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RECALLING GRAMMAR THROUGH THE CORPUS

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the implementation of an action research whose main intent is to contribute to grammar teaching through contemporary means, also exploiting the cross-linguistic issues related to SLA (Second Language Acquisition) and ELT (English Language Teaching). This action research is comprised of three parts: The first part includes the detection of a problem; namely, errors in grammar, the second part of the research is based on the frequency of the errors compiled from the instruments produced as documents, and the third part includes a descriptive implementation of the corpus search in a small-scale Contextual Grammar course so that it can be modelled as a classroom procedure for the other teachers who wish to use novelty in their lessons. It is a fact that grammar is the foundation of all language forms, regardless of its being oral or written; however, how it is dealt with by different genres of language, styles and registers of each language specify the amount and kind of the grammar in the form of input to be used in the classroom. The study has introduced fruitful results in terms of the errors, and when corpus is applied as a new approach to Contextual Grammar teaching, it is sure to be of great benefit for the learners. However, teaching grammar using the corpus requires the fine selection of the grammar item, under the light of SLA to be raised as the course material. Teachers should be educated in initial teacher programs or trained after they start the profession for the efficient use of the corpora, for it needs fine tuning in terms of the selection and classification of the sampling before presented as the educational material in the classroom.

Keywords: Corpus, contextual grammar, data driven learning, focus on form(s), foreign language education, inductive teaching

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to conduct action research whose main intent is to contribute to grammar teaching through contemporary means, also exploiting the cross-linguistic issues related to SLA and ELT. Current language teaching methodology has started to argue over the place of grammar in the language learning and teaching experience; however, there are views which underline the importance of teaching grammar in context as encompassed in skills. The focus of this study is to acquaint the language teacher with the field of corpus linguistics by showing how corpus can be used in English teaching classrooms on the basis of parametric variations (Chomsky, 1986) through a sample lesson that was designed by using British National Corpus (BNC) (see the References). In this way, foreign language teaching will gain a new dimension which merges traditional grammar teaching methods with contemporary means by using technology. Focus on Form (Ellis, 2001) and Consciousness Raising (Fotos, 1994) are the basic techniques during the procedure, and the inductive teaching of the specific grammar point is realized through discovery learning.

This action research is comprised of three parts: The first part includes the detection of a problem; namely, the personal experience of the researcher as for grammar teaching. Due to the observation of some problematic areas that hinder the acquisition/learning of some items of grammar like relative clauses, this part of the research is based on the frequency of the errors compiled from the instruments produced as written documents. As for the second part, it is the search on the corpus to see how these errors are displayed in the real, authentic language. As an extension, the researcher's implementation of the corpus search in a small-scale contextual grammar course takes place so that it will be modelled as a classroom procedure for the other teachers who wish to use novelty in their lessons.". In this sense, this study is important in that it aims to revisit grammar with the help of current technological means. This new vision of teaching grammar is expected to become common among language teachers.

All in all, when the interface is put into practice, learning grammar from the corpus will become easier and more effective. In that sense, the research questions of the present study are as follows:

The following research questions have been identified:

1. What kind of errors are the most common in the written productions of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students?
2. What can be done to improve the learning of some difficult items?

    2.1. What is the source of errors?

    2.2. How can corpus be used to eradicate errors?

Corpus Linguistics and Language Teaching

A corpus is a collection of electronic texts which have been stored on the computer. The compilation as the linguistic data can be analysed by software programs. Such an analysis produces concordance data that display the use of certain words or grammatical items as they emerge in their surrounding context. This facilitates the observation of authentic language, which used to be done intuitively with little success in the past. Corpus-based analysis has the features of being empirical, analysing the real patterns of use in natural texts, utilizing a large and systematic collection of natural texts, making use of computers for analysis through automatic and interactive ways, and depending on both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques (Biber et al. 1998)**.** As it is stated by Jones and Waller (2015), analysing the corpora to determine the usage of linguistic fragments has a direct use in areas such as ELT.

