). (Jenkins, 2003, p. 129).

Smith (1983), on the other hand, proposes the concept of English as an International Auxiliary Language, which would serve as a neutral means of communication in English in a global context. This form of English is formed of features of world Englishes of the outer circle and the native speaker standard English and it is not tied to the native speaker standard English nor to the native speaker cultures. Thus both native and non-native speakers would need special training to use English as an international language.

Crystal (2003) predicts that a ‘World Standard Spoken English’ will develop above the local varieties of English as he argues that

If Englishes did become increasingly different, as years went by, the consequences for world English would not necessarily be fatal. A likely scenario is that our current ability to use more than one dialect would simply extend to meet the fresh demands of the international situation. A new form of English- let us think of it as ‘World Standard spoken English’ (WSSE)- would
almost certainly arise. Indeed, the foundation for such a development is already being laid around us. (p. 185)

Crystal (2003) furthermore hypothesises that to involve in international communication the speakers of local varieties of English will need to switch into the World Standard Spoken English.

A similar argument is also made by Modiano (1999a, 1999b), who proposes the concept of ‘English as an International Language’ in place of native standard English for international communication. To Modiano (1999a, p. 27) “EIL is by definition a composite of the features of English which are easily understood by a broad cross-section of native and non-native speakers”. Modiano suggests that speakers of local varieties of English will be considered EIL speakers if they can code-switch into EIL.

One project to be mentioned in this context is the Languapedia Project (Global English Project) set up by Paul Robertson (as an initiative of the Global EIL Congress) and designed by Chris Patch. The aim of the project has direct resemblance to Modiano’s (1999a, 1999b) theoretical framework since it attempts to find out the forms of English common to all the varieties of English in the world but it is an empirical realization of such a framework. As expressed in its web page, “the Global English project seeks to uncover a core of the English language that can be considered international. The purpose of uncovering a Global English is to develop a standardized version of the language that can be taught internationally.” (“Languapedia,” 2007, retrieved from http://www.languapedia.com/index.php?title=Main_Page). Since the project is currently in its early phase we are yet to see the development of it.

General English

Another viewpoint to the issue of standards for English in the global context is that of Ahulu’s (1997) “General English”. Ahulu (1997) takes up the issue of Standard English /New Englishes debate that occurred between Kachru (1985) and Quirk (1985) as described earlier in this paper and concludes that neither Quirk’s ‘Standard English’ perspective nor Kachru’s ‘New Englishes’ perspective reflects the real nature of English as an international language. Thus, Ahulu (1997) aims to redefine the
concept of ‘Standard English’ or ‘correctness’ by “looking at the limitations of both the concept of ‘Standard English’ and the concept of ‘New Englishes’” (p. 17). Ahulu, on the one hand, considers Kachru’s viewpoint that nonnative varieties are legitimate varieties in their own right unrealistic. On the other hand, he criticizes the Standard English perspective for its consideration of any divergence from native standard English as an error. What the ‘General English’ framework suggests is that the divergent forms in the non-natives’ use of English would better be explained as modifications of standard English or styles of standard English and not as errors as Quirk views them nor as different national varieties of English as Kachru suggests. Thus Ahulu is against the discrimination between native speaker usage and nonnative speaker usage as reflected by Kachru & Quirk debate and considers them to be within the realm of possibility of each other. Thus “the concept of ‘Standard English’ that encapsulates such international variability will reflect the grammar of ‘General English’ (Ahulu, 1997, p.21).

*English as a family of languages*

The other new orientation to the issue of standards for English that go beyond the Kachru & Quirk debate is that of Canagarajah’s conceptualization of English as a family of languages. Canagarajah (2006) questions the relevance of the debate whether the norm for testing should be the inner circle norms (Quirk, 1985) or world Englishes norms (Kachru, 1985) and argues that in today’s society we need a “both and more” perspective rather than an “either / or” perspective. While Canagarajah finds the Kachru’s three circle model of English useful for legitimizing outer circle Englishes, he argues that some features of postmodern globalization requires us to question the assumptions behind the Kachruvian model and he puts forward a set of arguments in favor of a new orientation towards a notion of “English as a Family of Languages”. Firstly, while Kachru argues for the legitimacy of outer circle Englishes in local contexts (e.g. Indian English is valid for India, Nigerian English is valid for Nigeria) Canagarajah (2006) argues that in today’s world speakers of local varieties of English as well as speakers of inner circle and expanding circle countries need to develop an awareness of each other’s varieties of English. Thus Indian English is also necessary for Americans, American English is also necessary for Indians etc. Secondly, to Canagarajah (2006), speakers of English in the expanding circle do not use English solely for international purposes but they also use English for
intranational purposes in such countries as China, Vietnam, Brazil etc., which calls into question the ESL/ EFL distinction. Thirdly, Canagarajah indicates that the speech community in the expanding circle would better be classified as norm developing as they use English as a lingua franca contrary to Kachru’s view of these communities as norm dependent, and lastly, he maintains that while Kachru’s classification of speech communities as norm providing, norm developing and norm dependent leads to a core and periphery distinction designating the inner circle as the core and the outer and expanding circle as the periphery, the current statistics of number of English users (e.g. Graddol, 1999; Crystal, 1997) questions the periphery status of the outer and expanding circles and gives them a central position in the development of English.

