Metalinguistic Awareness and the Accuracy of Postgraduate TEFL Students' Writing: Teacher's Focus vs. Learners' Focus

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Abstract

The sway of the pendulum in language pedagogy towards conscious learning processes marks the paramount role of metalinguistic awareness. The purpose of this quasi-experimental study was to compare the impact of teacher-oriented vs. learner-generated metalinguistic awareness activities on Iranian TEFL students' writing accuracy. Sixty participants in three intact classes were randomly assigned as one control, and two experimental groups. All the participants received the same process-oriented instruction based on identical teaching materials. In the first experimental group, the teacher-focus metalinguistic awareness (TFMA) group, however, a collection of various form-focused activities, compiled by the teacher, was assigned and reviewed in the class weekly. In the learner-focused metalinguistic awareness (LFMA) group, the same assignments were assigned as supplementary self-study activities. The control group did not receive any structural assignments. The treatment perpetuated for six sessions and the analyses of the data obtained from the writing post-test revealed that both TFMA and LFMA groups outperformed the control group by producing more accurate writing and that the TF group surpassed the LF group. The findings lend credence to the significance of language awareness in EFL contexts and offer a number of pedagogical implications.

Introduction

Research into the role of attention to form and metalinguistic awareness (MA) during the last two decades seems to accentuate the role of these two variables in second and foreign language learning particularly in reading comprehension and writing classrooms. Focal attention to form and MA might be incorporated into teaching while the new information is being presented either by the teacher or jointly in cooperation with learners via input enhancement techniques like input flooding while learners are exposed to target language forms as an initial practice activity or during the post-view stage of the lesson while learners receive feedback from the teacher, peers or through self-monitoring. However, the protracted debate over the extent to which knowledge about formal features of language should be caught implicitly or taught explicitly has not reconciled yet and research data is scarce on whether learners' focus in self and peer-monitoring coincides with that of teachers and the extent to which post-graduate students of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) might assume responsibility for monitoring their own and their peers' performance.

The approach taken in this study was informed by form-focused instruction and its underlying source of inspiration the Interaction hypothesis (Long, 1996) which views meaning and form as two indispensible sides of the same coin and emphasized the need for promoting the former without sacrificing the latter in teaching various language skills including writing. Various forms of positive and negative evidence (Keh, 1990; Krashen, 1985; Robb, Ross, &Shortreed, 1986; Truscott, 2007), if properly noticed by the learner, are assumed to fuel the internal processing mechanisms and maximize the facilitative effect of exposure. Research findings in second language acquisition (SLA) soon underscored the need for a balanced attention to both form and meaning particularly in teaching productive skills like writing (Ferris, 1999; Piri, Barati, &Ketabi, 2012; Robb, Ross, &Shortreed, 1986; Truscott, 2007). In a similar vein, exploration of the role of learners highlighted the need for their active participation and researchers gave their assent to the emerging learner-orientation (Crooks &Gass, 1993; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Zhu, 2011)

which envisaged learners as capable of achieving autonomy in writing (Hyland, 2003).

Consensus soon emerged among scholars over the significance of learner investment (Breen, 2001; Breen & Littlejohn, 2000; Kumaravadivelu, 2003, 2006; Wenden, 1991, 2002) and was followed by further demarcation of the narrow and the broad views, the capacity to learn to learn and the capacity to learn to liberate oneself (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Yet, the ultimate post-mehod objective of engaging learners in the decision making processes and helping them assume responsibility for learning to learn and to liberate themselves is not achieved overnight. In a narrow sense, the pedagogical application of this concept in a writing classroom underscores the need for meticulously planned methodology on the part of the teacher to relieve the burden on the learner and teach him how to manage the complexity inherent in writing. A methodology that offers teachers' guidance at the pre-writing stage where learners are faced with a myriad of different requirements like generating ideas, using appropriate expressions and grammatical structures and identifying the purpose of writing and the audience. Teachers' assistance is also urgently demanded at the post-writing stage to teach learners how to enhance their use of language and thereby shape meaning more convincingly through pedagogical interventions like supplementary form-focused activities and feedback either generated by the leaner as self-monitoring and peer-editing or by the teacher.