Major reference grammar books now use corpus findings; therefore, leading to the use of corpus-based grammar in the classrooms. Individual, de-contextual sentences have been replaced by sentences that gain meaning in their context; in other words, corpus-based grammar now enables the observation of the consistencies that come out as rules and shows the interface between syntax and semantics through the naked eye, far beyond the human intuition. Corpus linguistics and the corpus itself offer the use of real language in the classroom as stated by Sinclair (1991, p.6), "one does not study all of botany by making artificial flowers". This means that teachers now enjoy the availability of the authentic language in their classroom like natural flowers in the garden; they can prepare more effective materials by making use of the concordance data through the observation of patterns as they randomly emerge in the corpus. However, the importance of the corpora use in the classroom is not commonly known by English teachers in Turkey, which seems to be the case for many countries in the world (Mukherjee, 2006). Moreover, a great deal of research in the field of classroom applications underlines the fact that teacher education and training programs should include the familiarization with the corpus (Conrad, 1999; Conrad, 2000; Biber, 2005; Farr, 2008; Liu & Jiang, 2009).

Unlike in the corpus based textbooks, basic features of grammar are not handled in different contexts in the majority of traditional English as a Second Language (ESL) and EFL grammar books, or they are dealt with as if they were isolated from the real life as artificial, ornamental items to be used if somebody likes them. However, grammar is the backbone of any language, and the spine is comprised of various bones, all embodied in the flesh and skin of the body. The backbone metaphor for the grammar can further be personalized and individualized to the humankind. As is the case for different types of human beings with the same backbone, grammar lies under all types of language variety, each different from one another, all making up the total language use.

It is a fact that grammar is the foundation of all language forms, regardless of its being oral or written; however, how it is dealt with by different genres of language, styles and registers of each language specify the amount and kind of the grammar in the form of input to be used in the classroom. Since grammar books fail to highlight the use of the language in different contexts of situation, learners encounter the written grammar; consequently,

placing little emphasis on verbal communication. Corpus grammar: on the other hand, displays the very possible uses of a given item in given contexts, thus enabling the observation of one form for various functions. Barbieri and Eckhardt (2007) which applies the teaching of Reported Speech through corpus-based form-focused treatment can be given as an example for classroom application.

The study offers to bridge the gap between the corpus-based findings and classroom applications in terms of designing principled second language materials and tasks under the light of current theories and principles of SLA. This approach to language teaching-second language and foreign language- sounds reasonable, for the language learning theories and their reflections onto the second language acquisition and foreign language teaching have always been in the focus of applied linguists. The SLA driven implementation is likely to eradicate the problems that emerge if the concordance data are used without a principle, which will either deter the language teachers from using it, or lead to chaotic situations that might be caused by the lack of a systematic design.

Lexico-Grammar in the Classroom: The Interface of Form and Meaning in the Corpora

This paper aims to subsume the two fields of research that could yield fruitful results if merged during the classroom practice. The first one is Data Driven Learning (DDL) (Johns, 1991), which offers an inductive discovery learning through the concordance as a suitable way for the proficient learner, but the lower-level proficiency remaining to be doubtful (Barbieri & Eckhardt, 2007). The second one is FonF (Focus on Form) (Long, 1983), as a technique that places stress on the way forms are introduced in the classroom context of learning where the attention is drawn to the form of a specific language feature, which is further specified by the meaning. Ellis (2001) makes a distinction between Planned Focus on Form (a focused task is necessary to elicit the predetermined form), Focus on Forms (isolated grammar points in the form of Presentation, Practice and Production as proposed by Doughty & Williams, 1998), and Incidental Focus on Form (naturally occurring forms as they arise out of communicative tasks).

Contributions of the corpora to language teaching can be felt most in lexico-grammatical interface between syntax and semantics as this specific field shapes the sentence structure and the context the sentences are embodied in. To Jones and Waller (2015), a corpus can be used to test or confront our perceptions about language and that a corpus may highlight or disprove an idea. If corpora are used in language teaching, the starting point would be the language structure, the primary importance given to the verb. Unlike traditional textbooks and dictionaries that rely on the intuitions of the writers, the organizing principle for the level of difficulty; thus, priority of teaching is based on the frequency of the words or other lexical chunks in the corpus based language teaching materials. This eliminates such problems as the lack of a match between real authentic language and the intuitive language that is not actual in the sources to be utilized in the classroom. The language teaching based on this approach can be started with the use of words as they occur in the sentence structure as individual items; more vitally, with their collocating words that can be likened to the root of a plant, with the

visible part on the surface, the invisible, but the binding part, lying underneath. Since language teaching requires natural contexts, this needs to be practised with concrete examples in classroom applications.

