The Effects of Using Online Concordancers on Teaching Grammar

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Abstract: *Studies conducted so far have mainly focused on the effects of online concordancers on teaching vocabulary, while there is a lack of research focusing on the effects of online concordancers on teaching and learning grammar. Thus, this study aims to review the studies on the effects of online concordancers on teaching and learning grammar and how online concordancers promote learning grammar in English as a foreign language (EFL) context to make recommendations for researchers and to guide teachers in the light of current research results. The study reviews the studies that focused on the effects of online concordancers on teaching and learning grammar. Results show that the use of online concordancers and authentic texts promote teaching grammar in EFL learning and teaching processes. In the light of the results, it is recommended that teachers should integrate online concordances into their classroom practices to teach grammar and vocabulary effectively. It is also recommended that further research should focus on the relationship between learner and teacher differences and the use of online concordancers in teaching and learning grammar.*

Keywords: *English as foreign language; learning; grammar; online concordancer*

Çevrimiçi Derlem Kullanımının Dilbilgisi Öğretimine Etkileri

Öz: *Yapılan çalışmalar çoğunlukla çevrimiçi derlemlerin sözcük öğretimindeki etkileri üzerine odaklanmışken, çevrimiçi derlemlerin dilbilgisi öğretimi ve öğrenimi üzerine yapılan çalışmaların sayısı bir hayli sınırlıdır. Bu nedene dayanarak, mevcut çalışma, çevrimiçi derlemlerin İngilizcenin yabancı dil olarak öğretimi ve öğrenimi bağlamında dilbilgisi öğretimi ve öğrenimine olan etkilerini gözden geçirmeyi ve elde edilen araştırma sonuçlarını yabancı dil öğretme ve öğrenme süreçlerinde uygulamaya yönelik öneriler sunmayı hedeflemektedir. Bir diğer amaç da ilgili konuda sonraki araştırmalara yol göstermektir. Bu amaçlara bağlı olarak, çalışma, çevrimiçi derlemlerin dilbilgisi öğretimi ve öğrenimi bağlamında yapılan bilimsel çalışmaların alanyazın taramasını kapsamaktadır. Sonuçlar, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğretme ve öğrenme süreçlerinde çevrimiçi derlemlerin ve özgün metinlerin ciddi katkı sağladığını göstermektedir. Çalışmadan elde edilen sonuçlara dayanarak, yabancı dil öğretmenlerinin sözcük ve dilbilgisi öğretiminde*

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çevrimiçi derlemleri öğretim etkinliklerinde öğretmenler tarafından etkin bir şekilde kullanılmaları önerilmektedir. Sonraki çalışmaların öğrenci ve öğretmenlerin bireysel farklılıkları ile çevrimiçi derlemlerin yabancı dil öğretme ve öğretimle süreçleri arasındaki ilişkilere odaklanması önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Yabancı dil olarak İngilizce; öğrenme; dilbilgisi; çevrimiçi derlem*

I. Introduction

There are four dimensions of communicative competence; sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic and grammatical competence. Sociolinguistic competence is the study of language in relation to society, and concerned with the socio-cultural rules and the appropriateness of a single sentence or utterance, whereas discourse competence is the way that ideas are linked across sentences or utterances and the two main aspects, cohesion and coherence, are used to understand it. Another dimension, strategic competence, is a set of strategies devised for effective communication, and puts into use to compensate the breakdowns in communication. Last, grammatical competence refers to as the knowledge of syntax, meaning, vocabulary and mechanics (Stern, 1983), and provides skills and knowledge so that students can learn to be understood in speaking and writing (Başöz, & Aydın, 2011). In a sense, the purpose is to acquire knowledge of forms of expressions that are grammatically correct and acquire the ability to use these forms correctly. Thus, it concentrates on recognizing and producing the distinctive grammatical structures of a language and using them effectively in communication. In short, grammar knowledge is an important point to be able to speak, write, read or understand English effectively. In other words, without knowing basic grammar structures in English, EFL learners cannot use the language properly as it is not their first language. Yet, it should be stated that learning grammar also involves some potential problems.

