Contribution of written languaging to enhancing the efficiency of written corrective feedback

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This study delved into the impact of written languaging (WL) on grammatical accuracy of writing. To this aim, two intact classes of Iranian EFL learners were randomly assigned to two groups. As the pre-test, both groups wrote a composition on the same prompt. One (n = 19) received only direct written corrective feedback (DWCF) on their original drafts while the other group (n = 19) received DWCF and was required to write about the reasons behind their errors (i.e. language about the errors). For the post-test, both groups revised their original writings. Results of the study revealed that both groups made significant gains in grammatical accuracy of their compositions. However, producing written languaging proved to be more effective than mere DWCF. Findings are discussed in the light of Vygotskyian sociocultural theory.

Keywords: languaging, written languaging, private speech/writing, written corrective feedback, sociocultural theory

Introduction

Language is a potent tool used for both facilitating effective communication and enhancing our cognitive abilities. In other words, language allows us to translate
our newly shaped knowledge into concrete linguistic output so as to be reconsidered and refined. This prime function of language, whether oral or written, has been particularly highlighted within the framework of Vygotskian sociocultural theory (SCT). Vygotsky (1978) held that the essence of all kinds of learning is situated in the socio-cultural milieu; learning is originally shaped and constructed through social interaction with more capable others in our surrounding and then we can bring this co-constructed knowledge under our control and use it autonomously in other contexts. Under the SCT viewpoint, further, human beings’ relationship with the external world is not direct, but it is established by virtue of some mediatory tools, either physical (e.g. a pen and a computer) or symbolic (e.g. languages and numbers). Among the symbolic ones, language is of paramount importance since it aids us in making contact with other people in order to co-construct knowledge and awareness and to build a link with our inside world or inner self. That is, it is mainly language that enables us to co-build knowledge at social level and internalize it for independent use in other situations.

Swain (2006; 2010) underscored this function of language in the second language acquisition process, referring to it as ‘languaging’. Through languaging, in fact, we obtain a possibility to give some thoughts to language features partially learned and yet to be fully mastered (Swain 2006; 2010). Specifically put, languaging is conceived as “the process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language” (Swain 2006: 95). Language in oral modality has been investigated in two strands: collaborative dialogue and private speech. The former refers to a “dialogue in which L2 learners are engaged in problem solving and knowledge building” (Swain and Lapkin 1998: 102) while the latter is taken as an audible speech to self (Ohta 2001). Nonetheless, as hinted earlier, utilizing language for the purpose of knowledge-building or languaging is not merely restricted to oral modality but in writing as well; it was Suzuki (2009; 2012) who spearheaded the introduction of written languaging into the field of second language acquisition.

Suzuki maintained that through written languaging, thoughts and ideas are translated into written artifacts; hence, they can be exposed to critical reflection and deliberation. Compared to oral languaging, written languaging can stimulate further elucidation and clarification of thoughts since in the case of oral languaging, an audience is present and speakers leave some parts of the discourse to them to grasp, so they can infer the unfolded sections by virtue of the immediate context or the speakers’ non-verbal language (Suzuki 2012). One manifestation of written modality which can stimulate language learners to employ language to construct knowledge about language itself is written corrective feedback (WCF).

As one type of WCF, direct WCF (i.e. indicating the location of errors and giving the correct forms) is one of the most prevalent mediations used by language teachers in the hope of enhancing learners’ writing proficiency. However, SLA research is divided over the efficiency of WCF; some researchers (e.g. Chandler 2003; Bitchener and Knoch 2008; Shintani, Ellis and Suzuki 2014)