A Stylistic and Proficiency-based Approach to EFL Learners' Performance Inconsistency

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Abstract

Performance deficiencies and inconsistencies among SLA or FL learners can be attributed to variety of sources including both systemic (i.e., language issues) and individual variables. Contrary to a rich background, the literature still suffers from a gap as far as delving into the issue from language proficiency and learning style is concerned. To fill the gap, this study addressed EFL learners' interlanguage performance (i.e., error types) in the light of their learning styles and language proficiency levels. Participants were 73 Iranian graduate EFL learners, who received the Michigan proficiency tests along with the Perceptual Learning-Style Preference Questionnaire (of Reid) in order to measure their language proficiency level and learning style types. For the purpose of the study they were divided into pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate levels. To explore their performance inconsistencies, both oral data from an semi-structured (SST) interview and written data based on an on-the-spot piece of writing were used and then classified based on Corder's (1971) scheme into pre-systematic, systematic and post-systematic errors. The results revealed significant relationships among the target variables, if not predictor-predicted relationships. The non-linear relationship among the variable underscores significance of an integrative approach to EFL learner's performance inconsistencies and the importance of stylistic instruction in EFL contexts.

***Keywords*:** Error Analysis, Interlangauge, Language Proficiency, Learning Styles, Performance Inconsistency.

Introduction

It is usually believed that language is an integrative system such that it should be approached holistically in the process of learning, and it cannot be learned unless a grasp of the whole system can be created (cited in Norrish, 1983). Language learners are able to grasp the rule systems of the target language in order to develop a competence. Competence development, synonymous here with interlanguage development is, however, characterized by ups and downs in the form of performance inconsistencies caused by multiple factors including learning styles and language proficiency level (i.e., interlanguage stage) among many. Respectively, first the nature and sources of performance inconsistency in writing (i.e., errors), then the nature and relevance of learning styles, and finally the issue of language proficiency are both individually and in relation to each other are reviewed.

According to Schumann and Schumann (1977), each language learner has his individual opinion on what he needs to learn and in what way he needs to do it. Rationally some language learners make some errors but not others. This could be associated with the learners´ potential to take from a lesson only those things that they wish for and in the way they desire. Therefore, as a very important beginning point, we need to be cognizant of the diversity of students' distinct learning styles, distinct factors affecting their acquisition and learning and be flexible enough to conform to the student's distinct needs. In other words, human learns differently in the light of many factors including primarily learning strategies and styles. For example, some people learn chiefly with their eyes (visual learners) or with the ears (auditory learners); some people give priority to learn by experience and/or by "hands-on" tasks (kinesthetic or tactile learners); some people learn better when they work unaccompanied (individual learners); while others prefer to learn in groups (group learners) (Reid's, 1984). Meanwhile, factors comprising age, intelligence, skill, motivation and sentiment, identity, and language type and language proficiency also affect the way and extent to which language behavior is performed. All these act reciprocally in the learner's cognitive system to the extent that the afore-mentioned distinctions in general and firmness of his/her performance in particular are

attributed to these factors. Accuracy of the performance consistency lies on the fact that it is of decisive status as it by itself reveals many other variables including learning process, learning strategies, learning styles, type of the task, materials types, teaching styles, and language proficiency level, to name a few (Chen, 2009). In other words in the light of learner's errors we can read his mind, learning styles and strategies and whatever might be related to language production and processing.

The phenomenon of error has long been considered by SLA researchers. According to Ellis (1989), errors mirror gaps in the learner's cognizance; they take place since the language learner is not acquainted with the correct form. Many researchers have analyzed the errors made in native and target language and found some resemblance among them (Corder, 1971; Selinker, 1972). Among them some have taken an extremist position ranging from calling error a sin to a promise and an indication of discernment into learners' process (Corder, 1976). Similarly, errors have been addressed from multiple theoretical perspectives chief among them are: Contrastive Analysis (CA), Error Analysis, and Interlanguage Theory (IL) (Ziahosseiny, 1999).

Fisiak, (1981) defined CA as comparing two or more linguistic system in order to find the resemblances and distinction between them. Other researchers (e.g., Johnsson and Hofland, 1994, p. 25) observed CA from both applied and categorical aspects. Procedurally, Ziahosseiny (1999. p. 10) considered five phases for it:

- *Selection:* Selecting the items to be compared with personal experience or error analysis.
- *Description*: Determining linguistic description in the grammar of two languages.
- *Comparison:* Looking for similarities or differences considering form, meaning, and distribution of items in two languages.
- *Prediction:* Foretelling the difficulties that language learners are likely to be faced in learning the target language on the basis of differences and similarities between two languages.
- *Verification:* Proving the coincidence of predictions is made in previous step with reality.

With cross – linguistic comparison of native language (NL) and target language (TL), CA is motivated by the belief that language learners can be informed of some areas of language learning that may encounter problems considering their NL. CA served two major purposes: To explain the reason of making errors by learners. And as an informative source for teachers, to know what areas need to be taught (Ellis, &Barkhvizen, 2005).

One drawback of this hypothesis is it's restriction in predicting assorted kinds of errors those mainly being attributed to the notion of interference. It is believed that it can only depict interlingual errors (errors caused by interference from NL). Accordingly, the CA held interlingual approach to the sources of errors. On the contrary, experiments have revealed that just one third of errors are of interference type (Ziahosseiny, 1999), which resulted in modifying this extremist view of behaviorism and emergence of another version of the hypothesis called weak version, which finally led to Error Analysis (EA).

Drawbacks associated with the CA approach and major developments in cognitive psychology were convincing enough to look for some profound approach to the nature of learner's performance inconsistencies. The lack of an approach to the complex cognitive processes that comprise a basis for language learning has forced most researchers to use alternative approaches to pinpoint difficulties looming ahead of language learning. One such approach is error analysis in which the output created by learners is examined for errors through which the fundamental causes of such errors are recognized after their occurrence and the frequency of error is estimated symmetrical to the degree of learning difficulty (James, 2001). It means that, contrary to the CA, EA holds a posteriori approach to error analysis rather than the apriority one as supported by CA. EA does not, however, negate interlingual sources, but supports more a posteriori approach integrating both interlingual and extra-linguistic perspectives to investigating sources of errors.

