A Mixed Methods Study of Scaffolded Corrective Feedback and Motivational Scaffolding in EFL Oral Production Accuracy and Fluency

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the effectiveness of three scaffolding strategies in improving EFL learners' speaking accuracy and fluency. Forty five female young adolescent students studying in three intact classes at an English Language institute in Behbahan, Iran were randomly assigned to motivational scaffolding (MS), synchronous scaffolded corrective feedback (SYN) and asynchronous scaffolded CF (ASYN) groups. Before the twelve session treatment, learners were required to express their opinion on a free discussion topic in two minutes. After transcribing the two-minute pretests, the researchers discovered seven types of errors common among the three groups, which were considered in later analyses. After the treatment period, each student's two minute performance on another topic was considered as her posttest. Mixed-methods data analyses were administered through which the quantitative phase did not show any significant improvement in either of the groups' speaking accuracy and fluency. However, qualitative inspection revealed that among the two most common grammatical errors, the SYN and ASYN groups showed considerable improvement in terms of third person singular –s. Unlike third person singular –s, simple past takes various forms with different verbs, which requires learners to memorize several distinct instances which in turn can add to the difficulty of this grammatical feature.

Keywords: Scaffolded corrective feedback; motivational scaffolding; speaking; accuracy; fluency.

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1. Introduction

Speaking is the ability to express or exchange thoughts through language (Mart, 2012). Unlike written tasks, oral presentations often require online language processing (Ellis, 2003). These, among other factors, might be reasons why Iranian EFL learners and teachers consider speaking to be the most demanding skill. In the Iranian EFL context in which the formal instruction of English language starts from the first year of junior high school and the dominant method of EFL teaching emphasizes deductive teaching of grammar, learning new lists of vocabulary, doing written exercises and even translating the texts, speaking skill is usually considered to be even more challenging to the students.

As an indispensable part of SLA research, corrective feedback (CF) has played a significant role in enhancing knowledge on the ways to improve language acquisition in general and different skills such as speaking in specific. There has been a shift in this line

of research from focusing on whether students' errors should be corrected to what type of CF (e.g. indirect or direct) should be utilized (Li, 2010). Later, however, under the influence of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and specially scaffolding strategies, it is suggested that scaffolded CF needs to be investigated (Finn & Metcalfe, 2010). Scaffolded CF arises when CF and scaffolding strategies meet and it applies to situations where "an expert guides the novice through the mechanisms of graduation, contingency and ongoing assessment of the learner's needs and abilities, and adjusting the help accordingly" (Amirghassemi, Azabdaftari & Saeidi, 2013, p.256). What makes scaffolded CF different from regular CF strategies, is the influence of scaffolding, which results in the gradual and guided provision and removal of indirect to direct CF; However, if the learner could self-correct through the indirect CF, the provision of a more direct CF would be redundant.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Scaffolded corrective feedback

In scaffolded CF, learning in general and language learning in particular is essentially seen as a socially mediated process in which the learner moves from object/other regulation to self-regulation where the learner would be able to solve his/her problems independently (Lantolf & Poehner, 2011). In order to achieve that goal, De Guerrero and Villamil (2000) argue that "interactions need to operate within the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)" (p.52). The type of assistance which occurs within the ZPD is referred to as scaffolding which can take different forms such as cognitive or affective and is intended to help a learner complete a task and gain more independence in problem solving (De Guerrero, 2000).

The synchronicity of the scaffolded feedback may also result in different outcomes (Shintani, 2015). Synchronous (in class) feedback might increase the level of the learners' stress, while asynchronous (delayed) feedback through online chat rooms might be considered as a possible solution for the negative effects of corrective feedback although more extra time needs to be allocated to asynchronous feedback.

2.2. Motivational scaffolding

CF, though well intended, often becomes a demotivating factor in L2 classes which may result in losing learners' motivation for and interest in participating in learning tasks (Elsaghayer, 2014). Mackiewicz and Thompson (2013) propose motivational scaffolding as a potential solution for motivating ESL writers to actively take part in writing tutoring sessions where tutors provide the learners' errors with the necessary CF. Verbal behaviors that are consistent with politeness strategies can operationally define motivational scaffolding "through their shared goal of solidarity and rapport-building" (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2013, p.49). Motivational scaffolding is seen as a means to mitigate the potential side effects of CF. Motivation is a complex concept with affective, cognitive and perceptual components; however, following Mackiewicz & Thompson (2013), the focus here is on the affective component. Based on research on motivation and scaffolding, Mackiewicz and Thompson (2013, p.47) present five types of motivational scaffolding: Praise (general and specific), Encouragement/ Optimism, Demonstration of concern for student, Statements of sympathy or empathy and Reinforcement of student's ownership.

