The Effect of Collaborative Peer- and Teacher-Scaffolding on Iranian EFL Learners’ Intentional and Incidental Grammar Learning

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Abstract — This study examined the effect of collaborative peer- and teacher-scaffolding on Iranian EFL learners' intentional and incidental grammar learning in writing at Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamedan. 18 students took part in the study, all were in term 2, studying English Translation. There were 11 collaboration episodes in each of which, there was a scaffolder, a scaffoldee and the teacher (the first researchers). The first five groups were the intentional group and episodes 6, 7, 9, 10, and 11 were the incidental group. The student in episode 8 had no errors in her essay. There were three topics to choose from and the subjects were asked to write an essay about one of them. Then, each student was given an essay in order to take it home and correct it. Based on Aljaafreh and Lantolf’s (1994) Regulatory Scale, the scaffolders were asked to correct their classmates' errors/mistakes, within their ‘zone of proximal development’ (ZPD). Whenever needed, the researcher entered the collaborations. For transcription and further analyses, the collaborations were tape-recorded. The results for both the intentional and the incidental groups showed a significant improvement in the subjects’ performance in the test. That is, they were all able to appropriate the grammatical points they had not known prior to the collaborations. However, there was no significant difference between the intentional group and the incidental group.

Index Terms — ZPD, Scaffolding, Intentional learning, Incidental (Strategic) learning, Corrective feedback

I. INTRODUCTION

Social constructivism emphasizes that learning takes place in a sociocultural environment (Vygotsky, 1978). We learn not as isolated individuals acquiring chunks of disassociated truths, but as members of society. What we learn, and how we make sense of knowledge, depends on where and when we are learning. Learning takes place through dialogue and is mediated through language and other systems of signs, such as gestures or diagrams (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) holds that this dialogue is initially intermental - it takes place between teacher and student and among students. Then, the learner makes sense of what is said (or written) through internal or intramental dialogue. He believes that well-designed instruction is like a magnet. If it is aimed slightly ahead of what children know and can do at the present time, it will pull them along, helping them master the things they cannot learn on their own.

So, Vygotsky in his genetic law of cultural development claims every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and then, on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological), and later inside the child (intrapsychological). Central to his idea is the process of internalization or more properly for his sociocultural theory, appropriation. This is what Zinchenko (1985, cited in Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994) refers to as "the bridge between external and internal activity". Vygotsky holds that the appropriation process is not only observable during ontogenesis of children into adults, but also during microgenesis in which processes undergo change "right before one's eyes" in the space of a few days or week, or even a few seconds, or fractions of seconds.

Vygotsky used the term "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) to refer to the range of tasks that are too difficult for children to master alone, but can be learned with guidance and assistance from adults or more skilled peers. Therefore, his concept of ZPD establishes
two developmental levels in the learner: the actual developmental level which is determined by what the learner can do alone, and the potential level of development, which can be established by observing what the learner can do when assisted by an adult or more capable peer (De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000).

Closely connected to the idea of ZPD, is the concept of "scaffolding". Although scaffolding is not one of Vygotsky’s initial terms, the concept is a useful one because it makes more explicit some of the instructional implications of the idea of the ZPD. Introduced almost forty years after Vygotsky's death by Jerome Bruner (Wood, et al, 1976), scaffolding is a technique of changing the level of support. Over the course of a teaching session a more skilled person adjusts the amount of guidance to fit the student's current performance level. As the student's competence increases, less guidance is given. Dialogue is an important tool of scaffolding in the ZPD. According to Bruner (1978, cited in De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000), the mother's scaffolding behaviour is characterized by five important features: (1) reducing the complexity of the task, (2) getting the child's attention and keeping it focused, (3) offering models, (4) extending the scope of the immediate situation, and (5) providing support so that the child moves forward and does not slip back.