Feedback has been defined as a decisive factor in the attainment of language fluency and accuracy that entails learners' noticing of the chasm between his performance and the norms of the target language which are available through MA (Keh, 1990; Swain, 1985; Swain &Lapkin, 1995). More specifically, Long (1996) underscored the facilitative role of negative feedback in the development of vocabulary, morphology and language-specific syntax and a number of classifications of feedback have been postulated based on the source, the mode and channel, and the type of feedback. The source can be either the teacher or the learners who provide it orally or in written form explicitly or implicitly in the form of recasts and codes or full explanations and corrections.

Explicit feedback can be metalinguistic in nature aimed to raise learners' MA which was defined by Cazden (1974) as the ability to think about language and to make language forms objective and explicit in order to attend to them in and for themselves and to view and analyze language as a process and as a system. MA, as suggested by Cazden (1974), is assumed to lead to metalinguistic knowledge (MK) through a continual and simultaneous process of developing linguistic control and cognitive abilities. It proceeds from implicit understanding and unarticulated knowledge through non-structured experiences such as L1 acquisition toward explicit understanding and articulated knowledge or through structured experiences such as direct instruction in second language learning (SLL). This explicit knowledge formation is, in turn, assumed to escalate students' self-regulatory control and enhanced language use on pedagogic tasks.

Although MA might be extended to cover various areas of language such as vocabulary and phonology (Carter, 1990, cited in Nunan, Berry & Berry, 1995) and even pragmatic and cultural features of SLL (Arabski&Wojtaszek, 2011; Sharifian, 2011, 2013; Sharifian& Palmer, 2007), any discussion of MA brings to the foreground the prominent role of grammar particularly in teaching second language writing mostly in foreign language (EFL) contexts where the learning more heavily hinges on explicit learning of language rules through formal instruction (DeKeyser, 2003).

The demand for MA is growing remarkably for many prospective English teachers who, unquestionably, need to achieve what Andrews (1999b) called teacher metalinguistic awareness (TMA) or teachers' knowledge about language (KAL) systems. He further argued that not only do teachers of a particular language need to draw on her implicit and explicit language knowledge but they also need to "reflect upon that knowledge and ability, and upon their knowledge of the underlying systems of the language in order to ensure that their students receive maximally useful input for learning" (p. 163). Yet, it is not clear whether teacher's focus and learners' focus coincide in form-focused supplementary activities and whether the same foci might impact the accuracy of writing.

Quite a number of studies have investigated writing (Kormos, 2011; Johnson, Mercado, & Acevedo, 2012; Larsen-Freeman, 2006; Ojima, 2006;

Ong& Zhang, 2010; Shang, 2007; Wigglesworth &Storch, 2009) in relation to other independent variables like concept planning, task complexity and group work.

To measure the learners' writing performance in terms of syntactic complexity, grammatical accuracy and lexical density, Shang (2007) investigated e-mail application and its impact on 40 EFL Taiwanese students employing both qualitative and quantitative methods. Improvements on syntactic complexity and grammatical accuracy were observed in students' written output; however, the findings did not reveal any improvement in terms of lexical density.

Following a task-based approach, Johnson, Mercado, and Acevedo (2012) investigated a large group of Spanish-speaking learners' written performance in terms of writing fluency, grammatical complexity, and lexical complexity under pre-task planning conditions. They reported a small significant effect on writing fluency, whereas the impact on lexical complexity and grammatical complexity was insignificant.

In a similar attempt, Ojima (2006) explored the impact of concept planning as a resource-dispersing factor and as a form of pre-task planning on three Japanese students' writing performance. The results indicated that pre-task planning led the learners to more fluent and complex texts, but did not improve grammatical accuracy. Following this line of inquiry, Wigglesworth and Storch (2009) conducted a study in order to determine whether pair and individual working produced any identifiable differences in the learners' essays. The essays were analyzed for fluency, complexity, and accuracy. Their findings revealed that collaboration had a positive effect on accuracy, but did not affect fluency and complexity of language production.