Brown and Levinson (1987) provide various specific politeness strategies, and those applicable to oral interactions fall into three broad categories (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2013). First, through giving understanding and sympathy, teachers can show that students feelings matters. Second, teachers can attend to students' successes or conditions by offering praise. The teacher might use the strategy of avoiding candid disagreement. Joking is another positive-politeness technique for putting [the hearer] at ease" (p.124). Third, Brown and Levinson explain that teachers can show that they and their students are cooperators, which indicates that they share a goal in a task. Instead of declaratives, teachers can use questions (e.g., *Do you think you should find a few more sources to back up this claim*?) or hedges (e.g., *You could say that in this way*) to make suggestions in a polite way.

2.3. Related studies on scaffolded CF

In SLA literature, several studies have adopted a cognitive perspective to investigate language

learning as a mental process (Lyster and Ranta, 1997; Chandler, 2003); however, Ellis and Sheen (2006) called for more research on socio-psychological issues that may influence learners' receptivity to CF. From cognitive perspective, CF advances language learning through triggering learners' cognitive processes, ignoring the online dialogic processes and even the affective dimension involved in interaction.

While CF studies within a cognitive framework have investigated the effectiveness of particular types of CF (e.g. Ellis and Sheen, 2006), CF studies within a sociocultural framework have tried to find how adjusting feedback to learners' ZPD contributes to learning (e.g. Aljaafreh and Lantolf, 1994). Finn and Metcalfe (2010) tested scaffolded CF against three other feedback types, including standard CF, minimal CF, and answer-until-correct multiple-choice CF with the purpose of understanding which type would generate the most robust improvement in error correction. The results of an immediate test showed that minimal CF led to the lowest final memory, answer-until-correct type led to moderate final memory, and scaffolded and standard types of CF resulted in high final memory. However, scaffolded CF resulted in the best memory in 30-minute and in one day delay tests.

Erlam, Ellis and Bastone (2013) designed a study in which some learners received scaffolded feedback in line with SCT and others direct feedback in line with cognitive approach. The results pointed to the effectiveness of the scaffolded CF in promoting self-correction; however, no evidence of any systematic reduction was found in the amount of assistance provided over time. Conversely, the direct CF led to less self-correction but was done much more rapidly.

In a study conducted by Rassaei (2014), 78 Iranian EFL learners were randomly assigned to two experimental (scaffolded CF and recast) groups and one control group. They took part in task-based interactions and received the above mentioned feedback types for their errors. Their pretests and posttests included a speaking task and an untimed grammaticality judgment test. The comparison between their pre and posttests showed that scaffolded CF resulted in better performance and development.

Previous research has contributed to a better understanding of scaffolding as a still evolving concept; however, very few studies have focused on the effectiveness of scaffolding types, i.e. synchronous scaffolded CF, asynchronous scaffolded CF through chat rooms and motivational scaffolding (Finn & Metcalfe, 2010; Mackiewicz and Thompson, 2013). Furthermore, in terms of motivational scaffolding, as a new interpretation of scaffolding, no study has focused on its effect on EFL speaking ability. By comparing three scaffolding conditions (synchronous scaffolded CF, asynchronous scaffolded CF through chat rooms and motivational scaffolding), the study intends to contribute to a crucial and controversial issue in speaking classes in the Iranian EFL context to see if the teacher intervention can improve EFL students' speaking accuracy and fluency. As such, this study hopes to fill the gap between cognitive and socio-psychological studies and also to shed more light on the ways to assist EFL learners achieve independence in oral production classes. The present study is guided by these two research questions:

1. Do synchronous/asynchronous scaffolded CF and motivational scaffolding cause any meaningful variation in terms of the speaking accuracy and fluency among Iranian adolescent EFL learners?

2. What qualitative changes, if any, can be traced in the EFL learners' utterances?

3. Methodology

This *quasi-experimental* study followed a mixed-methods design which examined CF within a classroom-based context with intact classes in a language institute to ensure the "ecological validity" (Loewen and Erlam, 2006, p.365). Ecological validity or authenticity, in line with action research tenets, concerns the relevance of the research to the everyday setting of those involved in it (Hawkes, 2010).

3.1. Participants

Through convenience sampling, this study was conducted with 45 young adolescent female students studying English at Ayandish English Language institute in Behbahan. Some of the students have started learning English and have passed several terms in the above mentioned

institute (e.g. twenty or more terms), while some others have started English learning in other English schools and after taking locally-made placement tests, have taken part in the top level classes of the institute. The participants attended in three naturally intact classes which were randomly assigned to three groups: synchronous scaffolded CF (SYN), asynchronous scaffolded CF (ASYN) and motivational scaffolding (MS), each including fifteen students.