Sometimes, incidental and intentional learning are used indistinguishably from implicit and explicit learning. According to Ellis (1994), the most characteristic feature distinguishing implicit from explicit learning is the absence or presence of “conscious operations”. Schmidt (1994) refers to this notion as the absence or presence of "awareness at the point of learning". Paradis (1994) distinguishes incidental from implicit in the following definition of implicit competence, which is acquired incidentally (i.e., by not focusing attention on what is being internalized, as in acquiring the form while focusing on the meaning), stored implicitly (i.e., not available to conscious awareness), and used automatically (i.e., without conscious control). Thus, incidental learning is always implicated in implicit learning, and implicit learning, as a result, entails more than what is meant by incidental learning.

A distinction must also be made between intentional and explicit learning. According to Hulstijn (2003), whereas explicit learning involves awareness at the point of learning (e.g., by trying to understand what the function of a certain language is), intentional learning involves a deliberate attempt to commit new information to memory (e.g., by applying rehearsal and/or mnemonic techniques). So, both incidental and intentional learning require some attention and noticing. Attention is deliberately directed to committing new information to memory in the case of intentional learning, whereas the involvement of attention is not deliberately geared toward an articulated learning goal in the case of incidental learning (Hulstijn, 2003). We can conclude that the major difference between incidental and intentional learning, which will also be referred in this study, is the fact that participants in the intentional condition are told in advance they will be tested later, whereas, participants in the incidental condition are not.

There is little research on the use of scaffolding strategies by EFL learners in the Iranian context. Therefore, the aim of the present paper is to cast light on Iranian EFL learners’ use of scaffolding strategies within their ZPD. The study tries to explore whether there are any significant differences between students in intentional groups using these strategies and those in incidental groups.

A. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the current study is to examine the effect of peer- and teacher-scaffolding on Iranian EFL learners’ incidental and intentional grammar learning. To this end, the researchers tried to answer the following research questions:

1. Is collaborative peer- and teacher-scaffolding effective in incidental grammar learning in Iranian EFL learners?
2. Is collaborative peer- and teacher-scaffolding effective in intentional grammar learning in Iranian EFL learners?
3. Between incidental and intentional learning, which one is more effective in grammar learning in Iranian EFL learners?

II. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

According to Vygotsky (1978), what is the zone of proximal development today will be the actual developmental level tomorrow. ZPD implies that cognitive development does not occur uniformly in all children or in all cultures because social support for thinking and problem solving vary for each child. Consequently, two individuals who achieve the same score on a given test, language or otherwise, may not both be able to make use of the help offered by an author; that is, in Vygotsky's view, the learner who is able to respond to such help must be considered to be at a more advanced developmental level than the one who fails to do so, because the learner who responds to help can be expected to show a more rapid rate of actual development (Aljaafreh & Lantolf 1994).

ZPD also suggests that deliberate teaching of cognitive stages can speed up cognitive development. This concept emphasizes that we can help move a child's cognitive development forward within limits (zones) dictated by child's biological maturation. Related to the ZPD, Wretsch (1979, cited in De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000), proposed that in the transition from interspsychological to
In the ZPD: first, the scaffolding system is then gradually taken away, as the learner begins to take over and understand the required thinking process. This continuous decrease of assistance is done without altering the learning task itself. Keeping the learning task unchanged makes scaffolding different from other instructional methods that simplify the learners’ job by breaking a complex task into several simple ones. Van Lier (1996) has formulated six principles of scaffolding:

1. **Contextual support** - a safe but challenging environment: errors are expected and accepted as part of the learning process.
2. **Continuity** - repeated occurrences over time of a complex of actions, keeping a balance between routine and variation.
3. **Intersubjectivity** - mutual engagement and support: two minds thinking as one.
4. **Flow** – communication between participants is not forced, but flow in a natural way.
5. **Contingency** – the scaffolded assistance depends on learners’ reactions: elements can be added, changed, deleted, repeated, etc.
6. **Handover** – the ZPD closes when learner is ready to undertake similar tasks without help.

Many scaffolding strategies have been used such as modeling, cognitive structuring, providing information, prompting, encouraging self-monitoring, and labeling and affirming. According to Many (2002), scaffolding can be shaped by broad frames for instruction which are pre-planned by the teachers as well as by responsive instruction which is contingent, it should be given only when it is needed and removed as soon as the novice starts to function independently.