Further developments led to modifications in approaching errors such that latest views oppose both views; the posteriori and apriori and look at learning another language from a different perspective; development of an approximate system or interlanguage (Ellis &Barkhuizan, 2005).

Interlanguage is held to be a system being gradually departed from the NL and approximating to the TL.

The concept of IL proposed by Selinker (1972) considers individuals' language system or varieties as displaying special properties and rules of their own. IL is a system that each individual constructs at particular stage in his language evolution. It is an autonomic system, independent of native or target language (Corder, 1981). The term "idiosyncratic dialects" mentioned by Corder (1972) and “approximate system” by Nemser (1971) both refer to the same IL system.

Contrary to the CA and to some degree the EA, interlanguage theory opens a new direction on studying SLA. IL is considered a language by itself being characterized by all features of a means of communication. IL theory seems to accommodate all features of the CA and EA as well as a comprehensive list of cognitive, sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and communicative considerations entailing performance inconsistencies.

Taylor (1975) mentioned that in preliminary phase of language learning, interlingual transfer comprises a majority; yet after the learner begin to learn part of the new system, more interlingual transfer -overgeneralization within TL- is revealed. (Richards (1973) referred to this terms as "ignorance of rule restrictions" indicating that learner is acquainted with the general rule but not with the exceptions to that rule. For example, statements similar to “They goed” or “Do they can sing”.Besides interlingual factors, errors may occur due to interalingual factors. Intralingual errors are generated by interference of the target language. Richards (1985) utters that intralingual or developmental errors reflect the learner’s capacity at special stage and explains some of the inclusive characteristics of language acquisition. Intralingual errors can be apportioned into four titles (Ricahrds, 1973):

- *Overgeneralization*
- *Ignorance of rule restriction:*
- *Incomplete application of rules*:
- *False concepts hypothesized or semantic errors:*

On the causes of error, Corder (1971) believed that language divergence are not by chance but organized and mirror an implicit hypothesis to the nature of language being learned.

All performances are not the same in character; meaning that learners' performances differ in terms of nature, degree, type, etc. though they enjoy plenty of commonalities. Corder's classification is one of the most referenced one, which builds the foundation of analysis in this very study as well.

Different error categories were recommended by Corder (1971). Corder classified errors as pre-systematic, systematic and post-systematic. Pre-systematic errors are thosemade by a language learner while he or she is trying to learn a new point. They occur as a result of ignorance, unawareness or lack of knowledge of the rules; systematic errors take place when the learner has shaped an imprecise assumption about the target language, which can be corrected by the learners themselves if pointed out; and post-systematic errors indicate wrong implementations of the rules because of the reasons like a lack of concentration, memory lapses, physical and psychological conditions; these errors are also named mistakes or performance errors.

In an empirical bid, Soheili-Isfahani (1987) has characterized Iranian EFL learner's errors on basis of the performance realities analogous to Corder's (1973) classification as follows:

Error Type	Common Characteristics
Pre-systematic	Deletion of lexical items (of various types) Wrong noun/pronoun use Verbal errors Wrong tense construction/use Wrong preposition selection Wrong reposition Doubling process Adjectival errors Adverbial errors Functional word order Lack of coherence
Systematic	Addition of structural item/s Doubling process Wrong verb construction/use Passive/active displacement Wrong complement construction Wrong conditional Deletion of lexical item Verbal errors Wrong noun/pronoun use Wrong sequence of tense Adjectival errors Adverbial errors Addition of structural items
Post-systematic	Wrong complement construction Wrong co-occurrence and collocation Verbal errors Wrong reported speech construction Wrong preposition selection Wrong comparative construction

Soheili-Isfgahani's analogy of errors to those committed by the Iranian EFL learners clearly depicts IL development moving from pre- systematic to post-systematic parallel to the proficiency levels of the learners. This classification illustrates the approximation process of IL. As already referred to, learners errors or performance inconsistencies may act as a window to read learners' minds and their individual variables playing role in IL development including their learning styles (to be discussed in the following section) amongst many others**.**

Learning styles are the general approaches that students use in acquiring a new language or in learning any other subject. Felder and Henriques (1995) defined them as "The ways in which an individual characteristically

acquires, retains, and retrieves information." They are durable ways of approaching a learning situation which are not usually amenable to change.

Montgomery,Aplaten, Mendoza, and Prey (2009) developed multimedia instructional modules that addressed the spectrum of learning preferences. To do this, she assessed her students' learning styles with an *Index of Learning Styles* (ILS) that classified learners on four dimensions (sensing vs. intuitive, visual vs. verbal, inductive vs. deductive, and sequential vs. global) and surveyed them to determine the attitudes of the different types toward different features of instructional modules. She reported that sensing and visual learners rated demonstrations highly; sensing learners liked having access to derivations of equations (which they might not have grasped as fully as the intuitions when the instructor first presented the equations in class); and active, sensing, and visual learners preferred movies more than their reflective, intuitive, and verbal counterparts did.

Lots of researches have tested the outcome of corresponding teaching to students' learning styles (Hansen-Strain, 1989). They have revealed that corresponding learning styles has a positive effect on students' attainments, interests, and motivation (Smith &Renzulli, 1984). Scarcella and Oxford (1992) maintained that learning styles are influential factors in L2 acquisition. Martinez (2006) pointed out that "as a very important starting point, we need to be aware of the variety of students individual learning styles, individual factors affecting their acquisition and learning and be flexible enough to adapt to the students individual needs; this way, we will have the key for success in both language teaching and language learning"(p. 2).

Investigation into learners' errors can provide useful insights into language proficiency. It is because of the fact that as Selinker (1972) holds some errors are found in different levels of language proficiency denoting fossilized. Furthermore, such errors indicate developmental nature of IL (Dulay, Burt &Krashen, 1982). In this respect, Taylor (1975) proved that in early stages of language proficiency more inter – lingual errors are observable, yet more proficient learners commit inter – lingual errors more.