3.2. Instruments

As pretests and posttests, learners' two minute performances on a free discussion topic were video and audio recorded. Each student was given about two minutes on average to express her opinions in an interactive way. An example topic from the syllabus is "How do you describe your best friend?" Generally, the selected topics had the feature of familiarity of information, which might assumingly (owing to easier access) result in better fluency and accuracy performance compared with unfamiliar topics. Literature review, however, rejects this assumption (Skehan & Foster, 1997; Skehan, 2001); in other words, the results of accuracy and fluency on both familiar (personal information) and unfamiliar (decision making) topics were strikingly similar. The twelve session treatment period was video and audio recorded as well.

3.3. Procedure

At the onset of the study, Before the treatment period, each student in the three groups (SYN, ASYN, MS) was individually asked to attend in a face to face interaction with the researcher to talk about a free discussion topic for two minutes as her pretest. The free discussion session class is usually part of supplementary courses in Ayandish English Language School, but the number of free discussion (FD) activities differs semester to semester. Through FDs, learners find the opportunity to exchange their ideas on a topic. Teachers use the students' performance in these classes to assess them and to give individualized feedback.

The learners' performances on pretests in the three groups were analyzed to detect the different types of grammatical errors the learners committed. Errors in word order, using pronouns, verb tense, verb morphology, auxiliaries and agreement are examples of such errors whose identification was made on the basis of linguistic evidence and comparing them with Standard English. The identification of errors was done recursively; that is, re-analyses of the students' utterances were carried out until the identification of the grammatical errors was satisfactorily done.

The types of errors in the pretests

After transcribing the two-minute pretests, the researchers discovered seven types of errors common among the three groups, which are presented and ordered below based on their frequency of occurrence:

   A. Third person singular –s:

   Example 1: **MS7**: She always *know* what I'm saying.

   Example 2: **SYN11**: She *go* to ehh another school.

   Example 3: **ASYN7**: She *don't say* I don't have time.

   B. Simple past tense:

   Example 4: **MS10**: I *meet* her when I was ehh, I think, two years old.

   Example 5: **SYN8**: I *meet* her in my school eh six years ago.

   Example 6: **ASYN1**: We *go* there ehh last year.

It was noticed that these two types of errors were the most frequent in the three groups. The other types exemplified below were also observed in the data, though less frequently than the first two types.

   C. Subject/object pronouns:

The reason behind such errors lies in the difference between English and the learners' L1, as there is usually only one form for subject or object pronouns in Persian. For example, while there is one form ("ou") for third person singular in Persian, it comes in four forms in English ("he, she, him and her"), which occasionally makes processing subject and object pronouns more demanding for

Persian learners, particularly in oral production (Shaghaghi, 2012).

Example 7: **MS8**: She like[s] me and *me* like *she*.

Example 8: **SYN2**: She can understand *myself*.

Example 9: **ASYN3**: When you recognize *he* or *she* really well,....

D. Possessive adjectives:

The case discussed in Subject/Object Pronouns is nearly the same with possessive adjectives. Persian speakers use only one form for subject/object pronouns and also possessive adjectives (e.g. "man" /mæn/ in Persian has three forms in English "I, me and my", which need to be attended to while learners are focusing on expressing their thoughts (Shaghaghi, 2012).

Example 10: **MS13**: My father and *she* father [are] friends.

Example 11: **SYN5**: *She's* point is good.

Example 12: **ASYN5**: *We're* ehh purpose was English.

E. Verb copula deletion:

This error is sometimes observed in utterances produced by Persian speakers who are learning English, because in Persian there is no easily detectable and salient form for it. It usually comes as an "e" sound (called clitic) added to subject complements such as "behtarin doostam Hassan-e" (Shaghaghi, 2012).

Example 13: **MS14**: My best friend smart.

Example 14: **SYN6**: Soroor very good friend.

Example 15: **ASYN4**: They all married.

F. Word form error:

This usually takes place when the wrong part of speech is chosen.

Example 16: **MS5**: Their *close* is important for her.

Example 17: **SYN10**: …there's a *different* between....

Example 18: **ASYN12**: They *behavior* me well.

G. Plural –s:

Few learners also occasionally had problems with using correct plural forms.

Example 19: **MS1**: We are eh family *friend* too.

Example 20: **SYN7**: …Maybe five *time*.

Example 21: **ASYN9**: We are very best *friend*.

In the treatment period, the week before each FD session, three general topics were introduced to the class. Until the beginning of the FD task, students were not informed of the chosen topic. After the teacher introduced the topic, they were given one minute as the planning time in which they could not study or take notes. The FD task was guided by the instructor's semi-structured questions. Such questions were more general and open-ended. In order to keep learners engaged in the discussions, closed questions that leave respondents no room to elaborate and that can slow the speaker's pace were avoided. For later investigation, the students' performances were video and audio recorded during a twelve session FD class time, designed for the study. The characteristics of the task were typically similar to those of everyday language performance, because the students were allowed to take turns, hold the floor and also pose questions to keep the discussion going.