There are some applications of the corpus with fruitful results (This article, for instance, pinpoints relative clauses as one of the challenging grammar points; particularly, the distinction between 'which' and 'where' as the relative pronouns, and shows the implementation of Form Focused Instruction (Ellis, 2001) of this item by using the corpus as the contextual tool to process the meaning in the focus of the teaching (Doughty & Williams, 1998). As the further step, the weak interface position of FonF, in which explicit knowledge turns into implicit knowledge (Ellis, 1994), will be used in order that the balance between the form and meaning can be struck through the focused items. Since the focus is the key word here, Consciousness Raising Technique (CRT) will be used in the first place as it is defined by Fotos (1994) by isolating a specific linguistic feature for focused attention, by providing data for the learners so that they can work out explicit grammar rules.

METHOD

Research Model

The roots of this action research are grounded on the observations of the researcher while working in the field as a professional. Seeing that things do not run smoothly in some parts of EFL grammar instruction, the researcher has decided to conduct action research and provide solutions for this problem. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2003, p.592), action research involves four basic stages: "(1) identifying the research problem or question, (2) obtaining the necessary information to answer the question(s), (3) analysing and interpreting the information that has been gathered, and (4) developing a plan of action". In line with this framework, the data have been observed and interpreted and the problem(s) have been identified. To improve the conditions of language teaching, the researcher has used the principles of action research, which is "most appropriate when teachers or others involved in education wish to make something better, improve their practice, deal with a troublesome issue, or correct something that is not working".

Participants /Sampling

The research mainly relies on documentation that had been compiled by the researcher(s) to detect errors. In this sense, there not direct participants, but their products as an entity for research. The procedure is given in detail below:

Data Collection Tools

Secondly, as for the instruments of data collection, the researcher used the documents produced during the education terms at three different phases as years (2000, 2010, 2017) of advanced groups of learners (180 total). Once these manuscripts were used for their main purpose; namely, for the evaluation of learner performance,

the researcher has examined and analysed them later by conducting a cross-linguistic research in the same way as previously done by Dönük (2001) and Dönük and Tezbaşaran (2010) to pinpoint the types and sources of errors.

Data Analysis

The findings have been interpreted, and a specific entity to be a topic for teaching grammar has been identified. Finally, as the last step, the action plan has been developed to merge the old with the new.

FINDINGS

The research has produced fruitful results as for the findings. Research question 1 asks the most problematic areas encountered by the EFL learners while learning grammar. According to the documentation, learners seem to make errors on the items shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The areas errors accumulate while learning grammar

Articles
Present Perfect Tense vs. Simple Past Tense
Tenses with progressive aspect (e.g. have been doing)
Past and Perfect forms of modals
Passive of the Gerund
Passive of the Infinitive
Unaccusative Verbs
Verb morphology (e.g. compound verbs)
Relative Clauses
Indirect Speech
Adverbial Clauses of Time

As an answer to the second question, which asks the possible course of action to improve the learning of some difficult items, the research suggests theoretical solutions such as cross-linguistic research and lexico-grammar to be applied during the course time. To be more specific, research question 2.1 can be answered as the utilization of cross-linguistic research from a comparative and contrastive perspective.

As an answer to the research question 2.2, some search in the corpus has been done under the light of the research conducted on the learner errors. The classes of the errors having been identified; a problem has been pinpointed among the consistent mistakes that emerge in the documents mentioned above. As a sample item to teach, relative clauses identifying a place have been marked, for 18 % of the students had used 'which' modifying a place while 82% of them had used 'where' correctly. This means that, as a relative pronoun, 'where' does not stand alone, and that learners should be aware of the existence of 'which' as well, particularly while reading or listening to a text. As a course of action, corpus samples including these pronouns (Table 2 & Table 3) have been extracted from British National Corpus (see references), and the context these challenging pronouns take place can be seen as well as the frequency of emergence:

Table 2. Corpus Sampling for '(the) place which' out of 36 instances

No	File name	Sample Sentence
1	CJD	Tafahi is thus the place which greets the world's new day first.
2	EFX	This was the name of the place which he had visited five years before; he had gone almost in the role.

Table 3. Corpus sampling for '(the) place where' out of 492 instances

No	File name	Sample Sentence
1	H01	I was started for I've got sweep all the (pause) floor, the place where we work.
2	CE4	In some cases, it helps to imagine the place where the picture will be hung.

As it can be observed from the examples, the instances of each pronoun as modifiers of 'place' are not the same: 'where' far more frequent than 'which' (perhaps more instances with prepositions, and it is possible to extract each preposition combination with 'which' from the corpus). As the next step of this action research, the implementation for the utilisation of a corpus to display the relations at the syntax-semantics interface has been applied during the course time, and the procedure has been elaborated step by step as follows:

Implementation

1. The teacher greets the class and starts the lesson. (S)he introduces a context including Relative Clauses on the board and asks questions to elicit the meaning of the form (e.g. which house is expensive?)