Good deals of research have been done in the field of language proficiency and factors affecting it. To begin with Ehrman, leaver, and

Oxford (2003) pinpointed age, perceptive ability and motivation as causes corresponding to final proficiency level of Individuals.

It is generally held that SLA and language proficiency are interwoven in a sense that trend, quality and pace of SLA is affected by the level of proficiency at which the learner is since the way a piece of input is processed depends on the learner's communicative ability level(Leeser, 2004). VanPatten (1996) in his model of input processing asserts that the language learners will get the meaning first and, then, if there are still cognitive valid resources, will concentrate upon form. The outcome of this far more proficient language learners appears to be obvious: the more proficient one is, the less his working memory functions to lead his attention to meaning.

Leeser (2004) investigated the effect of proficiency level of language learners on amount and type of outcome produced by them. The results of the analyses revealed that the level of proficiency of the language learners influenced the amount of participants' attention to specific types of form. In summary, the findings on the effects of different levels of L2 proficiency on acquisition of various facets of an L2 showed that different L2 proficiency levels affect the acquisition process. Later, Joseph (2009) investigated relationship of L1 skills in elementary school and L2 learning in high school was investigated. Students grouped as high-, average-, and low-proficiency L2 learners were compared on the basis of L1 achievement on reading, spelling, vocabulary, phonological awareness, and listening comprehension. Findings revealed that L1 skill (i.e., all four language skills) distinctions are related to L2 proficiency. On the other side, there have been lots of debates over age and language proficiency. Many researchers express the usual supposition that children are more proficient at L2 acquisition than elderly individuals; supporting most probably the Critical Period Hypothesis.

Since L2 acquisition is a developmental process, the linguistic errors made by language learners are common not by chance, but rather they are representatives of the learner's present knowledge of English (Charles, Tepper& Baird, 1999). Corder (1971) stated that errors supply information on the current phase of learners' language proficiency, and then it is fundamental for language educators to know language learners' errors. Likewise, Flicks (1980) and Charles, Tepper and Baird (1999) claimed that

the errors made by a language learner depict the language learners' growing proficiency and could be utilized as a sight into the pedagogical necessity of the learner. White (1977) also found that the advanced language learners made fewer errors and are able to correct their errors better comparing the lower proficiency level.

Language learners' styles are also taken as a factor in growing the proficiency of language learners (Dunn, et al., 1995; Hall & Moseley, 2005). According to Liu (2008) there is a considerable relationship between language learners' proficiency and their learning style and learning styles are as predictor of listening ability. Drysdale, Ross, and Schulz (2001) found learning style to be significant in 11 of the 19 courses. Cassidy (2004) and O'Brien (1991) discovered that making language learner's conscious of their learning style and assisting them improve study skills congruent with their favored learning style had a positive impact on their performance and improve their proficiency. In Chen's (2009) study statistically meaningful connections were discovered between proficiency level and kinesthetic learning style preference (p=.001), tactile learning style preference (p=.047), and individual learning style preference (p=.02).

According to Chen (2009), there is statically consequential association between learners' proficiency level and their styles. However, the idea of proficiency has stayed as a relative term in linguistic parlance. Totally proficiency symbolizes the overall competence of native speakers. For second or foreign language learners, achieving native – like proficiency is a state of nirvana. It's an issue of special relevance finding out the relation between overall language proficiency of students and their errors. In actual sense, learners are prone to both interlingual and intralingual errors.

To shed light on the issue of IL from the perspectives of performance inconsistency and the learner's styles of learning,this study aims investigating the hypothetical differentiation of performance inconsistency manifested through variety of errors, learner's perceptual learning styles and learner's language proficiency level. Moreover, the scarcity of sufficient literature on the way learners perform in the process of their IL development in relation to the variables two by two, and specifically the learning styles and proficiency level, warrants similar studies. In doing so, the problem

was raised in the form of three research questions and their respective null hypotheses.

1. Is there any difference between language proficiency level and performance inconsistency?
2. Is there any difference between learning styles and performance inconsistency?
3. Is there any difference between learning styles and language proficiency level?

Method

Participants

Two language learner populations of Karaj and Tehran, from distinctive educational levels, namely, English major university students in Tehran and language learners of an institute in Karaj were picked out as our samples. A number of 22 English Learners, 20 female and 2 male, were chosen from an institute as the first sample, with an average age of 27 years. As another sample, we asked 51 students of English majors, 44 female and 7 male, for cooperation. The age average was 25, with different levelsof language proficiency as was determined by our language proficiency test. The total number of students was summed up as 73 students (9 male, 64 female).

Instrumentation

To satisfy the objectives of the study, the following instruments were employed including:

1. Perceptual Learning-Style Preference Questionnaire to settle the participants' individual styles (Reid, 1995). The Questionnaire assesses the participants' preferences in the six learning style preferences: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, individual learning, and group learning.
2. Michigan proficiency test in order to decide on proficiency levels of the participants.
3. The Standard Speaking Test (SST) was used measure the participants' proficiency levels, and detect their speaking errors. Every student was interviewed and rated by two raters expert in the field.

4. An on the-spot paragraph was developed by the participants to detect their writing errors. All the participants were encouraged to write an on the spot paragraph their "First Day of Enrollment for EFL level at the University". The Journal was not supposed to exceed 300 words and they were expected to observe the principles of paragraph writing as much as they could.