Kormos (2011) studied the effect of task complexity on linguistic and discourse features of narrative writing performance and found that task complexity would influence lexical complexity. Significant differences were also reported between L1 and FL narratives in terms of lexical variety, complexity, and syntactic complexity.

A number of studies explored Iranian EFL learners' writing with regard to task type and under pre-task planning condition (Alavi&AshariTabar, 2012), task complexity (Sadeghi&Mosalli, 2013), Multiple-intelligence

oriented tasks, formal instruction of cohesiveties (Seifoori&Shokri, 2012), task-supported interactive feedback (Seifoori, Zeraatpishe&Ahangari, 2012), Multiple-intelligence oriented tasks (Seifoori, Zeraatpishe&Hadidi, 2014) and peer-editing (Seifoori, 2008). Alavi and AshariTabar (2012) addressed the impact of task types and various participatory structures during the pre-task planning on the quality of 120 intermediate learners' writing performance in three experimental and one control group. All the groups were engaged in personal and decision making task types. The participants in the experimental groups were subjected to different pre-task planning conditions, individual, pair, and group, while the control group performed tasks with no pre-planning. The analyses of the findings revealed that task type and pre-task condition influenced the writing accuracy of the participants in a way that resulted in greater accuracy in the decision-making task.

Sadeghi and Mosalli (2013), following Kuikn and Vedder (2008) and Ishikawa (2006), examined the effect of manipulating task complexity on learners' lexical complexity, fluency, grammatical accuracy, and syntactic complexity in writing an argumentative essay. The results revealed that increasing task complexity: 1) did not result in differences in lexical complexity but did lead to significant differences when mean segmental type-token ratio was used to measure lexical complexity; 2) produced significantly less fluent language; 3) led to more grammatically accurate language in the least complex task; and 4) demonstrated significant difference in syntactic complexity.

In an EFL context, Andrews investigated TMA in relation to grammar in Hong Kong secondary schools with four groups of teachers whose explicit knowledge of grammar and grammatical terminology were explored through a test with four task types: recognition, production, correction and explanation. The results revealed that the local English teachers outperformed other groups in the correction task, and their mean score in the recognition task was higher than that in the production task. They were, however, weak in the explanation task. Comparing the four groups' performances, Andrews (1999a) suggested that knowledge of grammar and

grammatical terminology were affected by such factors as teaching study background and experience.

Modeling his study on Andrews' (1999a) and employing the same types of tasks, Lan (2011) explored the awareness of 20 in-service primary English teachers on a grammar metalanguage test. He compared the primary English teachers' awareness in Hong Kong with that of their secondary counterparts. The findings indicated that the primary teachers were better at the lower level of metalanguage application like recognition of examples for metalinguistic terms and the secondary teachers at the higher-level applications such as error correction.

Iranian undergraduate TEFL students' ability to self/peer-edit writing was investigated by Seifoori (2008) through a three-phase planning procedure including awareness raising via error recognition activities, error categorizing activities and self-peer editing. The findings proved the participants' failure in noticing the formal features of their written texts either owing to lack of required metalanguage resources or inaccessibility of those resources for noticing and self-editing. Another study in the same context, however, confirmed the facilitative role of explicit instruction of cohesive ties in enhancing cohesion and coherence of Iranian undergraduate TEFL learners' writing (Seifoori&Shokri, 2012).

The difference in Iranian TEFL students' performance in Seifoori (2008) and Seifoori and Shokri (2012) might be pertinent to the complexity of the resources they required to attend to. In the former case, they had to take into account the vast body of the grammatical knowledge in order to self/peer-edit their writings whereas in the latter the object of focal attention was much more restricted in scope. A probable conclusion, hence, would be the extreme need of Iranian undergraduate, and probably postgraduate, TEFL students to intensify and reinforce their MK through constant MA activities of varying types.