Synchronous Scaffolded CF Group

In the SYN group, the teacher first attempted to treat the error through indirect feedback which only consists of an indication of error (e.g. St: "I very like Brad Pitt" Tr: "You *very like* Brad Pitt"?). If the speaker could not correct his error, the teacher resorted to metalinguistic clues. That is, he provided questions, remarks or comments about the accuracy of the speaker's utterance (Tr: "Do we say I *very like* Brad Pitt?). At the final phase, if the error remained, the teacher gave a direct feedback on the error to be corrected by the speaker (Tr: "I *like* Brad Pitt *very* much.").

The following extract is a sample treatment sequence in the SYN group:

Example 22: **SYN2**: My mother always *say* "study".

R: Your mother always what?

SYN2: She always *say* "study".

R: *She always say*"? is it correct?

SYN2: … (silent for a few seconds)

R: She always "says"…

SYN2: Uha, (she continues),…

Asynchronous scaffolded CF group

In the ASYN group, the teacher did not correct students' errors during the class time, rather, after creating a Telegram group for all the students, he shared the students' errors recorded in the previous FD class via a short audio file at a specific time later that day. Then, through a voice message, he indirectly encouraged the group members to identify and correct the error. The students were required to take part in the chat and to send their comments. The teacher read the messages and, if they were unable to rectify the error, he would send a more direct feedback. Finally, the teacher provided the correct form through a direct feedback. This process was repeated for the other errors. To see its effects on accuracy and fluency, the scaffolded CF was directed at the grammatical accuracy of the utterances, which is in line with Bygate, Skehan, and Swain's (2001) definition of accuracy.

In the following extract, the researcher shares a short audio file containing a single utterance produced by one of the students in the ASYN group. Then the instructor asks all the online students in the group to listen to it; he calls a student's name to correct the utterance. The first student had difficulty with some parts of the utterance in the audio file.

Example 23: Audio file: "In the past, I think, university eh is different."

R: ASYN8 (student's name), you please?

ASYN8: It was hard.

R: ASYN11 (student's name)?

ASYN11: …university was different.

After the first student fails to correct the error, the researcher tries to save time by asking another student. Learners had to, first, locate and then correct errors. In case they are successful in error correction, the researcher shares another prepared audio file like the following example:

Example 24: Audio file: "Whatever I eh I remember about Mahnaz is that she *hate* studying."

R: ASYN10 (student's name), you please?

ASYN: …she *hates*?

R: Yes.

Motivational scaffolding group

In the third group, learners were motivationally scaffolded through motivational scaffolding strategies. Learners' performances were positively evaluated (e.g. This was a good idea). In order to encourage them, the teacher reminded the learners that difficulties in language production would be overcome (e.g. It will take a lot of practice, but I think you can do it); humor was another strategy to show that the teacher and the learners shared the background knowledge and values. From time to time, the teacher asked them about the extent they were satisfied to show concern for them (e.g. Do you feel comfortable with the topic?), and if needed, also expressed his sympathy with them to show that he understood them (e.g. I know that it is difficult); using "we" form, the learners were reminded that the task would be collaborative (e.g. If we use simple present in this sentence, it will be OK). In order to reinforce the learner's ownership and show attention, the teacher repeated in whole or part what s/he said (e.g. Following what you said about the topic,…); justifying suggestions through giving reasons, avoiding candid or honest disagreement and mitigating a suggestion through the use of hedges and passive voice or other linguistic forms were other techniques for emphasizing the learner's ownership.

At the end of the treatment period, each student had a free discussion session similar to the

first one with the researcher on a specified topic. Students' performance was considered as their post-test. Similar to pre-test, in this session each student in the three groups was given 2 minutes to talk about the topic in an interactive way.

3.4. Data analysis procedures

Measuring accuracy and fluency

Most recent studies have measured accuracy by considering the number of the errors. Bygate, Skehan, and Swain (2001), for example, have measured accuracy by calculating the frequency of errors per t-unit; that is, the less the number of errors, the more accurate the learner would be. Some studies have focused on the number of error-free t-units (Ellis and Yuan, 2004; Foster & Skehan, 1996). However, following Bygate, Skehan, and Swain (2001), in this study, accuracy of the students' pretests and posttests was measured by calculating the number of total errors made by each student and dividing them by the number of t-units.