The Standard Speaking Test (SST) was used to determine level of proficiency of the participants. This test has been devised for language learners founded on the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) that was generated chiefly by the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL).The SST interview is 10 to 15 minutes long and according to Tono, Kaneko, Isahara, Izumi, Saiga, & Kaneko (2001), consists of 5 stages:

- *Warm-up and initial assessment*
- *Single picture prompt with level checks and probes*
- *Role-play with level checks and probes*
- *Single or picture sequence prompt with level checks and probes*
- *Wind-down*

The participants' SST interviews were tape-recorded and a script of each was prepared; so that the oral corpuses also were utilized for analysis of their errors. Subsequent factors were calculated in this study:

- -*Proficiency level of participants*: it is apportioned into 3 levels based on their standing position in relation to the mean score in a sense that the standard deviation was used as the criterion measure. Those whose scores were minus and plus one SD were, respectively, were categorized as pre-interemediate and upper-intermedaite, while those whose scores lied in between were identified as intermediate learners.
- -*Language learners learning style*: it is determined by means of Perceptual Learning-Style Preference Questionnaire (Reid, 1995) that assesses the participants' preferences in the six learning style preferences: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, individual learning, and group learning.
- -*Journal writing*: a sample of on- the-spot journal on the classroom was developed by each participant.

- -*Errors in written samples of participants*: they were encouraged to develop their writing piece in 30 minutes then their written productions were analyzed base donCorder's (1971) classification of errors: pre-stystematic, systematic and post-systematic.
- -*Errors in spoken samples of participants*: similar steps taken as to the journals were taken in the analysis of oral productions.

Procedure

Procedurally, the following steps were sequentially taken in order to collect the required data. First, the Michigan proficiency tests along with the Perceptual Learning-Style Preference Questionnaire (of Reid) were administered. Then, they were asked to take part in SST interview. As mentioned before, all the interviews were recorded by two laptops. Two interviewers took part in this stage in order to save the time. A script of each recorded data was prepared and all the errors of them were carefully detected and highlighted according to Corder (1971) classification of the errors, and were analyzed and classified separately. All the errors in written corpus of participants were detected and highlighted and each data were analyzed and classified according to Corder (1971) classification of the errors separately as well.

Results

First the analysis of chi-square was run to explore the extent to which frequency of error type differ depending on the proficiency levels of the students (pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate) and their pre-systematic, systematic and post-systematic errors conventionally named based on Corder's classification. The chi-square observed value was 36.06 (Table 1). This amount of chi-square value is higher than the critical value of chi-square at 4 degrees of freedom, i.e., 9.48. Based on these results it was concluded that there is a significant relationship between language proficiency level and performance inconsistency.

Table 1

Analysis of Chi-Square Performance Inconsistency by Proficiency Levels

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	36.069[a]	4	.000

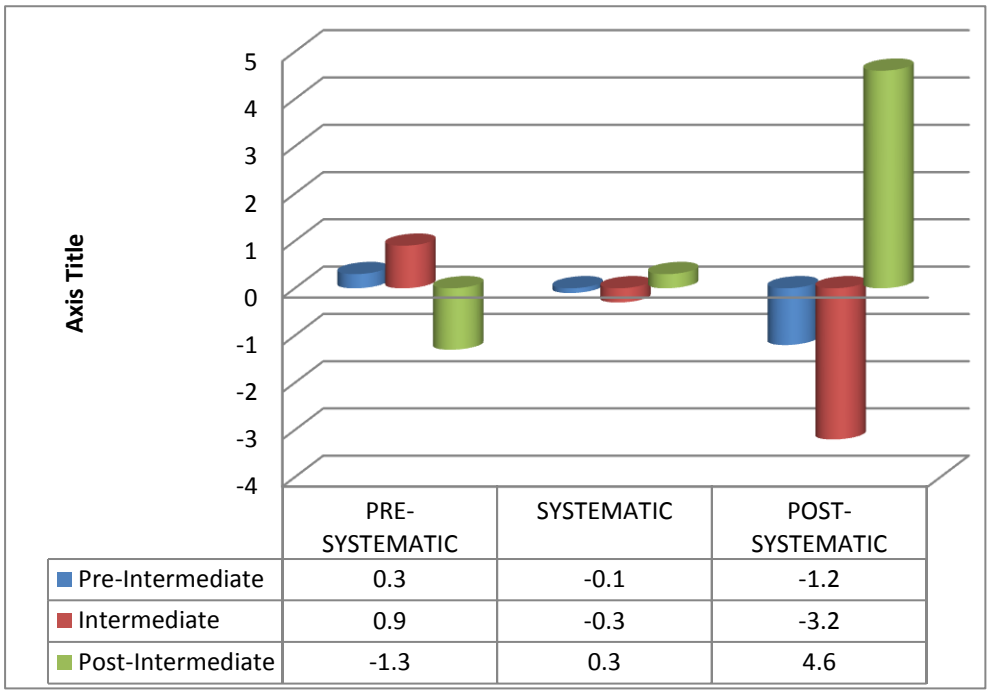
a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 19.05.

Table 2 displays the frequencies, percentages and the standardized residuals for the three types of performance inconsistency by proficiency levels. Based on the frequencies and percentages no conclusion can be made because they are parts of descriptive statistics however the Std. residual can be used for making inferences. Any Std. residuals beyond the ranges of +/- 1.96 indicate significant relationship between the two variables. Based on these results it can be concluded that at pre-intermediate level, all three types of errors are made randomly. All of the Std. Residuals are within the ranges of +/- 1.96. However, the intermediate students make less post-systematic errors (Std. Residual = -3.2). The upper-intermediate students make more post-systematic errors (Std. Residual = 4.6).

Table 2
Frequencies, Percentages and Standardized Residuals Performance Inconsistency by Proficiency Levels

		Type of Error			Total
		Pre-systematic	systematic	post-systematic	
Pre-intermediate	Count	540	234	22	796
	% within proficiency level	67.8%	29.4%	2.8%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	.3	-.1	-1.2	
Intermediate	Count	374	154	5	533
	% within proficiency level	70.2%	28.9%	.9%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	.9	-.3	-3.2	
Upper-intermediate	Count	341	165	40	546
	% within proficiency level	62.5%	30.2%	7.3%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-1.3	.3	4.6	
Total	Count	1255	553	67	1875
	% within proficiency level	66.9%	29.5%	3.6%	100.0%

Then, as proficiency level increased, the students made more post-systematic errors. This fact is shown by the significant Std. Residual of 4.6 and trough the Figure 1. The cylinders above the base line show that the performance inconsistencies are beyond expectation which shows the highest value for the post-intermediate students on post-systematic errors.



