

The Effect of Corpus Assisted Language Teaching on the Learners' Proper Use of Punctuation Marks

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Abstract

One of the critical contributions of the emerging technologies in computer sciences is the capability of corpus compilation and processing. Corpus resources and approaches are regarded as a potentially valuable areas both in developing instructional methods and designing pedagogical materials. This study aimed to explore the effect of exposing language learners to corpus data and guiding them to make deductions on the acquisition of punctuation marks in comparison to lecture based teaching. The participants were 171 prospective teachers attending a state university in central Anatolia, Turkey. The data were gathered through an achievement test, a questionnaire, and semi structured interviews. The results related to the achievement revealed that the learners who exploited corpus resources performed significantly better compared to those who received lecture based instruction. Besides, the findings also noted that the collaboration should be an important factor of success in corpus consultation among language learners. The results obtained via questionnaire and interviews underlined the positive perceptions of the participants toward corpus assisted language learning activities and materials. Suggestions were made for further research to have a deeper understanding of corpus utilization in Turkish language education.

Key Words

Corpus, Corpus Linguistics, Concordance, Punctuation Marks, Turkish.

Computer technology has contributed in language pedagogy in various aspects such as natural language processing (Granger, Hung, & Petch-Tyson, 2002), machine translation (Bates, 1995), applied linguistics (Oflazer, Say, Hakkani-Tür, & Tür, 2003), stylistics (Crystal, 1995), language development (Mukherjee, 2006), semantics, and sociolinguistics (Teubert, 2004). The current study was set out to determine the effect of corpus based language learning on Turkish students' proper use of punctuation marks. Examining the authentic language databases formatted through determined criteria (Meyer, 2002; Sinclair, 1991, p. 171; Tognini Bonelli, 2001, p. 3), corpus linguistics aims to utilize computer technology to present hypothetical assumptions on how the language is functionalized in daily life (Hunston, 2002).

Corpora Based Language Education

Corpus based research has provided critical points of view to language pedagogy in terms of creating authentic materials and enhancing learner autonomy (Johansson, 2007). The empirical research on the effect of corpus based language learning involve various aspects of language teaching such as vocabulary, writing, error analysis and correction (Bernardini, 2004; Chambers, 2005; Cobb, 1997; Cresswell, 2007; Çelik, 2011; Çelik & Keser, 2010a, 2010b; Gaskell & Cobb, 2004; Gray, 2005; Stevens, 1991). All of the corpora and concordance based activities are defined as data-driven learning (DDL) by Johns (1988; 1991; 2002). Data driven learning implies that a learning activity using concordance outputs can be used by the learners to derive the dif-

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ferent features of a word, in terms of semantics and grammar in various contexts (Çelik & Keser, 2010a). DDL activities are labeled within the terms of deduction (Willis, 1990), and discovery based learning (Bernardini; Widdowson, 1990). DDL is argued to help learners discover the language knowledge by focusing on the contextualized structures rather than rules and artificial impositions (Yip, 1994).

Concordancing

Implementing corpora in language teaching requires both functioning concordancing tools and utilizing appropriate instructional strategies to improve the pedagogical benefits. Concordancers are used to retrieve sorted lists of linguistic data from the corpus under examination (Fromkin & Rodman, 1993; Tribble & Johns, 1990). The role of concordancing in language pedagogy is generally attached with the notions of 'awareness raising' and 'discovery based learning' (Tribble & Johns; Wichmann, 1995; Wichmann, Fligelstone, McEnergy, & Knowles, 1997; Willis, 1990).

Correct use of Punctuation Marks in Turkish

Accurate use of punctuation marks has been the core of a major research field in Turkish language education (Aksan & Çakır, 1997; Arıcı, 2008; Arıcı & Ugan, 2008; Avcı, 2006; Bağcı, 2007, 2011; Baydar, 2006; Erdemir & Bayram, 2006; Mataracı, 1998; Özbay, 1995; Şentürk, 2009; Uludağ, 2002; Yıldız, 2002). Many of these studies posit a common problem of Turkish speakers with the correct use of punctuation marks and a lack of emphasis on the issue within educational environments (Akbayır, 2003; Ateş, 1999; Er, 2004; Hepçilingirler, 1997; İşcan & Kolkusa, 2005; Kavcar, Oğuzkan, & Sever, 1997; Külebi, 1999; Mutlu, 1999; Özel, 2000; Öztekin, 2004; Tezeren, 2000; Yaşın, 1999).

Purpose

The role of authentic materials use in language education has been witnessed/ acknowledged by many researchers (Kennedy & Miceli, 2001; Sinclair, 1991, 1997). While the relevant literature on the effect of corpus and concordance activities on the achievements of language learners mainly depend on foreign language context and specific language skills such as vocabulary and grammar (Cobb, 1997; Er, 2004; Hirata & Hirata, 2007; Kurtul, 1999; Madeleinekenning, 2000; Supatronant, 2005), the current study aims to explore the role of corpus assisted language teaching in an L1 setting focused on

the correct use of punctuation marks.

Corpus assisted language learning environments may also provide learners with collaborative learning opportunities (Stahl, 1995) which is believed to be a promising asset of constructive learning paradigm (Beckman, 1990; Collier, 1980; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Sharan, 1980; Slavin, 1980). The current study also aims to determine the role of collaborative corpus exploitation activities on language development.