Donato (1994, cited in Machado & Mattos, 2000) holds that scaffolded help can be obtained through collaborative work among peers of the same level of competence in L2 acquisition settings, and not only through the unidirectional help of a more capable peer or expert, as the majority of research on scaffolding has shown. So, scaffolding is a joint process constructed on the basis of the learner's need. The scaffolding support system is then gradually taken away, as the learner begins to take over and understand the required thinking process. This continuous decrease of assistance is done without altering the learning task itself. Keeping the learning task unchanged makes scaffolding different from other instructional methods that simplify the learners’ job by breaking a complex task into several simple ones. Van Lier (1996) has formulated six principles of scaffolding:

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There seems to be a general consensus among researchers that negative corrective feedback has a role to play in second language learning (Nassaji & Swain, 2000). Rutherford (1987, cited in Nassaji & Swain, 2000) and White (1991) considered that negative feedback is essential to L2 learners when positive input in the natural environment is inadequate to lead the learners towards the correct form of the target language. However, there is disagreement among L2 researchers over the extent and the type of negative feedback that may be useful in L2 acquisition. Consequently, according to Pica (1994), research in this area has produced different and sometimes conflicting results. More recently, in an attempt to resolve some of these conflicting conclusions, some researchers have taken a different stance on the issue of feedback in L2 learning by looking at the question from the perspective of a sociocultural theory of learning (Nassaji & Swain, 2000). Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) claim that the focus of corrective feedback should be more on the social relationship in the interaction, rather than on demarcating types of corrective feedback.

Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, one of the central themes of second language research has been the study of learner errors (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). Later, the attention of those working on errors has moved towards the effects of corrective procedures on language learning. Day, et al (1984) hold that learner personality may have something to do with the amount and type of correction supplied by the teacher. Sharwood-Smith (1993) and Schachter (1991) argue that learners’ internal strategies and linguistic development may play an important role in determining the effectiveness of negative feedback and recommend that these should be investigated in greater depth. Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) believe that adjustments in providing feedback to the learner cannot be determined a priori; rather, they must be collaboratively negotiated on-line with the learner. They acknowledge that we are still a long way from a full understanding of how feedback interacts with the L2 learning process.

Carroll and Swain (1993) report that learners who received explicit correction procedures generally performed better on their experimental tasks than those learners who were given implicit feedback. Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994), however, claim that both kinds of feedback are relevant for linguistic development, but their relevance must be negotiated between the novice learner and the expert knower of the language. They continue to argue that, in some cases implicit correction is sufficient to promote learning, while in others, it is not, and in such cases, explicit feedback is the only type of correction that will elicit a reactive response from the learner.

When students have the opportunity to work in small groups, they can contribute to a common understanding as well as developing verbal and social abilities. Peers work in a common context; therefore, they may have insight into other learners’ needs, their focus, and the best way to explain. Gillies (2006) argues that helpers also benefit because when they explain their ideas to others they have to verbalize their understanding, making explicit the difference in what is in his/her mind and his/her utterance, and by doing so obtain a clearer perspective of the topic. Peer learning can be characterized by the following types of engagement that
are fostered (Damon & Phelps, 1989): 1. Peer tutoring where one instructs the other, 2. Cooperative learning where students form a team in which the task to solve is divided between the different team members, and 3. Peer collaboration where students share ideas to jointly solve the task.

Collaboration itself does not necessarily lead to learning (Damon & Phelps, 1989). Gillies (2006) argues from a Vygotskian perspective, that emphasizes the importance of verbal interaction as a catalyst for promoting thinking, one could expect that multidirectional dialogue exchanges present in small group discussions enhance students’ cognitive development.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

18 students – 12 girls and 6 boys - took part in the experiment. 9 in the intentional group and 8 in the incidental group, and in episode 8 which was neither accounted as intentional nor incidental, since there were no errors in the scaffoldee's essay. They were all in term 2 studying English Translation at Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamedan. Their ages ranged from 18-23.