	PRE-SYSTEMATIC	SYSTEMATIC	POST-SYSTEMATIC
Pre-Intermediate	0.3	-0.1	-1.2
Intermediate	0.9	-0.3	-3.2
Post-Intermediate	-1.3	0.3	4.6

Figure 1.Std. Residuals Performance Inconsistency by Proficiency Levels

An analysis of chi-square was similarly run to find the relationship between the proficiency levels of the participants and their error type (i.e., pre-systematic, systematic & post-systematic) in writing modality. The chi-square observed value is 34.09 (Table 3). This amount of chi-square value is higher than the critical value of chi-square at 4 degrees of freedom, i.e., 9.48. So, there is a significant relationship between language proficiency level and performance inconsistency in writing.

Table 3
Analysis of Chi-Square Writing Performance Inconsistency by Proficiency Levels

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	34.09[a]	4	.000

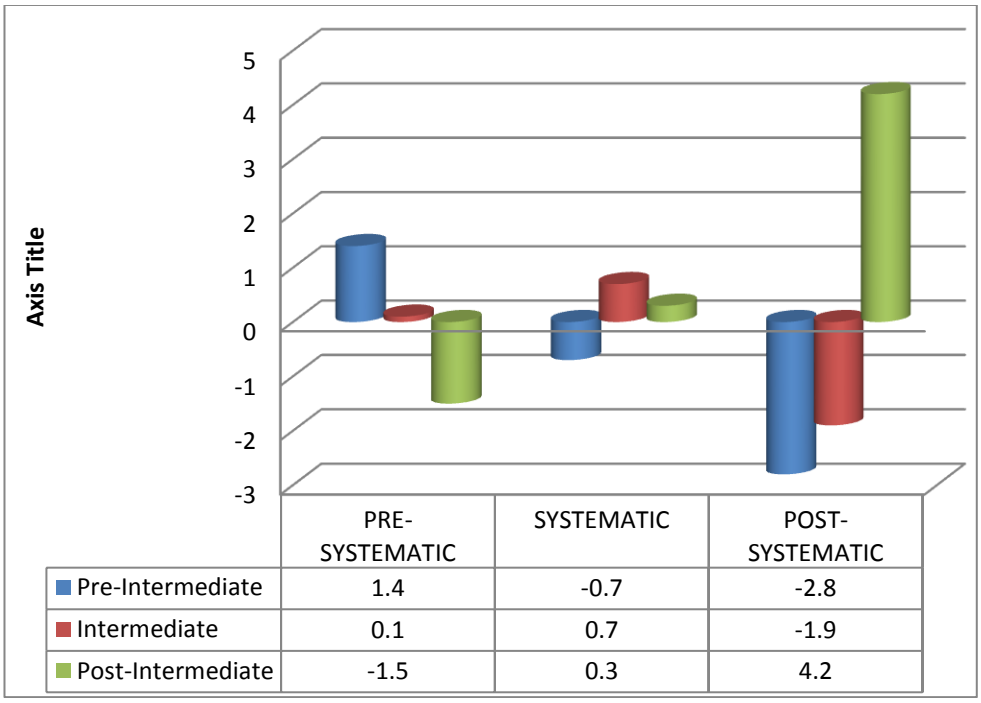
a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.58.

It can then be concluded (Table 4) that at pre-intermediate level the students make significantly less post-systematic writing errors (Std. Residual = -2.8). However, the upper-intermediate students make more post-systematic writing errors (Std. Residual = 4.2).

Table 4
Frequencies, Percentages and Standardized Residuals Writing Performance Inconsistency by Proficiency Levels

		Type of Error			Total
		Pre-systematic	systematic	Post-systematic	
Pre-intermediate	Count	215	88	8	311
	% within proficiency level	69.1%	28.3%	2.6%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	1.4	-.7	-2.8	
Intermediate	Count	83	44	3	130
	% within proficiency level	63.8%	33.8%	2.3%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	.1	.7	-1.9	
Upper-intermediate	Count	159	90	37	286
	% within proficiency level	55.6%	31.5%	12.9%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-1.5	.3	4.2	
Total	Count	457	222	48	727
	% within proficiency level	62.9%	30.5%	6.6%	100.0%

Based on these results it can be concluded that as proficiency level increases the students make more post-systematic writing errors. The Std. Residuals for pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate levels are -2.8, .1.9 and 4.2, respectively, as illustrated in figure 2.



	PRE-SYSTEMATIC	SYSTEMATIC	POST-SYSTEMATIC
Pre-Intermediate	1.4	-0.7	-2.8
Intermediate	0.1	0.7	-1.9
Post-Intermediate	-1.5	0.3	4.2

Figure 2.
Std. Residuals Performance Inconsistency in Writing by Proficiency Levels

After this stage, the analysis of chi-square was run to find the relationship between the proficiency levels of the students (pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate) and their pre-systematic, systematic and post-systematic speaking errors. The chi-square observed value is 9.57 (Table 5). This amount of chi-square value is higher than the critical value of chi-square at 4 degrees of freedom, i.e., 9.48. Accordingly, there is a significant relationship between language proficiency level and performance inconsistency in speaking.

Table 5
Analysis of Chi-Square Speaking Performance Inconsistency by Proficiency Levels

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.578[a]	4	.048

a.1cells (11%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.58.

The results displayed in Table 6 show that, unlike the previous two analyses, at pre-intermediate level the students made significantly more post-systematic speaking errors (Std. Residual = 2.1). There were not any speaking inconsistencies beyond expectation at other levels of proficiency. Based on these findings it is then concluded that error types are not only proficiency dependent but they are modality dependent as well since speaking and writing performance inconsistencies showed differences in relation to language proficiency levels. However, further studies should be carried out to come up with stronger and sounder claims.