Moreover, following Foster and Skehan (1996), the researchers used disfluency features to measure the learners' speech fluency. Disfluency of L2 production was calculated by tallying the number of repetitions, false starts, reformulations, and replacements per t-unit and dividing the sum of disfluency measures by the number of t-units. Each participant's speaking accuracy and fluency scores were the average of the scores given by the two raters (one of the researchers and a PhD candidate) to these dimensions. Through Cohen's Kappa, the inter-rater reliability was calculated (Fluency= .831 and Accuracy= .776)

The learners' performances on pre-test and post-test were analyzed through IBM SPSS 22 software to evaluate the effect of the treatments on the learners' speaking accuracy and fluency. A number of descriptive and inferential analyses were conducted on the data. Finally, the students' oral performances during the final three treatment sessions in each group were examined qualitatively in terms of treatment sequences and in order to look for any qualitative change in the subjects' performance.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Quantitative results

In terms of both fluency and accuracy, since they are respectively based on disfluency features and students' errors, the lower the score is the better each learner's performance will be.

As shown in Table 1, the results indicate almost similar mean scores of oral fluency obtained by each group on pretests and posttests.

As Table 2 reveals, no significant difference exists in the oral fluency mean scores of three groups (ASYN, SYN and MS) from pretest to posttest ($p>0.05$).

As shown in Table 3, the results indicate almost similar mean scores of oral accuracy in the pretest and posttest in all of the three groups.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics on oral fluency in pretests and posttests

	Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
ASYN				
Pre. Flu.	2.71	14	.64	.17
Pos. Flu	2.69	14	.69	.18
SYN				
Pre. Flu.	1.92	15	1.09	.28
Pos. Flu	1.96	15	1.14	.29
MS				
Pre. Flu	3.02	14	2.20	.58
Pos. Flu	3.00	14	2.24	.60

Table 2. Paired-samples t-test for students' oral fluency in pretests and posttests

		Different mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
ASYN	Pre. Flu.- Pos. Flu	.01	.21	13	.83
SYN	Pre. Flu.- Pos. Flu	-0.45	-1.14	14	.27
MS	Pre. Flu.- Pos. Flu	.02	0.51	13	.621

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for students' performance on accuracy in pretests and posttests

	Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
ASYN				
Pre. Acc	.32	14	.16	.04
Pos. Acc	.31	14	.15	.04
SYN				
Pre. Acc	.36	15	.18	.04
Pos. Acc	.35	15	.17	.04
MS				
Pre. Acc	.67	14	.21	.05
Pos. Acc	.47	14	.21	.05

Table 4. Paired-samples t-test for students' accuracy in pretests and posttests

		Different mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
ASYN	Pre. Acc.- Pos. Acc	.01	1.42	13	.179
SYN	Pre. Acc.- Pos. Acc	.019	1.85	14	.085
MS	Pre. Acc.- Pos. Acc	.18	1.95	13	.073

As Table 4 reveals, no significant difference exists in the oral accuracy mean scores of the three groups (ASYN, SYN and MS groups) from pretest to posttest ($p > 0.05$).

4.2. Qualitative findings

The quantitative data analysis did not reveal any significant change in either of the groups in terms of fluency and accuracy. Therefore, more in-depth analyses were made to look for possible qualitative changes in the accuracy of the learners' utterances. Since the fluency of learners is closely related to quantification, qualitative investigation of fluency change was not contributory in this regard.

In much of the previous studies the focus has been on the definition of uptake proposed by Lyster and Ranta (1997); that is, learner's "utterance that immediately follows the teacher's feedback" or his/her reaction to the CF (p.49). In the present study, as well, learners frequently responded to error corrections through uptake. However, through error treatment sequences, the researchers looked for more long lasting changes in a classroom-based schedule. Therefore, the three final sessions were thoroughly analyzed and investigated in terms of the two most frequent grammatical errors that had been located in the students' pre-tests (i.e. third person singular –s and simple past tense). The decision for selecting the most frequent errors was made due to the limited size of the data, which might be insufficient for any fair and logical inference.

Motivational scaffolding group (MS):

In this group no remarkable change was observed regarding all the categories of errors. Although students in MS group took part actively in the discussions, their accuracy did not noticeably change. Third person singular –s and simple past were still common among nearly all of the students. For example MS7 and MS10 who had difficulty with producing correct forms of third person singular and simple past in their pretests, did not show any observable improvement.

Example 25: **MS7**: She *love* girls.

Example 26: **MS10**: My aunt go to Turkey last year.

The results turn not to be in alignment with the strong version of Long's (1996) interaction hypothesis which claims that interaction itself contributes to language development. On the other hand, the weak version is the position that learners, through interaction, simply find learning opportunities. However, it seems that MS group learners did not find sufficient opportunities for interlanguage modification. This appears to be consistent with Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis which suggests that learning grammatical features cannot take place unless learners notice those features. In the MS group, the focus was totally on meaning which again seems to be insufficient in interlanguage modification. The results also seem to be in line with Swain's (1985) hypothesis which considers three functions of output, namely noticing function, hypothesis-testing and metalinguistic function. However, the point is that simply participating in free discussions through producing output has not helped MS group learners notice what they want to say and what they are able to say. In other words, the next two functions (hypothesis-testing and metalinguistic function) were not fulfilled as learners have not noticed their errors.