B. Instruments

The students were given three topics to choose from and were asked to write an essay on one of the topics. The topics had to be about one of the following: 1. Can Iran host the World Cup? 2. The Internet, or 3. What they did during the holidays. These topics had already been talked about in free discussions during the term in the researchers’ classes and all of the students were interested in at least one of them.

C. Data Collection Procedure and Data Analysis

Data were collected using the students’ essays which contained the corrective feedback provided by their peers and also the teacher. After writing their essays, the researcher asked them to swap their essays and to take them home and correct them on a different piece of paper based on Aljaafreh and Lantolf's (1994) Regulatory Scale (Appendix A). Only the intentional group knew that they will be tested on the same errors at the end of the term. The other group was not informed in advance about the exam; here, the purpose was to see whether they would learn incidentally or not. In order to make sure all the errors were noticed, the researcher also sat beside the scaffold and the student being scaffolded. If there were any errors/mistakes not noticed by the scaffold, the researcher started to scaffold the student using the Regulatory Scale.

During the collaborations, their voices were recorded. After the test, however, they were informed about the recording and its purpose and were assured their voices will not be heard nor used by anyone.

In order to find out whether the number of errors for both the intentional and the incidental group, before the scaffolding collaborations and in the test is significant or not, two Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests were carried out. To explore the differences in the performances between the intentional group and the incidental group, a Mann-Whitney U Test was run.

IV. RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to find out whether collaborative peer- and teacher-scaffolding is effective in teaching problematic grammatical points to Iranian EFL learners in incidental and intentional groups and also to examine whether there are any differences between the two. In each episode, there was a scaffofdee, a scaffold, the teacher (the researcher). First, the incorrect sentence is given. And then the collaborations are provided. "T" stands for the "teacher", "S1" the "scaffold / helping student", and "S2" is "the scaffoldee / helped student". Their actions and their silence are written in italics in brackets. In each episode, the parts which are corrected, either by the scaffold or by the scaffoldee, or in cases where the rule is given, are written in italics.

As can be seen in the first episode (Appendix B), the student had only two ungrammatical sentences in her assignment which are shown by asterisks. It took her some time to notice the first error, because she had not known the rule. She could finally correct her error in line 22 which is written in italics. In this example, the learner could learn the rule without the need for explicit mentioning. But in the case of the second, it seems as though it was only a mistake, since as soon as she is told there might be something wrong in the sentence, she immediately corrects it. The correct sentence is shown in italics in line 4.

In episode 6, the learner did not have any serious problem correcting his errors/mistakes. He had some doubt whether the construction "lot of reasons" is correct or not. At first, he thought it was correct (line 3). But later, with the correct type of peer-scaffolding in his ZPD, in line 5, he found out that it is wrong.

In episode 8, the learner had no grammatical errors in her essay. The scaffold and the scaffoldee were two of the most intelligent students in class. So, none of them had to take the test.

In episode 10, thanks to peer- and teacher-scaffolding, the learner has learned some new grammatical points. In the first sentence, she was not sure about the exact place of the adverb "really". After the collaboration, she learned that it comes between the auxiliary and the main
verb (line 10). In the second sentence, she learned a new word; that is, the noun form of "identify". Before, she had thought that "identify" is also a noun, as is shown in italics in line 13. In the third sentence, she learned that it's better not to repeat the same noun twice in the sentence, instead, use a preposition the second time. Here, the scaffolder explicitly mentions the rule in line 6, and in response to the student's asking for clarification, he explains the reason in lines 9 and 10.