The need to develop prospective and practicing English teachers' writing skill is unquestionable and a large body of research has so far examined various tentative methods of enhancing this intricate skill in ESL and EFL contexts (Alavi&AshariTabar, 2012; Bahardoust&RaoufMoeini, 2012, Edalat, 2008; Hinkel, 2004; Seifoori, 2009). Yet, very few studies, if any, have addressed the extent to which postgraduate TEFL students in an

exposure-restricted EFL context can adequately direct their focal attention on formal features to self-generate MA and achieve higher levels of accuracy in their writing. Thus, the current study was undertaken to explore the comparative impact of learner and teacher's focus on form in supplementary MA activities on postgraduate TEFL students' writing accuracy.

The present study was inspired by the highly restricted nature of Iranian TEFL students' MK and their intense need for MA which was defined by Thornbury (1997) as the knowledge of underlying systems of the language that enables TEFL MA students to write more effectively. The definition of MA advocated in the present study conforms to three defining characteristics of TLA delineated by Andrews (2003) as knowledge about language, knowledge of language, and awareness of language from the learners' perspective and her developing interlanguage. The participants were, thus, required to engage in some metalanguage activities the purpose of which was to sharpen their knowledge about language and further to apply the resultant knowledge in their writing. It was hypothesized that such involvement would sensitize them to delicate structural properties and would culminate in more accurate writing and that teacher's intervention would render better results. To test these two hypotheses, I formulated the following research questions:

1. Do MA activities enhance the accuracy of Iranian postgraduate TEFL students' writing?
2. Do teacher's focus and learner's focus in MA activities have differential effects on the accuracy of Iranian postgraduate TEFL students' writing?

Method

Participants

To conduct this quasi-experimental study, a sample of 60 female and male postgraduate TEFL freshmen was recruited at Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch from a population of 70 students taking the two-credit Advanced Writing Course. The participants were within the age range of 25 to 40 and had already received their Bachelor of Arts degree in TEFL, English Literature (EL) or English Translation (ET). They had been grouped

in three intact classes and, since random sampling was impossible, the initial homogeneity of the groups was assessed via a modified version of Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

Very few participants obtained scores that fell two standard deviations (SD) above the mean, thus, those whose scores fell within one SD below and above the mean were selected as the homogeneous research sample. The groups were further randomly assigned as the learner-focused MA (LFMA) group with 19 participants, teacher-focused MA (TFMA) group with 21 participants and the no MA control (NMAC) group with 20 participants. The same genre-based writing course book (Birjandi, Alavi&Salmani-Noudoushan, 2004) was selected to teach eight writing genres. In the two experimental groups an identical collection of grammar activities were also compiled and assigned by the teacher to be covered differently, as will be explained in the procedure section below.

Instrumentation

I employed three data collection instruments to collect the research data: The vocabulary and grammar sections of a TOEFL test to assess the homogeneity of the participants' lexical and grammar knowledge as two prerequisite requirements for writing, a writing pre-test to delineate whether the groups were homogeneous with regard to the accuracy and organization of their writing and a parallel writing post-test to compare the three groups and delineate probable significant differences.

The TOEFL test had been modified for two reasons. First of all, owing to executive restrictions in terms of time, space and equipment, it was virtually impossible to administer the entire test which required standard test administration. Secondly, the original TOEFL test was inevitably truncated in line with the requirements of writing skill to contain vocabulary and grammar as two paramount sub-skills in writing.

The modified version of the TOEFL test included 15 multiple choice (MC) items testing grammar related structures and 25 error recognition MC items. Although the participants were less proficient than the real TEOFL applicants, a Preliminary English Test (PET) was not administered because it lacked vigorous grammatical subcomponents. Thus, the time allotment was different; the participants were allowed to perform the test in 40

minutes. The second section was a thirty-item test of vocabulary which examined the participants' lexical knowledge in forty five minutes. The total test score was 70 and the participants' scores were analyzed to identify the groups' initial homogeneity in terms of their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary.