Synchronous scaffolded CF group (SYN):

In the last three sessions, thirty seven instances of correct use of third person singular –s were found. These utterances were produced by eight students (SYN1, SYN2, SYN5, SYN8, SYN9, SYN11, SYN12 and SYN14). However, three learners still experienced difficulty in its consistently correct production. These three learners only showed once or twice correct use of third person singular –s. The remaining two learners did not use it correctly. The following instantiates a correct utterance produced by SYN11 who had previously (see Example 2) failed to produce the correct form of third person singular –s:

Example 27: **SYN11**: …and my mother works too, but…

SYN2 also showed improvement in this regard:

Example 28: **SYN2**: My sister never plays in my bedroom.

Examples from other learners:

SYN1: She eh eh needs a kind friend.

SYN12: My sister also likes she [her].

SYN14: He is 14 years old and eh plays video games eh in his free time.

SYN9: I think Negin forgets it.

Compared to the MS group's performance, this can be considered a noticeable change which can apparently be attributed to the type of treatment they have received. Simply attributing learners' improvement to the treatment effects could have been reasonable if they had been able to use the correct forms of all the other erroneous utterances; however, those errors were still prevalent among the students in the three final sessions. In other words, despite students' considerable improvement in the case of third person singular –s due to synchronous CF, other errors still remained common. According to Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis, learners learn the grammatical features of a language only if they notice them. All the students in the SYN group have noticed those grammatical features through synchronous scaffolded CF techniques and except for third person singular –s, they still fail to use those features correctly.

The findings show that mere noticing may be insufficient for language acquisition, since in SYN group, learners have become aware of all the grammatical features through CF strategies, yet they were unable to use them correctly except for third person singular –s; in other words, learning has not taken place. A plausible explanation can be that those errors that have been noticed or corrected more frequently (e.g. third person singular –s), have been learnt more successfully. Taking a closer look at the results, however, reveals that simple past tense, too, after third person singular –s has been the most common grammatical error, which has been corrected frequently as well. However, in the three final sessions only three students showed consistently correct use in this regard. Put it simply, the researchers' earlier conjecture (i.e. more instances of the same error correction results in better learning) might not be a considerable justification for students' outperformance regarding third person singular –s in the SYN group.

A more plausible explanation can be related to the idea of existing of a natural order of acquisition of English grammatical features (Krashen, 1985). Refuting this idea, Goldschneider and DeKeyser (2001) argue that there are key factors such as "perceptual salience, semantic complexity, morphophonological regularity, syntactic category and frequency" that determine the order of acquisition (p.27). They conclude that a great extent of saliency at the aforementioned levels is the best predictor of the order of acquisition. To investigate this, Hoshino (2014) conducted a case study in which a Japanese learner had been taught some grammatical features. In case of third person singular –s, the participant outperformed compared to other grammatical features being investigated. He argues that third person singular –s which simply requires learners to concern what subject takes a singular and what subject needs a plural form was easier to learn and was also more salient than other grammatical features that required memorizing. This is not implausible since unlike third person singular –s, simple past takes various forms with different verbs, which requires learners to memorize several distinct instances which in turn can add to the difficulty of this grammatical feature. While verbs like "sit", "take" and "eat" only need to take –s to be grammatically correct in case of third person singular –s, their simple past tense comes in three forms (sat, took and ate), making it more difficult for the students to process in oral production. Although in the present study nearly the same amount of correction was made to two most frequent errors, namely simple past tense and third person singular –s, more learners outperformed in the latter.

Literature review shows that tense marking is considered to be a real trouble for language learners relating it to Input Processing (McArthur, 2002; Law, 2005). According to VanPatten, (2002) learners get meaning from input and this can result in inevitable outcome. He argues that they first attend to content words and if such words and a related grammatical form (that is present in an utterance) both express the same meaning, the grammatical feature usually remains unattended to.

In the present study, learners frequently and erroneously used bare infinitives to refer to past actions, while they used adverbs to refer to the intended time. Similarly, in another study carried out by Law (2005) learners, seemingly, used temporal adverbials to determine the timing of an action. Problems with using correct verb tense can be considered as a common and worldwide phenomenon. Robison (1995), in this regard, claims that lexicosemantically more active verbs are tense-marked first by learners, and then they mark less active verbs.