While grammar knowledge is an important step for learning English, there are some difficulties in learning grammar. First, foreign language learners see learning grammar as sets of rules that have to be memorized. For them, grammar is seen as a demotivating and threatening force. They memorize the grammar rules but have difficulties in applying them in their own use of the language and that causes unwillingness and lose of motivation for the learners. The second difficulty in learning grammar is related to the methods which are used when grammar is taught. Especially, traditional methods make grammar learning difficult and boring for students. In the same way, textbooks and learning environment have bad effects on learning grammar. For instance, some textbooks are not appropriate

for the levels of students, and confusing, monotone and colorless. The differences between grammar structures of native and foreign languages, interference from the native language are the other reasons of difficulties in learning grammar. These make students stressed and they fail in learning grammar, and that causes lack of confident in students. As a result, they cannot use the language properly in communication. However, as mentioned above, grammatical competence is the key factor in learning and using language. If students feel confident and have high motivation, they learn grammar easily and for this grammar is given in a context, the focus should be on the content not the structure. So using authentic materials is necessary for learning grammar, and in a sense, is a must (Ozkan, 2011). In this context, content based grammar learning contributes learning grammar. In other words, learners study the interesting content and use the appropriate language automatically and subconsciously. The use of technology in language teaching was found to have various effects on students' attitudes towards second language teaching (Al-Jarf, 2005). As a result, online concordancers as authentic materials can be an ideal resource for learning grammar in a context.

An online concordancer is defined as a piece of software and can be installed on a computer or accessed through a website. In foreign language teaching and learning processes, teachers and students can use online concordancers for searching, accessing and analyzing texts from a corpus. In a concordance, language is presented in an authentic context, and learners analyze a key word in the context of a chain of sentences and these sentences exemplify the use of that particular word (Al-Jarf, 2007). Teachers can get very accurate information about the way language is authentically used. In addition, authentic examples that demonstrate and reinforce the language taught can be found. As a result, online concordancers can be very useful for teachers to create teaching materials or for students to do some research for themselves.

A corpus approach promotes using real language examples in the classroom, and corpus data can supply language instructors and learners with enlightening guidance to frequent co-occurrences and other language patterns. To improve individual creativity, language learners can use corpus evidence in language use (Varley, 2009). Using corpora in a foreign language classes helps students to be exposed to authentic examples instead of fixed or artificial examples (Koo, 2006). In other words, online concordancers give students opportunity to enjoy learning grammar on their own; however, using corpora with students requires a great deal of introduction and support as it is a long process and needs practice for students to become independent corpus users, learning how to formulate related corpus questions and interpret the results (Vannestal, 2007). Students see various examples of grammar structures in different contexts to discover and construct their own rules, as online concordancers are authentic materials which are different from textbooks or worksheet for students, and increase the interest in subjects. In fact, one of the main ideas of using authentic materials in the classroom is to expose the students to as much real language as possible (Berardo, 2006). Online concordancers are natural because

they introduce authentic examples of language use by native speakers and they have rich resources as they have various uses of a certain structure or an item (Al Hosein et al., 2013). They raise the learners' awareness, develop the communication skills and develop learning skills (Bernardini, 2004) since they provide the uses of the target items. Since students analyze and discover the rules and research on their own, online concordancers are more efficient than being given language descriptions by the teacher. They make the learners creative, researcher, discoverer and receiver as the real learner.

In conclusion, it is possible to underline that it is necessary to review the studies on online concordancer effecting learning grammar in order to reach a conclusion on the issue, as research on the use of online concordancers in teaching grammar in EFL context is relatively new and untouched area. In addition, it is not possible to reach conclusions for practical recommendations for teachers and researchers without a brief synthesis of research on the mentioned issue. Thus, following section reviews the studies carried out previously on the use of online concordancers in teaching grammar.