Two writing tests were also administered to elicit samples based on which accuracy of the participants' writings could be assessed. Two parallel topics were selected to engage the participants in compare and contrast writing. The pre-test topic was: 'Some people prefer compact cars while others would rather have a saloon car. Compare and contrast these two cars'. On the post-test, they were required to 'Compare and contrast rural life and urban life'. They were given 80 minutes to write a single paragraph on each of the topic.

Advanced Writing is offered to assist postgraduate TEFL students enhance their writing skill and develop the skills required for writing their papers and dissertations. Various features of academic writing were presented and practiced throughout the course with a focus on accuracy as a fundamental expectation from scholarly writing in EFL contexts. Skehan (1996) described accuracy as the learner's capacity to handle different levels of interlanguage complexity. A number of previous empirical studies (Ellis & Yuan, 2004; Foster &Skehan, 1999; Tavakoli&Skehan, 2005, as cited in Ellis 2005; Yuan & Ellis, 2003) quantified grammatical accuracy as percentage of error-free clauses in overall performance. In the current study, however, overall grammatical accuracy of learners' writing was measured as the proportion of errors to terminal units (t-units), hence, the lower the measure the higher the accuracy would be.

The writings were scored by two experienced assistant professors who had more than ten years of experience in teaching writing to Iranian graduate and postgraduate TEFL students. The two sets of scores were correlated to estimate the inter-rater reliability of the accuracy measures, which proved to be acceptably high. Further the mean scores were statistically analyzed to answer the research questions.

The primary teaching material employed in the three groups was a writing course book entitled 'Advance Writing' by Birjandi et al. (2004).

The book comprises thirteen units the first four of which present various features of paragraph writing like unity, cohesion, coherence, and format, techniques of support and methods of support. These units were briefly presented and covered in a single session. From unit five on, the book presents various writing genres of enumeration, chronology, process, description, definition, cause and effect, comparison and contrast and argumentation. Each unit starts with an introduction defining the genre in question, along with some theoretical principles regarding the organization and functions of it mingled with example paragraphs to clarify the statements. The unit proceeds with some exercises to sensitize students to grammatical and organizational features by doing sentence-level and discourse-level exercises.

Procedure

The first two sessions of the course were devoted to the administration of the TOEFL and writing pre-test. In the third session, the course objectives along with basic features of paragraph writing were introduced. The genre-based presentations started from session four and continued for six sessions, six weeks. Despite the particular focus of the methodology, the three groups were taught based on the same process-oriented approach to writing in which all the groups were involved in an interactive presentation of the chapter to grasp the underlying principles. During the presentation, the structural characteristics of the genre in question and the grammatical structures required to produce the text were reviewed based on a model paragraph. For example, in teaching 'chronology paragraph', the participants were required to underline and explain the use of past tense in the model narrative text or the use of simple present tense and imperatives in a model process paragraph. Then, all the participants were advised to review relevant structures from a grammar book to broaden their understanding of the grammatical structure of sentence types and the linking signals used. Finally, all groups of participants were required to write a well-developed paragraph on a similar topic for the following session. The pre-writing stage began in class through some whole class brainstorming and students were guided to generate ideas.

In addition to the above activities, the participants in the two experimental groups performed an identical set of supplementary grammatical exercises to raise their MA and enrich their MK. These exercises had been compiled by the teacher in line with the structural focus of the course to orient the participants' attention to formal features. In the LFMA group, the activities were assigned as homework to be completed and checked in pairs or groups. The following session the teacher was available to answer the participants' probable questions but would initiate no feedback. In the second experimental group, however, all the exercises were checked interactively and the teacher drew the participants' attention to the significant features.

Results

I first analyzed the research data obtained from the TOEFL test and the writing pre-test to compare the groups' means scores and test their initial homogeneity. The post-test data were also compared to find out the impact of MA supplementary activities on the accuracy of the participants' writing and to compare the impact of teacher and learners' focus.