2. The teacher explains that these clauses modify nouns and that they can take place at different parts of the sentence according to the place of the noun, and that it can be located to the left or right of the relative clause according to the typology of the language (e.g. English vs. Turkish).

3. The teacher also mentions how these clauses are marked in different languages (e.g. English as an embedded clause on the syntax; Turkish, relativization morphemes behaving like adjectives: e.g. *the house which I have hired is expensive* / kira-la-dığ-ım ev pahalı(dır)).

4. The teacher writes a few sentences with gaps on the board to be filled in either with 'where' or with 'which' (structured input: VanPatten, 1996).

5. The teacher, then, goes around the class and elicits the answers without making any comments, nor does (s)he give corrective feedback.

6. The teacher shows the students the sentences that are used with the relative pronoun, 'where' from the corpus, and asks the students what commonality they find in the given sentences. The students are given some time to engage themselves in the task. They are also asked to share and discuss the findings with their peers.

7. Then, the teacher repeats the same procedure with the relative pronoun, 'which'.

8. The students, having been exposed to the input flood or enhancement (Lee & Huang, 2008), figure out the shared behaviour for 'where', but when it comes to 'which' they are assumed to have difficulty in

determining the function. They are expected to state that 'where' is used to modify places; however, 'which' can function in the same way with an additional preposition such as in, at, etc., but without a preposition it is hard to explain how it can be used to modify a place.

9. The teacher draws the students' attention to the examples from the corpus with enlarged fonts so that input becomes intake (Sharwood Smith, 1993) and adds that there are no related prepositions, still 'which' modifies a place in the examples.

10. The teacher specifies the situation through some examples: she asks the students to pay attention to the verbs that are used in the modifying clauses (Consciousness-Raising, Fotos, 1994)). She writes such verbs as 'to recommend', 'to own', 'to find', 'to mention',' to create' etc. on the board, and asks the students to make sentences with these verbs using the relative pronouns, "where" or "which".

11. Having elicited some examples, the teacher writes some of them on the board, underlining the objects these verbs choose as their complements. For example, she elicits a sentence like, 'I own a shop', and underlines 'a shop', and asks the students to write a pronoun for this. As the next step, she asks the students to notice the sentences with 'which' (Schmidt, 1990).

12. The teacher extracts an example from BNC:

"It is the place which our neighbours find so fascinating that, in spite of our invitation to enter the living room, they say,' I won't stay a moment', but find that they stay thirty minutes!"

13. Following this step, the teacher asks the students to rewrite the given sentence with the embedded relative clause in the main clause (Larsen-Freeman et al., 1999).

"It is the place. Our neighbours find so fascinating that, in spite of our invitation to enter the living room, they say,' I won't stay a moment', but find that they stay thirty minutes!"

She, then, underlines the repetitive word, 'the place', and asks the students to write either 'it' or 'there' for the noun in the second sentence (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; cited in Dalili, 2011).

14. The teacher follows the same steps in 11-14 with the verbs that are used with the pronoun, 'where', such as 'to live', 'to park', etc.

15. To round up, the teacher states that seeing just the form may not be helpful in all cases; a further insight into the meaning and the verb used in the modifying phrase or the clause needs to have the priority in the selection of the pronoun (The teacher has the background information that the verb selects its complements according to its lexical properties).

16. As the final step, the teacher gives a mini-test including relative pronouns to make sure the class has understood the grammar point.

The teacher has a chat with the students to see if they have benefitted from this kind of teaching.

CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

Corpus can be used to teach lexico-grammar as well as grammar itself as an individual item. Apart from this, Friginal et al. (2019) mention that vocabulary and writing courses can be conducted using corpora though it may not be suitable for speaking or listening courses. For the present research, the first research question asks the most problematic areas encountered by the EFL learners while learning grammar. The list of the problematic areas' points to the interface between syntax and semantics as for the verb morphology and the changing transitivity features between English and Turkish. Besides, parametric variations (Chomsky, 1986) seem to pose a challenge (e.g. Present Perfect Tense) for the EFL learners.