In this study, there were 11 episodes, one of which (episode 8) had no grammatical errors in her essay. The first 5 episodes are the intentional group; that is they were told in advance that they will be tested on the same errors. The next five episodes (episodes 6, 7, 9, 10, and 11) were the incidental group; that is, they were not told in advance they will be tested afterwards. Overall in all the episodes there were 30 ungrammatical sentences, and 38 errors/mistakes (some sentences had more than one error/mistake). Out of these 38 sentences, 34 of them, that is 89.47%, were corrected by the students themselves in the test, 3 remained erroneous, and one student left a sentence blank (blank here is the same as remaining erroneous) This means only 10.53% of the errors could not be corrected by the scaffoldees. Table 1 shows the results.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Scaffoldees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode</th>
<th>Erroneous Sentences</th>
<th>Errors/Mistakes</th>
<th>Corrected Errors/Mistakes in the Test</th>
<th>Uncorrected Errors/Mistakes in the Test</th>
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<td>Sum</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>38</td>
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</table>

The intentional group wrote 19 ungrammatical sentences with 26 errors/mistakes in them. They were able to notice 24 of the errors/mistakes in the test and they corrected them (92.3%). Only 2 of the errors (7.69%) were not noticed in the test. The incidental students wrote 11 ungrammatical sentences with 12 errors overall. In the test, 10 of the errors were corrected (83.33%), with only 1 remaining erroneous and a student left the sentence blank (7.69%).

For the intentional group, to probe the differences between performances of the participants in their performance in class and on the exam in the incidental group, a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was run. The results show a significant growth at $p < .05$ ($z = -2.041, N - ties = 5, p = .041$).

In order to discover whether intentional learning or incidental learning is more effective, a Mann-Whitney U Test was run. The results show there was no significant difference between the intentional group and the incidental group in their grammar learning at $P < .05$ ($U = 11, N_1 = 5, N_2 = 5, Z = -.387, P = .841$).

V. DISCUSSION

The overall results show a significant macrogenetic growth in the grammatical development. Macrogenetic growth is an improvement developed as a result of a corrective feedback across sessions (inter-session growth), rather than intra-session development which is a microgenetic growth. The first session in this study is the collaboration session between peers and the teacher, and the second session is the test session. This is a strong evidence for the positive effect of scaffolding / corrective feedback provided within the students' ZPD. The interesting point in the study is that both the intentional and the incidental groups benefited and enjoyed the sessions and appropriated the grammatical points they had not known prior to the collaborations. When some of the scaffolders were interviewed after the test, they were all interested in the scaffolding sessions and said they had a sense of being able to teach something to their peers.

Even the scaffoldees showed high motivation and wanted to learn / appropriate the grammatical points very quickly. In some cases, some of the scaffoldees were scaffolders and had to help their peers in their problems. There was also a sense of competitiveness among them, and they all wanted to perform better than others. The scaffolders had examined their classmates’ papers (essays) meticulously and did not want to miss an error. For the case of the incidental group, they were, somehow, surprised to see the test of their own errors. After the test, however, none of them were upset or shocked by the test.

The results must be analyzed with caution. One reason is that in the test, they were faced with some ungrammatical sentences and blanks underneath each sentence. They were told to correct the sentences and write them in the blanks. This tells them that each sentence is actually incorrect and all they had to do was to try and find the error(s). If the test had included a mixture of correct and incorrect sentences, it could have been a stronger evidence to see whether they have learned the grammatical points or not. The reason not to include other sentences was that we did not want to confuse them.

The number of students in the study must also be taken into account as a limitation of the study. Due to the

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limited time, we could only have 18 students. The collaborations took some time and it was not possible to have more students. But, generally, the results are strong proof for the effectiveness of peer- and teacher-scaffolding.

VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

As the results of the study show, peer- and teacher-scaffolding is beneficial in teaching grammar and both scaffolders and scaffoldees enjoy their collaborations. In the current study there was no sign of jealousy among the students and the atmosphere was fruitful. The results are quite revealing, especially for the teachers who think the whole burden of teaching is on their shoulders. What is quite impressive in the study is that we cannot conclude whether the students have memorized the errors in order to remember them for the test, since the incidental group also performed well in the test.

In the learner-centred era, learners are excellent sources in instructing themselves. The same strategies can be used in other areas of second language acquisition, for further studies. The role of culture must also be taken into account. The learner-centred approaches to teaching language are mostly favored in the western cultures. The results of this study, clearly, show that such approaches are beneficial, at least, in the Iranian culture.