Based on these assumptions, Canagarajah (2006, p. 232) calls for a need to view English as “a heterogeneous language with multible norms and diverse grammars”, which would be a model of “English as a family of languages”, where the varieties of English in the world relate to each other on a single level rather than on three hierarchies as in Kachru’s three circle model of English.

4. Local versus international uses of English and the issue of EIL competence

Given the diverse views on the issue of standards in EIL, the issue of competence becomes a complex matter in the consideration of English as an international language leading some (e.g. Nunn, 2005) to call for a need to define competence in relation to EIL. Defining competence in EIL depends a lot on the conceptualization of the nature of English as an international language and the context of cross cultural communication in English in today’s world. At one point the issue is whether a single standard English will emerge above the local standard Englishes as some (e.g. Modiano, 1999a, 1999b and Crystal, 2003) argue. In such a conceptualization speakers of local varieties of English will need to be proficient in two varieties of English: their local variety and an international variety, and they should also have the ability to code switch from their local varieties to an international one.

The point, however, is that while Crystal (2003) already acknowledges that “it is too early to be definite about the way this variety (WSSE) will develop” (p.186) Modiano’s (1999a, 1999b) concept of English as an international language as the core features of the English language “which are used and are comprehensible to the
majority of native and competent nonnative speakers of English” (p. 11) is still problematical as some (e.g. Jenkins, 2003) indicate that “the difficulty of distinguishing between core and non-core varieties remain” (p. 21). Such a theoretical concept needs to be supported by an empirical study like the Languapedia Project to find out the common core of English as a global language.

At another point the issue is whether Ahulu’s “General English” framework with its assumption that native and nonnative norms should be considered to be within the realm of the possibility of each other would be a valid conceptualization for the nature of English as an international language. Thus proficiency in English would be proficiency in “General English”. This would make the case rather pessimistic in terms of proficiency since being proficient in EIL would mean being competent in the native standard English with all its styles and registers, which would be a burden for the learners of EIL.

Canagarajah’s conceptualization of “English as a family of languages” where the varieties of English in the world relate to each other on a single level rather than on three hierarchies as in Kachru’s three circle model of English requires a different view of proficiency in EIL. From this point of view, “to be really proficient in English today, one has to be multidialectical” (Canagarajah 2006, p.133). This view of proficiency however does not mean being proficient in all the varieties of English in the world. What Canagarajah stresses is the importance of raising the students’ awareness of different varieties of English as well as developing the negotiation skills for shuttling between different varieties of English. The conceptualization of expanding circle speech communities as norm developing in this model, however, does not meet a common consensus among the researchers. Thus whether testing in this circle should include local norms (English as a lingua franca) or not is not yet definite.

Jenkins’ and Seidlhofer’s conceptualization of English as an international language in the expanding circle or English as a lingua franca argues for the existence of new standard forms in this circle and proficiency in EIL would mean having such forms in one’s linguistic repertoire for use when the need arises, having language awareness (awareness of the diversity in English) and accommodation skills to cope with the
variability in English. Jenkins (2006) stresses that “instead of speaking a monolithic variety of English, it is considered more important for speakers of WErs and ELF to be able to adjunct their speech in order to be intelligible to interlocutors from a wide range of L1 backgrounds, most of whom are not inner circle native speakers. (p. 174)

One important point in these considerations is whether the use of English in what Kachru labels as outer circle should be considered as the use of EIL. I assume that a distinction between English as an intranational language and English as an international language is a valid one and I define EIL in a global sense as a language of wider communication between countries largely but not exclusively in Kachru’s expanding circle. One issue to be discussed in this context is whether the speech community in the expanding circle should be norm developing or norm dependent, an issue which is crucial for the choice of a pedagogical model and for defining proficiency in EIL.