In line with the nature of the action research, the second question asks the possible courses of action to be taken to overcome the difficulty of learning a grammar item as an EFL learner. Advanced grammar teachers (also including personal observations and the occasional chats with colleagues) must have encountered learner mistakes that arise because of the misconduct or lack of information learners are given about relative pronouns, 'where' and 'which'. Basic grammar books explain the most frequent use of these pronouns, but when it comes to practice, these two pronouns are sources of interlanguage errors for the learners who are assessed by means of multiple-choice tests on relative pronouns modifying a place or use these pronouns in productive skills. This cross-linguistic research also requires the attention of the teacher on these two pronouns, which can be followed in the corpus samplings more easily. The sentences extracted from the corpus and the other instances show that some grammar books which describe relative pronouns stating that a place is modified by 'where' or 'preposition+ which' could be misleading. The reason for this case is that, most of them do not mention the existence of 'which' that functions as the relative pronoun because the verb of the complex sentence the pronoun interacts with in the deep structure, c-selects an object (e.g. to enjoy a place, to create a place, etc.) instead of an adverb (e.g. "there" to replace "where" in the relative clause) as its complement, thus reflecting its semantic properties onto the syntax.

Research question 2.2 asks about the way corpus can be used to teach parametric variations between English and Turkish. For this to realize, the researcher has used the implementation of the instructed focus, 'which' and 'where' by using the concordances with the help of a corpus. The suggested steps were applied in a Contextual Grammar course, ending with the achievements of the learners; a similar procedure can be adapted to some forms of grammar that need more attention of the EFL teacher when parametric variations between Turkish and English are considered. As it can be seen from the classroom implementation, teaching grammar using the corpus requires the fine selection of the grammar item to be raised as the course material. Besides, the input flood learners are exposed to imply that if they are given more opportunities to notice a linguistic item, they are likely to produce the similar ones (Doughty & Williams, 1998). On the other hand, the frequency is supposed to be set for the priority of the item in the course material, not the total ignorance as if such a use did not exist in the language itself although an important point to be handled with ultimate care is that 'frequency of the data simply cannot dictate pedagogy' (Conrad, 2000).

In line with the research findings, it can be said that the grammar available in the books may not represent the actual representation of a specific grammar item The best course of action to be employed is to refer to the corpus to see the possible other uses of a grammatical item so that learners would not make mistakes. Corpus linguistics research and its educational implications pave the way for a new approach towards grammar teaching, which has recently been considered to be embodied in the skills instead of overt teaching. Unlike traditional ways which suggest teaching grammar deductively by dealing with decontextualized sentences, the corpus facilitates the insight into the use of grammar to raise it to the consciousness level of the learner, who can figure out the rule out of the massive data displayed as concordances. In this way, corpus can be used both for inductive and deductive teaching purposes, depending on the learner variable, which is determined by the teacher as a need analyst.

In conclusion, corpus serves for the purpose best if the teacher knows how to use it on the basis of cross-linguistic action research. Teachers can compile interlanguage errors and give mini grammar courses as an error correction procedure using the corpus, or as it has been modelled in this article, can determine the problem-based area and start the teaching of such difficult structures using the corpus for a tailor-made teaching of grammar. As for the limitations, this is a small scale research with its results belonging to a group of participants who benefitted from the action procedure which had been planned and developed by the researcher(s). At the end of the application, the learners were observed to be able to identify the right pronoun in the right place, which means that using the corpus for teaching was effective for them. This result is consistent with another study conducted by Kilichevna (2022), who points out that corpus based materials for grammar were favored by the participants. Therefore, they are more effective than using textbooks and coursebooks.

Although the study bears the features of action research, in principle, its main intent is to "produce results generalizable to wide population" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003) as in formal research rather than remain local. The personal observation as the product of this procedure can be summed up with the philosophy that classroom teaching can be shaped by the corpus if the teacher also works as researcher.

SUGGESTIONS

This research is limited to a small group of participants; however, as it was stated before, its main intent is to make the action part and the results of this action become more general and applicable. In this sense, as a web-based application, corpus may contribute to language teaching to a great extent. For this to realize, teacher candidates should be educated in initial teacher programs or trained after they start the profession for the efficient use of the corpora, for it needs fine tuning in terms of the selection and classification of the sampling before presented as the educational material in the classroom. Moreover, in-Service professional development programs should hold drip-feed sessions to update language teachers with the latest products of technology, including the corpus.

ETHICAL TEXT

In this article, the journal writing rules, publication principles, research and publication ethics, and journal ethical rules were followed. The responsibility belongs to the author (s) for any violations that may arise regarding the article. The data of the present study were collected during the 2017-2018 Spring term.

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