The Groups' Homogeneity

The homogeneity of the TOEFL test scores was supported by Levene test of homogeneity of variance ($p =.651> .05$) and the descriptive statistics of the groups' pre-test scores were calculated, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Groups' TOEFL Scores and Pre-test Accuracy Measures

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Between Groups	12.04	2	6.02	.12	.883
TOEFL	Within Groups	2750.94	57	48.26		
	Total	2762.98	59			
	Between Groups	.287	2	.144	2.68	.077
Accuracy	Within Groups	3.05	57	.054		
	Total	3.33	59			

As shown in Table 1, the groups' TOEFL mean scores were 30.65 in the NMA group, 29.71 in the TFMA group, and 29.68 in the LFMA group which reflected the participants' lower than the mean performance on the

TOEFL test. The accuracy means of the same groups were .93, .53, and .77, respectively. The mean differences were compared via a One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test, the results of which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
The ANOVA Analysis of the Groups' TOEFL Scores and Pre-test Accuracy Measures

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
TOEFL	NMA	20	30.65	6.86	1.53	27.43	33.86	23.00	46.00
	TFMA	21	29.71	7.68	1.67	26.21	33.21	20.00	48.00
	LFMA	19	29.68	6.12	1.40	26.73	32.63	19.00	40.00
	Total	60	30.01	6.84	.88	28.24	31.78	19.00	48.00
Accuracy	NMA	20	.93	.12	.02	.87	.99	.76	1.23
	TFMA	21	.53	.22	.05	.42	.63	.00	.83
	LFMA	19	.77	.14	.03	.70	.84	.49	1.00
	Total	60	.75	.16	.03	.66	.79	.10	1.23

No significant difference was observed among the groups regarding their grammar and vocabulary knowledge ($p =.883>.05$, nor the accuracy of their writing pre-test ($p=.077>.05$).

Metalinguistic Awareness and the Differential Impact of Teacher's vs. Learners' Focus

The first research question delved into the impact of MA activities on the participants' accurate use of grammatical forms in writing and the second one addressed the differential impact of teachers' and learners' focus. To answer these questions, I first estimated the descriptive statistics of the three groups' accuracy measures obtained from the writing post-test. Table 3 presents the results.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics of the Groups' Post-test Accuracy Measures

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
NMA	20	.69	.19	.04	.60	.78	.40	1.00
TFMA	21	.48	.18	.04	.40	.57	.10	.88
LFMA	19	.62	.26	.06	.49	.75	.00	1.00
Total	60	.59	.21	.04	.49	.70	.00	1.00

As evident in Table 3, a pattern of growth was observed in the groups' accurate use of grammatical structures from the pre-test to the post-test which can be attributed to the positive role of instruction in enhancing learners' accuracy. Yet, comparison of the three groups' post-test accuracy measures indicated outstanding differences in accuracy mean scores of the NMA group (.69) the TFMA group (.48) and the LFMA group (.62). The LFMA group was found to be more variable in the accuracy of their writing as evident in the group standard deviation (SD=.26.) To further determine the significance of the observed differences, thus, I ran a One-way ANOVA, the results of which are portrayed in Table 4.

Table 4
The ANOVA Analysis of the Groups' Post-test Accuracy Measures

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.10	2	1.05	43.15	.000
Within Groups	1.38	57	.02		
Total	3.48	59			

According to the ANOVA analysis of the groups' post-test accuracy measures, as displayed in Table 4, the difference among the groups reached significance level, $F_{(43.15)}$, p=.000<.05, which necessitated a more precise determination of the difference through a Tukey Post Hoc test, as depicted in Table 5.