More recently, VanPatten (2015) conducted a study to investigate how learners acquire Spanish and English past tense. Learners in the study had to listen to different utterances in which there was sometimes a mismatch between grammatical inflections and adverbs of time (e.g. Last night I am cooking dinner vs. At the moment I am cooking). The results revealed that, to identify the tense of a sentence, elementary learners frequently relied on adverbs while advanced learners in both groups (i.e. Spanish and English learners) focused on inflectional elements. Examples 4, 5 and 6 (page seven), in which learners have used adverbials, instantiates this claim. This clearly indicates why, unlike third person singular –s, learners of the SYN group did not show any observable improvement in simple past tense, because, although students' awareness was raised through numerous instances of error correction, no observable improvement was found in terms of this grammatical feature.

VanPatten (2015) concluded that relying on lexical items is a universal strategy to obtain temporal reference. He also suggested that through making them aware of simple past tense markers, learners can avoid this incorrect processing strategy. In the present study, his suggestion, though, was shown to be less effective in case of simple past tense.

Although illuminating, such studies may not disclose how simple past tense is truly represented in the learners' interlanguage; in other words, the Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis might explain the situation. White (2003) argues that even if there is deficiency in using inflections consistently or properly, grammatical features might have been completely acquired. According to Chan (2013), failing to correctly produce tense phrases (simple past in this study) does not necessarily mean they have not learnt them, or in other words, their production might not precisely reflect what they truly know. He, also, found that some learners had the essential knowledge about tense, however they were occasionally unable to map forms and meaning. Thus, he suggests that assisting learners in mapping forms and meaning could be the major challenge for English teachers.

Asynchronous scaffolded CF group:

In ASYN group almost similar results have been found; that is, learners advanced in terms of third person singular –s without any considerable improvement in other types of errors. The difference, however, is that ASYN learners even outperformed the SYN learners regarding third person singular –s. Of fourteen learners, twelve learners showed 49 instances of correct third person singular –s in their production. The remaining two learners were observed to be still struggling in consistently producing correct form of third person singular –s.

The basic difference between SYN and ASYN is in the timing of correction; that is, whether it is instantaneous or procrastinated. Asynchronous correction is traditionally related to Writing skill, where learners are required to react to their teachers' CF after they have finished a writing task. However, unlike traditional written corrective feedback which is reactive, asynchronous scaffolded CF constituted an interactive process between the ASYN group learners and the instructor.

In synchronous CF, learners enjoy the opportunity for the three processes considered necessary for acquisition, namely, internalization, modification and consolidation to occur contiguously and recurringly (Williams, 2012). SYN learners were able to notice errors while speaking when they received scaffolded CF, offering a chance for internalization of the correct form of the erroneous utterance. Learners were, thus, able to rectify the error instantaneously (modification), but also were probably offered chances to produce the correct form of the grammatical feature in new sentences (consolidation). The analyses of SYN learners' performaces show how knowledge of third person singular –s was consolidated through making attempts at generating the grammatical feature (Williams, 2012). To Swain (1995), this happened because learners noticed the gap, while they were speaking, through synchronous CF. In the ASYN group, error correction was made only after learners had completed the discussion tasks. While there was a chance for internalization and modification in the correction session in the Telegram group, there was no opportunity for consolidation since learners were not able to produce the modified grammatical feature in new sentences.

To Doughty (2001), the perfect condition for assisting learners in mapping forms onto meaning is when they are trying to express their thoughts (i.e. during writing or speaking). Owing to Shintani's (2015) work, this perfect condition was found to be to a certain extent true in writing process. The performance of the SYN group in the present study indicated the effectiveness of this condition in oral production tasks as well. In other words, qualitative investigation showed consistency in this regard. However, the ASYN group, in which learners were assisted after the completion of tasks and not during their attempts to express their thoughts, even outperformed the SYN group. In the SYN group, learners had to focus on meaning and form concurrently, while in the ASYN group, focus on meaning and form took place separately. In the first group, learners had to shift their attention between meaning and form. This shift in oral production is much more rapid than in writing (Williams, 2012), which does not allow learners to pay assiduous attention to form while their overall attention is on meaning. Learners in the ASYN group had a different experience though. On the correction sessions (in the Telegram group), their attention was no longer on meaning but they rectified errors mechanically. Unlike the SYN group in which learners had less opportunity to reflect on the feedback they received, in the ASYN group, error correction took place at a much slower pace, which, at least in case of third person singular –s, provided them with sufficient time to inspect the grammatical feature. The important point is that although eight learners were successful in the correct production of third person singular –s, which independently is a considerable improvement, in the ASYN group even more (twelve) learners were able to shift from other-regulation to self-regulation. This shift might not have been possible unless the feedback ASYN learners had received on their earlier attempts was accessible at any time. They had enough time to check and consult the feedback on their earlier attempts and to use this opportunity to struggle with self-regulation, in Vygotsky's terms, or consolidation, in Williams (2012) terms.