Appendix A REGULATORY SCALE – IMPLICIT (STRATEGIC) TO EXPLICIT (FROM ALJAAFREH & LANTOLF, 1994)

| 0 | Tutor asks the learner to read, find the error and correct them independently, prior to the tutorial. |
| 1 | Construction of a ‘collaborative frame’* prompted by the tutor as a potential dialogic partner. |
| 2 | Prompted or focused reading of the sentence that contains the error by the learner or the tutor. |
| 3 | Tutor indicates that something may be wrong in a segment (e.g. sentence, clause, line): ‘Is there anything wrong in this sentence?’ |
| 4 | Tutor rejects unsuccessful attempts at recognizing the error. |
| 5 | Tutor narrows down the location of the error (e.g. tutor repeats or points to the specific segment which contains the error). |
| 6 | Tutor indicates the nature of the error, but tries not to identify the error (e.g. ‘There is something wrong with the tense marking here.’). |
| 7 | Tutor identifies the error (‘You can’t use an auxiliary here’). |
| 8 | Tutor rejects learner’s unsuccessful attempts at correcting the error. |
| 9 | Tutor provides clues to help the learner arrive at the correct form (e.g. ‘It is not really past but something that is still going on’). |
| 10 | Tutor provides the correct form. |
| 11 | Tutor provides some explanation for use of the correct form. |
| 12 | Tutor provides examples of the correct pattern when other forms of help fail to produce an appropriate responsive action. |

Appendix B EPISODES

Episode 1:

1. * We can contact a person who is physically present thousand miles away.

S1: Can you find your error here?
S2: No.
T (to S1): Underline the sentence please.
S1: You have a problem here.
T: OK. What is the problem?
S2: I mean that we can contact a person who is far away from us.
S1: There is something wrong in what you have written.
S2: Is it correct or false?
S1: It’s false.
T: You have an error. Can you find it? "....thousands miles away". What is wrong here?
S2: (Silence)
T (to S1): OK. Narrow it down. Go to the place of the error.
S1: The last of the sentence. Thousands…. miles.
S2: Thousand…..
T: Should it be thousand or thousands?
S2: (Silence)
S2: It should be thousands.
T: So, she said one of the errors.
S2: One of them.
S1: There is still something wrong.
S2: Thousands of miles.
T: Yes, did you know this?
S2: No.
T: OK. So, you learned it now. Thousands of miles.
2. * Watching any of the pornography can have very bad influenced on the mental health of children.
S2: What about this sentence? Is there any problem?
S1: Yes, influences.
T: Very good, very good.

Episode 6:

1. * Overall, there are lot of reasons for this idea as I mentioned above.
T (to S1): Underline the sentence please.
S2: It's correct.
T: No, there is something wrong.
S2: Lots of?
T: Yes, either "a lot of" or "lots of". So it was not correct.
S2: Yes.

Episode 8:

S1: There was nothing wrong in her essay.
T: Really? That's very good. Let me read it. (After reading it) Yes. Well done both of you.

Episode 10:

1. * We don't need to really go to a physical library anymore.
S1: Where is the problem in this sentence?
S2: (Silence)
T (to S1): Narrow it down please. Just underline the error.
S1: From "don't" to "really".
T: OK.
S2: Are the words misplaced?
S1: Yes.
T: Where should "really" go?
S2: After "don't"?
T: Yes. It comes between the auxiliary verb and the main verb.
2. * It's not completely safe due to hackers and people who steal information and other people's identifies.
S2: (Reads the sentence twice)
T (to S1): Just underline the erroneous parts.
S2: (Silence)
S1: We need a noun after possessives.
T: What is the noun form of "identify"?
S2: Ident….
T: Ident…..
S2: Ident…..
T (to S1): OK. Tell her.
S1: Identity.
S2: I had not heard this before.
T: So it should be "other people's identities". OK?
S2: OK.

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