While the ELF studies (Seidlhofer, 2001 and Jenkins, 2006) suggest that new norms are emerging in the expanding circle the case cannot be generalized to the whole expanding circle countries. While we will be able to talk about the emergence of EuroEnglish if English is being used intensively and extensively in the European Union (a future configuration) there is however certainly not a distinct variety called Turkish English which would find place in the educational setting in Turkey. Expanding circle Englishes thus should be better classified as norm dependent (dependent on the native Standard Englishes e.g. American English and British English) for the reason that English has no intranational function in many countries of the expanding circle and hence it is far away from having established local norms. Thus native standard English(es) should serve as the model for teaching in this circle. The other point is that taking inner circle varieties as a model in this circle does not necessarily mean the students should achieve native like proficiency at all levels of language. Pragmatic and discourse variation in the expanding circle speaker’s English use will better be considered as a natural consequence of the sociocultural context of these speakers since such norms are strongly shaped by the cultures of these speech communities.
The other important point in the consideration of competence in EIL is the context of cross cultural communication. As Canagarajah (2006) points out in the post modern globalization borders become less important and we often see that the speakers of outer circle, expanding circle and inner circle countries often involve in cross cultural communication in English among them. Such being the case, Indian English is also relevant for Americans and American English is also relevant for Indians etc. Expanding circle speakers also do not need just inner circle English but they also need to be familiar with other varities of English. Thus raising the students’ awareness of the varieties of English (Language awareness) is gaining importance. The same is also true of the inner circle and outer circle speakers. As Canagarajah (2006) points out “postmodern globalization requires that students should strive for competence in a repertoire of English varieties as they shuttle between multilingual communities” (p. 229). The passive competence to understand new varieties is part of this multidialectical competence (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 233).

Another relevant point about the issue of proficiency in the postmodern globalization is the importance of accommodation skills. Kubota (2001, p. 50) argues that

In a community that promotes monoculturalism and monolingualism, the dominant group forces the dominated group to accommodate and acquire the dominant way of life. However, a multicultural society affirms cultural and linguistic differences and rejects a one-way accommodation. In communication between inner circle mainstream speakers and other We speakers, the accommodation should be mutual with both parties exploring ways to establish effective communication.

Thus, the speakers of EIL should also have the necessary skills to cope with variability in English in today’s world, a point also shared by both Canagarajah (2006) and English as a Lingua Franca researchers (Seidlhofer, 2001; Jenkins, 2006). Jenkins (2006), for instance, argues that “instead of speaking a monolithic variety of English, it is considered more important for speakers of WEs and ELF to be able to adjust their speech in order to be intelligible to interlocutors from a wide range of L1 backgrounds, most of whom are not inner circle native speakers (p.174)
Thus, along the line of Canagarajah (2006), I argue that proficiency in the postmodern globalization would better be explained as being multidialecticism. This would mean competency in EIL would require being proficient in at least one variety of English, to be able to understand different varieties, and to be able to accommodate one’s speech to be intelligible to the speakers of other varieties of English. For the expanding circle speakers, for example, competency would mean being proficient in the linguistic norms of the inner circle native speakers, making use of their own pragmatic and discourse norms, having the ability to understand local varieties of English and to be able to accommodate their speech to be intelligible to the other speakers of English from different countries. The application of this paradigm shift in proficiency is yet to be seen in the assessment objectives in the ELT profession.

Conclusion
This paper aimed to present some of the recent approaches to the issue of standards in English as an international language and to discuss the issue of defining competence in relation to EIL. EIL is defined in a global sense as a language of wider communication between countries largely but not exclusively in Kachru’s expanding circle. It is argued that while the inner circle native speaker standard English should still serve as the pedagogical model in this circle there must be allowance for pragmatic and discourse variations in these English users’ speech since these levels of language are strongly shaped by the cultural contexts of these speakers.

Moreover it is indicated that expanding circle speakers do not need just inner circle English but also need to be familiar with other varieties of English as a requirement of post modern globalization (Canagarajah, 2006). Thus it is argued that raising the students’ awareness of the diversity in English (Language awareness) is gaining importance. This would also require that the speakers of EIL should also have the necessary skills to cope with variability in English, that is, accommodation skills. Such assumptions lead us to conclude that competency in EIL would require being proficient in at least one variety of English, to be able to understand different varieties, and to be able to accommodate one’s speech to be able to intelligible to the speakers of other varieties of English. Whether these requirements will find application in the testing of English as an international language is yet to be seen in different educational contexts.
References


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