Processing oral CF, as Williams (2012) suggests, can be challenging for working memory, but this processing seems to have been much less demanding for ASYN learners. In Long's (2000) words, these learners have possessed more time for cognitive comparisons which he believes to be important for learning. In case of third person singular –s, scaffolded CF seems to have been influencing learners for making this cognitive comparison.

The major privilege of scaffolded CF is that it first provides the learner with the opportunity of self-regulation through indirect feedback. If s/he fails, the learner will be assisted through scaffolding strategies, increasing and developing the level of awareness. This became evident in learners' gradual development from other-regulation to self-regulation. While at the beginning of the course, leaners were not sensitive enough to the researcher's indirect corrections, and were observed to require and be dependent on more direct correction techniques, in the subsequent sessions they seemed to have become more accustomed to the implicit intention, that is, signaling that an error has been made. SYN2, for example, who had previously (Example 22) failed to notice the instructor's indirect feedback, was later observed to have raised her awareness as she tries to locate the error in the first step of scaffolded CF, although she fails to detect it and the researcher provides her with the correct form. This example was extracted from the fourth session of the course.

Example 29: **SYN2**: But she sometimes *eat* junk food in the class.

R: She sometimes what?

SYN2: She sometimes *eat bad* food?

R: No. "Junk food" is right. She sometimes *eats* junk food.

Later in other contexts, however, her self-correction, at the first place, precludes further feedback or explicit correction. This clearly shows that noticing the gap has taken place gradually as in early sessions (Example 22) she confused the researcher's intention (i.e. signaling the occurrence of an error) with failure to hear, which resulted in repeating the same erroneous sentence. In the following example (extracted from the sixth session) SYN2 succeeds in rectifying the erroneous utterance after receiving the indirect CF:

Example 30: **SYN2**: Reyhaneh, also, *want* to play guitar, but….

R: Reyhaneh also?

SYN: waaaaants!

Through lengthening the correct form, she seems to be emphasizing that she has become aware of her error.

Previous studies have reportedly pointed out the effectiveness and successfulness of using different types of CF on learners' writing performance (Chandler, 2003; Ellis and Yuan, 2004; Shintani, 2015). Although writing and speaking have traditionally been considered to be similar in that they are productive skills, they are essentially different. Writing, in essence, entails meticulousness of expression and tends to rely on metalinguistic knowledge (Williams, 2012). However, unlike writing, in speaking there is not enough opportunity for reflection and revision. It seems that, except those grammatical features that are frequently used and are easier to process, most errors will remain unaffected even after frequent corrections, which can be attributed to the basic difference between oral production and writing.

5. Conclusion

In the set of experiments discussed above, three methods of scaffolding were contrasted. Through motivational scaffolding and by means of specific verbal behaviors, the instructor tried to help motivational scaffolding group learners cope with affective problems and make them enhance their learning. Learners' performances in the posttests, however, did not change significantly in terms of both speaking accuracy and fluency. Qualitative investigation of the data also did not reveal any change.

In the other two groups, the results of the quantitative data analyses remained exactly the same, while qualitative exploration revealed learners' improvement in one grammatical feature (i.e. third person singular –s). In one group, eight learners who received synchronous scaffolded corrective feedback were able to use this grammatical feature correctly. In the asynchronous scaffolded corrective feedback group, more learners (twelve) showed improvement in case of third person singular –s, while other grammatical errors remained unchanged. Although the two frequent grammatical errors (third person singular –s and simple past) received nearly the same

amount of correction, learners in both groups were more successful in using third person singular –s correctly than using simple past while the asynchronous scaffolded corrective feedback group even outperformed the other group. Whereas the frequency of the error correction is an important factor, the type of processing each type of error needs or imposes on memory is also determinant.

Scaffolded corrective feedback seems to be a viable alternative to using either direct or indirect error correction. By and large, implicit error correction does not always lead to attempted uptake (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). In this respect, then, indirect CF resembles no correction. However, this type of correction can provide the opportunity for conscious processing and attention at the level of understanding, which is considered to be necessary for learning. Explicit error correction, on the other hand, guarantees delivering correct language form to the learners, which might be at the expense of being grammatically oblivious. Although a possible drawback of synchronous scaffolded CF might be that it could hamper the flow of communication or result in slower pace, asynchronous scaffolded CF, unlike its potential limitations (such as voice recording, editing audio files, looking for errors, and managing the online chatroom) can be considered a more attractive way for treating learners' errors. However, the major advantage of both synchronous scaffolded CF and asynchronous scaffolded CF is believed to be their effectiveness in both raising awareness and also providing students with appropriate evidence. With regard to motivational scaffolding, which did not seem to be effective in promoting learning, more in-depth investigation needs to be taken into account in further research.

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