Table 6
Frequencies, Percentages and Standardized Residuals Speaking Performance Inconsistency by Proficiency Levels

		Type of Error			Total
		Pre-systematic	systematic	Post-systematic	
Pre-intermediate	Count	325	146	14	485
	% within proficiency level	67.0%	30.1%	2.9%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-.7	.5	2.1	
Intermediate	Count	291	110	2	403
	% within proficiency level	72.2%	27.3%	.5%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	.6	-.6	-1.8	
Upper-intermediate	Count	182	75	3	260
	% within proficiency level	70.0%	28.8%	1.2%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	.1	.0	-.6	
Total	Count	798	331	19	1148
	% within proficiency level	69.5%	28.8%	1.7%	100.0%

Based on these results it can be concluded that as proficiency level increases the students make less post-systematic speaking errors. The Std. Residuals for pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate levels are 2.1, -1.8 and -.6 respectively, as presented in figure 3.

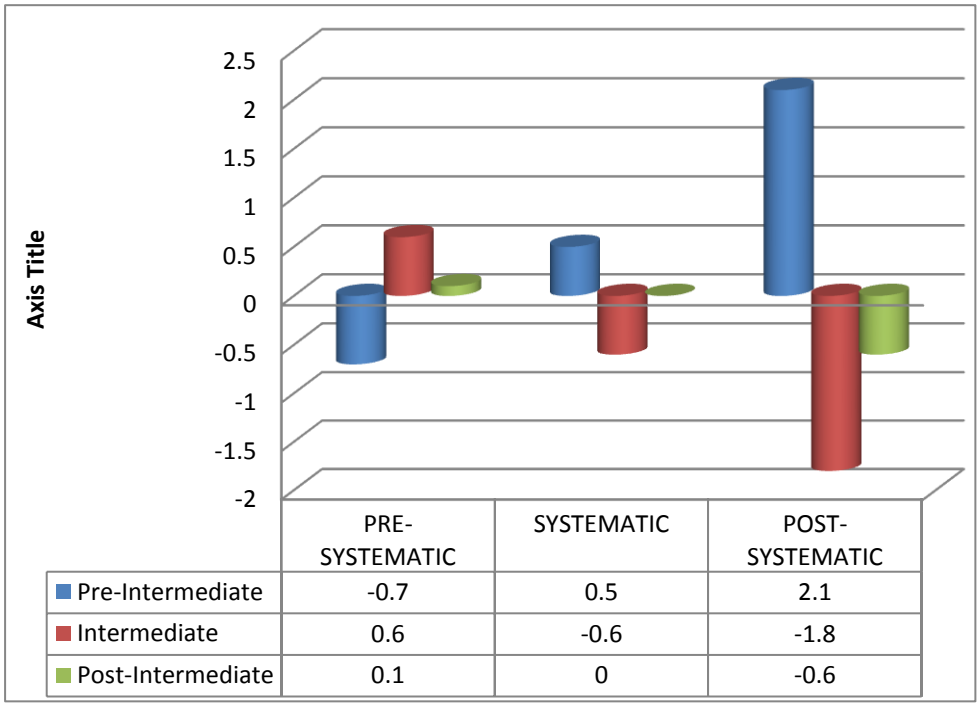


*Figure 3.*Std. Residuals Performance Inconsistency in Speaking by Proficiency Levels

The aim of the second question was to investigate the relationship between the learning styles and the performance inconsistencies. The chi-square observed value is 22.51. It exceeds the critical value of 21.02 at 12 degrees of freedom. Table 7 shows the results.

Table 7
Analysis of Chi-Square Performance Inconsistency by Learning Styles

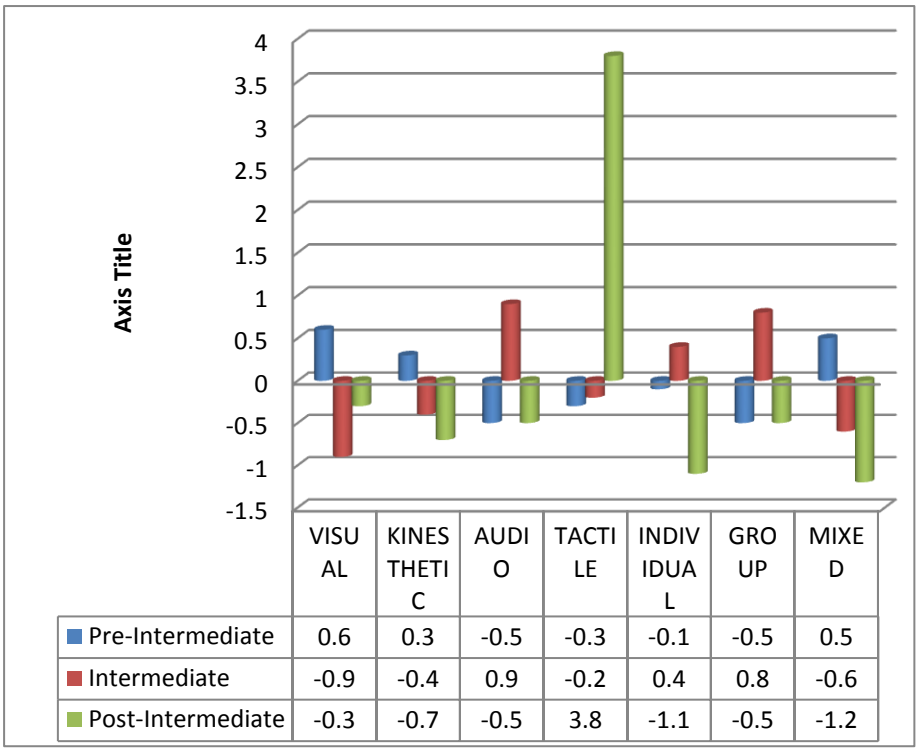
	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	22.51[a]	12	.032

a. 7 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.12.