Table 5
Multiple Comparisons of Groups' Post-test Accuracy Measures

(I) Groups	(J) Groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
NMA	TFMA	.445[*]	.048	.000	.328	.563
	LMLA	.158[*]	.049	.007	.038	.278
TFMA	NMA	-.44[*]	.048	.000	-.563	-.328
	LFMA	-.28[*]	.049	.000	-.406	-.168
LFMA	NMA	-.15[*]	.049	.007	-.278	-.038
	TFMA	.28[*]	.049	.000	.168	.406
*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.						

Multiple comparisons of the research data obtained from the writing post-test confirmed significant differences among the three groups whose *p*-values were smaller than the alpha level (.05). That is to say, the TFMA group, with a mean of .48 achieved the highest level of accuracy compared to the LFMA group who obtained the second place with a mean of .62. The NMA group for whom no MA activities had been designed indicated some growth from the pre-test (M=.93) to the post-test (M=.69); yet, the group's achievements were the lowest compared to the other counterpart groups.

Discussion

All the three groups participating in the present study enjoyed some level of learning which indicates the positive role of formal instruction in enhancing accuracy. The findings are in line with those of Eckman, Bell & Nelson (1988), Ellis (1989), Pica (1983) and Pienemann (1989) who, as stated in Graaff and Housen, (2009), collectively claimed that if appropriately planned, formal instruction can assist learners to overcome the risk of fossilization of prematurely learned grammatical items, achieve higher levels of grammatical accuracy and proficiency.

The finding also lend support to White and Ranta (2002) and Lan (2011) who postulated that making prospective and practicing teachers linguistically aware does have an impact on teachers' linguistic behavior. The impact of instruction on the accuracy of interlanguage system was examined by Weslander and Stephany (1983). They reported positive impact of intensive instruction on the interlanguage system of 577 young

learners with limited proficiency in Iowa who performed better on Bilingual Syntax Measure. Long (1983) also underscored the considerable evidence supporting the significant role of formal instruction in SLL.

The impact of grammatically-focused instruction was also explored on the learners' grammatical judgments (Lightbown, Spada& Wallace, 1980) and on the learners' use of grammatical features in speech (Pica, 1983). Lightbown et al. (1980) investigated the impact of half-hour grammar lessons on the grammatical judgments of 175 French speaking learners of English with a focus on morphological structures like plural, possessive and third person –s. They reported the more remarkable progress of the instructed groups. In another study Pica (1983, 1985) compared the impact of formal instruction on unplanned speech of three groups of learners learning English in three contexts: natural contexts, in instructional contexts and in mixed natural and instructional conditions. Mixed findings have been reported; the instructed group was found more accurate in the use of plural – s but less accurate in the sue of progressive –ing. No difference however was found in the use of articles.

Although receiving the same amount of formal instruction, the control group in the present enquiry achieved lower levels of accuracy compared to the other experimental groups. What differentiated the groups was the type of grammar instruction they received. In the experimental groups, grammar instruction was more explicit, focused and intensive compared to the control group. The contrast underscores two essential features of the learning process for adult TEFL students at east in the context of Iran: their need for explicit metalinguistic awareness and their reliance on teacher assistance as a guide in directing their attentional resources.

Expectations in terms of language knowledge are high from postgraduate TEFL students some of whom are practicing teachers at high schools and private institutes and some others will soon become English teachers. Hence, to assume such primary responsibilities they have to develop and optimize their language skills on the one hand and to learn effective teaching techniques that they can employ in their own teaching practice on the other. A major source of challenge for many of them is writing accurate, complex, well-developed and well-organized English texts.

The difficulty seems to stem from highly restricted critical lexical and formal resources required to notice and self-monitor one's performance in English (Seifoori, 2009) which, in turn, hampers the conversion of ideas to language. Although such deficiencies are less likely to eliminate in a two-credit course, the findings from the current study accentuate the facilitative role teacher-oriented MA activities can play in mitigating the problem. The gradually enhanced performance can definitely lead to self-regulation and, thereby, higher self-confidence and learning motivation culminating in professional self-development as described by White and Ranta (2002) as a process that aims to create and develop links   between subject-matter knowledge and classroom activity.

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