Method

This experimental study was conducted to determine the effect of corpus assisted language learning activities and materials on university level Turkish learners' acquisition of punctuation marks. The followed/ adopted research design was pre and post test control group model (split plot). The scope of the study was restricted in terms of the frequency and functionality of the punctuation marks in Turkish and the following nine marks were involved; full stop, comma, semi colon, colon, triple dot, exclamation mark, quotation mark, apostrophe, and hyphen.

While the dependent variable of the study was handled as learner achievement, the independent variables were determined as the corpus assisted language learning approach and lecture based instruction. Two experiment and two control groups were involved in the study. While the first experiment group studied the selected punctuation marks individually, the second experiment group had the same treatment process in groups of three. On the other hand, while the instruction was provided in a lecture based method, there was no manipulated instruction at the second control group except for the pre and post measurements. The reason of having a control group with no planned treatment was to check whether the variance to be observed on the dependent variable stems from the treatments (independent variables) conducted at the three other groups.

Participants

The participants of the study were 171 prospective teachers (93 Females, 78 Males) attending the primary education department of Kirikkale University, Faculty of Education.

Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instruments of the study are an achievement test on punctuation marks, a questionnaire on the corpus assisted language learning ap-

proach, and semi structured interview forms (conducted with 10 participants in the experiment groups).

Data Analysis

The data gathered throughout the study were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 17.0). Since the main research goal of the current study was to determine the effect of treatment on independent variable, the most convenient statistical method was to employ Covariance Analysis (Ancova). The pre-test of the groups were taken as the covariate of the study (Büyükoztürk, 1998).

Results

The results of the post test revealed that the two experiment groups (individual and group based treatments) who studied through corpus assisted language learning approach performed better than the control group that studied on lecture based method and one with no specific treatment. The mean values of the groups were as follows: individually studied experiment group (\bar{x} : 23.48), collaboratively studied experiment group (\bar{x} : 24.34), lecture based instructed control group (\bar{x} : 18.33), and control group with no treatments at all (\bar{x} : 16.00). The corrected values of post test results of the study groups indicated that there is a variance between the two experiment groups and control groups in favour of experiment groups at significant rates. Besides, a mean difference of two points between the post test results of experiment groups was observed in favour of collaboratively studied learners. The mean difference between the control groups was two points in favour of the first control group which studied on a lecture basis instructional method. Briefly, the findings pointed out that the groups studied with the help of corpus data achieved significantly better than those who received lecture type instruction and no instruction at all.

The Findings related to the Questionnaire

The descriptive statistical analysis of the questionnaire data pointed out that the majority of the participants (74.6%) declared that they have no problems of getting involved in corpus assisted language learning activities. Moreover, a high proportion of the learners in the experiment groups (72.29%) noted that they are pleased to study punctuation marks through concordance outputs. The number of the learners who think that corpus methods are convenient to examine the context of the key language

unit was measured as 52 which reflects more than half of the participants in the experiment groups (62.65%). Correspondingly, nearly two third of the participants (68.68%) expressed that corpus assisted language learning is an effective method of learning the Turkish language. On the other hand, just five of the learners (6.01%) mentioned the problems they encountered while studying on the corpus data. Lastly, (a vast) majority of the learners (75.90%), who are also pre-service teachers, underlined that they would like to utilize corpus assisted language learning activities and materials in their future professional environments to teach language.

The Findings related to the Semi-Structured Interviews

The content analysis of the interview forms revealed that the learners in the experiment groups do have a positive perception toward the utilized method and a clear consensus on the effectiveness of corpus assisted language learning on examining the language units and acquiring their roles in various contexts. All of the learners pointed out that corpus supported language learning environments are very promising in terms of pedagogical value.

Discussion

This study has found that generally language learners who studied with corpus assisted language learning methods performed better than those who received instruction on a lecture based method. The results of this research support the idea that corpus assisted language learning improve learners in terms of doing research, having their own responsibility of learning (Johns, 1988, 1990, 1991), exposing themselves to authentic language materials (Mindth, 1996). The results of the current research are compatible with the relevant literature conducted in the Turkish context with a specific view toward the effect of corpora on foreign language learning (Çelik, 2011; Çelik & Keser, 2010a, 2010b).

The study has contributed to enhancing our understanding of how corpus assisted/based language learning activities and materials may be incorporated into L1 learning environments. The present study provides leading evidence with respect to the efficacy of corpus assisted language learning in the Turkish language education and in developing language teaching skills of prospective classroom teachers who are supposed to teach Turkish in their perceived careers. This study produced results

which corroborate the findings of a great deal of the previous work in the field of foreign language pedagogy and corpora (Stahl, 1995; Stevens, 1991). The results of the qualitative data were also found out to be consistent with the quantitative results which were in favour of corpus assisted language learning.

Though the post test results of the two experiment groups were observed as very similar, the empirical findings in this study provide a new understanding of how collaborative learning may be integrated into corpus based language learning. This specific outcome of the study confirms previous findings in the role of collaboration in language learning context (Şahin, Maden, Kardeş, & Şahin, 2011; Tok, 2008). As one of the most striking results to emerge from this study, the achievement of the experiment groups supports the idea postulated by Kavcar et al. (1997) that language rules and structures should be acquired by deduction. These results are also in consistent with the previous research on the effect of corpora and authentic learning materials on learning (Cobb, 1997; Kurtul, 1999; Stevens, 1991; Supatranont, 2005). The most important limitation of the study lies in the fact that the current study did not compare the two treatments in the experiment groups. The further research can be formulated to compare various corpus utilization methods.

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