As displayed in Table 8, all types of learning styles produce almost the same number of pre-systematic and systematic errors. However, the participants who enjoy a tactile learning style commit more post-systematic errors (Std. Residual = 3.8). The Std. Residuals are also displayed in Figure 4.

Table 8
Frequencies, Percentages and Std. Residuals Performance Inconsistency by Learning Styles

		Style							Total
		visual	kinesthetic	audio	tactile	individual	group	mixed	
Pre-systematic	Count	103	150	113	132	81	121	112	812
	%	12.7%	18.5%	13.9%	16.3%	10.0%	14.9%	13.8%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	.6	.3	-.5	-.3	-.1	-.5	.5	
systematic	Count	35	58	56	55	37	59	41	341
	%	10.3%	17.0%	16.4%	16.1%	10.9%	17.3%	12.0%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-.9	-.4	.9	-.2	.4	.8	-.6	
Post-systematic	Count	1	1	1	7	0	1	0	11
	%	9.1%	9.1%	9.1%	63.6%	.0%	9.1%	.0%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-.3	-.7	-.5	3.8	-1.1	-.5	-1.2	
Total	Count	139	209	170	194	118	181	153	1164
	%	11.9%	18.0%	14.6%	16.7%	10.1%	15.5%	13.1%	100.0%



	VISUAL	KINESTHETIC	AUDIO	TACTILE	INDIVIDUAL	GROUP	MIXED
Pre-Intermediate	0.6	0.3	-0.5	-0.3	-0.1	-0.5	0.5
Intermediate	-0.9	-0.4	0.9	-0.2	0.4	0.8	-0.6
Post-Intermediate	-0.3	-0.7	-0.5	3.8	-1.1	-0.5	-1.2

Figure 4
Std. Residuals Performance Inconsistency by Learning Styles

The third question sought to investigate if there were any significant relationship between the proficiency levels of the students (pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate) and their learning styles. The chi-square observed value is 417.91 (Table 9). This amount of chi-square value is higher than the critical value of 21.02 at 12 degrees of freedom. Based on these results it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between the learning style of the students and their proficiency levels.

Table 9
Analysis of Chi-Square Proficiency Levels by Learning Styles

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	417.918[a]	12	.000

a.0cells (0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 30.31.

The Std. Residuals are displayed in Table 10

Table 10
Frequencies, Percentages and Std. Residuals Proficiency Levels by Learning Styles

		style							Total
		Visual	kinesthetic	audio	tactile	individual	group	mixed	
Pre-Intermediate	Count	83	93	70	162	33	69	35	545
	%	15.2%	17.1%	12.8%	29.7%	6.1%	12.7%	6.4%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	2.2	-.5	-1.1	7.5	-3.0	-1.7	-4.3	
Intermediate	Count	35	47	0	32	26	55	104	299
	%	11.7 %	15.7%	.0%	10.7%	8.7%	18.4%	34.8%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-.1	-.9	-6.6	-2.5	-.8	1.2	10.3	
Post-Intermediate	Count	21	69	100	0	59	57	14	320
	%	6.6%	21.6%	31.3%	.0%	18.4%	17.8%	4.4%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-2.8	1.5	7.8	-7.3	4.7	1.0	-4.3	
Total	Count	139	209	170	194	118	181	153	1164
	%	11.9%	18.0%	14.6%	16.7%	10.1%	15.5%	13.1%	100.0%

Based on the results in Table 10, the following conclusions can be made.

A: As proficiency level increases the number of students who enjoy a tactile learning style decreases significantly. The Std. Residuals for the Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate and Post-Intermediate are 7.5, -2.5 and -7.3.

B: As proficiency level increases the number of students who enjoy a visual learning style decreases significantly. The Std. Residuals for the Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate and Post-Intermediate are 2.2, -.1 and .2.8.

C: As proficiency level increases the number of students who enjoy an audio learning style decreases and then increases significantly. The Std. Residuals for the Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate and Post-Intermediate are -1.1, -6.6 and 7.8.

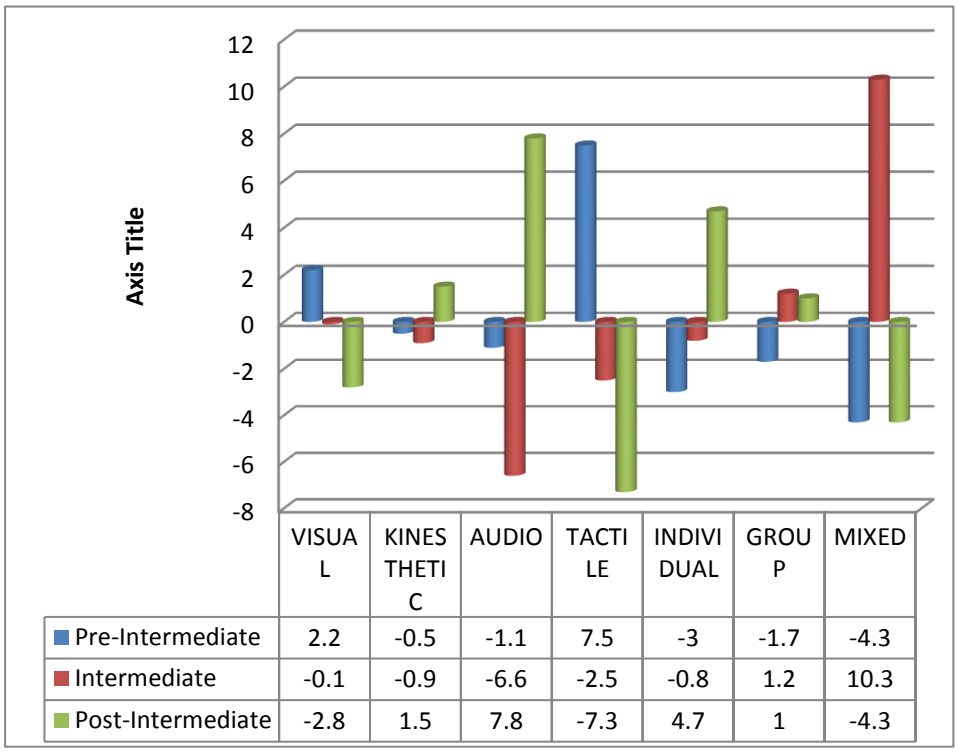
D: As proficiency level increases the number of students who enjoy an individual learning style increases significantly. The Std. Residuals for the Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate and Post-Intermediate are -3, -.8 and 4.7.

E: The relationships between the proficiency levels and the kinesthetic and group learning styles are not significant.

F: The number of students who enjoy a mixed learning style increases from pre-intermediate to intermediate (Std. Residuals = -4.3 and 10.3).

However they decreases for the upper intermediate level (Std. Residual = 4.3).

Figure 5, illustrates the results more vividly.



	VISUAL	KINESTHETIC	AUDIO	TACTILE	INDIVIDUAL	GROUP	MIXED
Pre-Intermediate	2.2	-0.5	-1.1	7.5	-3	-1.7	-4.3
Intermediate	-0.1	-0.9	-6.6	-2.5	-0.8	1.2	10.3
Post-Intermediate	-2.8	1.5	7.8	-7.3	4.7	1	-4.3

Figure 5
Std. Residuals Proficiency Levels by Learning Styles

Discussion

As to the first research question, the result of the analysis revealed that the relationship between level of language proficiency and type of errors is meaningful. This finding is consistent with the study done by White (1977) in which it was found that the advanced language learners made fewer errors and are able to correct their errors better compared the lower proficiency level ;then it shows that they are more prone to post-systematic errors. Along the same line, Mariko (2007) in a study of spoken and written data extracted from 100 Japanese junior and senior high-school EFL learners whose proficiency levels were assessed variously using SST interview found

evidence in favor of variability of errors during different stages of language development. Also this study revealed that some errors may share common developmental patterns, despite others may alter uniquely across proficiency levels. Nevertheless, Boon-Long (1998) in an error analysis of writing of the English major students found that the levels of students didn't have a strong effect on the students performance. He found that, students of second level of proficiency committed the highest number and different type of errors. Surprisingly, students of first level of proficiency didn't commit the highest number of errors. However, the data disclosed that no difference was found between the types of errors among different proficiency levels. One reason for such findings may be because of various factors involved in the two writing courses, such as the theme, the length of the written homework, sort of writing, teachers, classroom conditions, and course time.

As to the error-style correspondence, this study leaves us with a significant relationship among error categories and style types. The closely pertinent literature is not rich enough, which makes the finding an innovation while leaving the horizons open for further investigations as well. However, proficiency level and style use studied by Liu, 2008; Farr, 1971, who found that the more proficient listeners were likely to be more flexible than the less proficient listeners regarding their learning styles, while the less proficient listeners confined themselves to a special style. Reid (1987) in another study revealed that the learning style preferences of students with greater TOEFL scores more closely correspond to those of native speakers of English. He discovered that while graduate students denoted a considerably greater tendency for visual and tactile learning, the undergraduates were remarkably more auditory. However, both graduates and undergraduates strongly favored learning kinesthetically and tactilely.

Dorsey and Pierson (1984) in different study deduced that age and experience of previous work influence learning styles, but, in contrast with the present study, they found that the more proficient learners enjoy kinesthetic style to a greater degree. Kia, Alipour, and Ghaderi (2001) in another research among language learners in Payame Noor University in Iran, realized that visual learners have the greatest academic achievement.

The abovementioned findings seem to be contradictory with the idea of Hall and Moseley (2005) that believe that learning styles are fixed. However, it is conceivable that if learning styles are fixed, instructors could accommodate students more easily by tapping into their preferred learning style and teaching in a way that is compatible with each student's ability to process information. Surprisingly enough, in contrast with the aforementioned findings, Rawian (2002) in his study on a total of 314 secondary school students in the District of Hulu Langat, found a weak, negative but significant correlation between the modes of learning styles and English proficiency levels of participants.

Another study that displayed contradictory result with those of this study was carried out by Renou (2004) who didn't show any statistically meaningful advantage to preferring one learning style over another by Montemayor, Aplaten, Mendoza, and Prey (2009) disclosed that no considerable difference can be found in the learning styles between the low achieving and high achieving students.

The results of the study point to language proficiency level and language learners learning styles as two main predictors of error types and performance inconsistency, even though the effect of learners learning styles is still a matter of controversy (Hall & Moseley (2005). Rawian (2002) found a linear relationship between proficiency level and learners' learning styles underlines the importance of style teaching in EFL contexts. Effective use of learning styles is likely to impact language achievement and lead to the improvement of second language proficiency. Similarly, the strong link found here between the level of proficiency and types of errors once again points to the significance of noticing types of language learners' errors for language learners in EFL contexts like Iran where the lack of exposure to the target language out of the language classrooms results in the lower language proficiency than expected among language learners. All these matters validate examining factors affecting efficient and better learning among foreign language learners in Iran. It's crucial for foreign language teachers to be more cognizant of differences in their pupils and present information that appeal to different level of language learners' proficiency.

In addition to customary ways of teaching (video tape, text books, paper and pencil tests,….), teachers should utilize sort of strategies

accommodating students' needs such as role – play, receiving stimulation from group work, going on field trips and so on. Furthermore, it is useful for language learners to be acquainted with their learning styles and to be taught how to be involved more efficiently in their own language learning.

Teaching learners' style give greater pertinence and more immediate meaning and results in a more in-depth understanding (Schumann & Schumann, 1977). If teachers support their students less favored style, the students' lack of comfort impedes their learning and they cannot improve mental agility needed to reach their expected level of proficiency.

Considerable numbers of studies have shown the relation between foreign language learning and Individual differences (e.g., Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003; Skehan, 1989). In line with is claim, "Language teachers should provide a wealth of information to students in order to raise their awareness about learning styles … and finally, to work with students learning strengths." (Reid, 1987. p.3)

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