II. Research on the Use of Online Concordancers in Teaching Grammar

This section presents studies conducted on the effects of online concordancers in teaching and learning grammar. These studies focused on the incorporating concordancers with language learning and teaching. The effects of corpora using has been investigated and how corpora using increased the interest of students to use concordancers in future. The studies on the effects of online concordancers on teaching grammar, vocabulary, reading and other skills have been also reviewed, as seen below.

According to Varley (2009), corpus consultation is getting more important as a language learning tool. Varley's (2009) approach to language analysis has taken its way into the language classroom in which its existence ranges from the presentation of printed concordance data with related tasks to learners' direct use of concordancing software to perform analyses of self-selected language features. Varley (2009) refers in his study that research is needed to provide support to integrate corpus consultation into the language learning environment. Varley (2009), in his study, aims to enable advanced students of English to improve their language proficiency by using concordancing software. In the study, Varley (2009), by using a popular concordancing software program, the responses of second year undergraduate students were examined in a course assignment. According to the results of his study, a positive response to corpus consultation was given by learners, and they were able to define advantages of corpus consultation in the areas of vocabulary acquisition and increased awareness of syntactic patterns. In addition, students' course assignments demonstrated an increased awareness of lexico-grammatical usage, especially with respect to vocabulary use, phrases and colligational patterns. In another study by Berardo (2006), the effects of authentic materials on reading skill were investigated. Berardo (2006) stated that reading meant different effects on different people; for some, it was recognizing written words, while for others it was an opportunity

to teach pronunciation and practice speaking. Thus, in the study, Berardo (2006) aimed to demonstrate how the authentic materials affected and developed reading skills. For university engineering students, an intensive reading course was designed and advanced learners used authentic materials in the classroom. The results showed that the students were highly motivated and preferred working with the authentic material; found studying with authentic materials more interesting, more up to date than the textbooks as well as generally more stimulating.

Online concordancers have a great deal of effects on learning vocabulary. In a study by Al-Jarf (2007), as a complement to classroom teaching a step was made to use online learning in EFL vocabulary instruction from home, since technology was not used in EFL classrooms at King Saud University. Al-Jarf (2007) aimed to increase the use of technology in learning writing and vocabulary. In the study, the pre- and posttest mean scores of 53 freshman students were compared, and those comparisons showed considerable differences indicating that online instruction had an effect on vocabulary development. The posttest scores also associated with the frequency of using the online course. Moreover, the gains of active participants were higher than inactive participants. The results showed that in learning environments where technology was unavailable to EFL students and teachers, the use of technology from home and even as a complement to traditional classroom techniques helped them motivate and improve English vocabulary.

Corpora have been used for pedagogical purposes for more than two decades, while experimental studies are comparatively rare especially in the context of grammar teaching. For instance, Al-Jarf (2005) aimed to find out whether integration of online learning in face-to-face in-class grammar teaching significantly develops achievement and attitudes of EFL freshman college students. The results of the study showed that the online grammar course was found useful and fun by students. It increased students' motivation and their self-esteem. Thanks to the growing availability of innovative technology, corpora were used more frequently as a reference tool for language teachers and learners. In another example, Koo (2006) aimed to understand better the aspects of using reference tools for writing and to define technologies that can help foreign language writers. Koo's (2006) specific purpose of that study was to look closely at how English as a Second Language (ESL) students from Korea used a corpus as a reference tool in company with dictionaries while paraphrasing English newspaper articles. This study was concluded that collocations, definitions, context, and parts of speech were included in the purposes for using a concordancing program. The subjects looked for a variety of information in a concordancing program that included prepositions, authentic samples, and the context that include search terms. Vannestål (2007) focused on what students' attitudes were towards grammar, and how the introduction of concordancing affected these attitudes. Vannestål's (2007) main aims of the project were to raise the motivation of students by showing them that English grammar is more than a set of rules in a book and to enable them to take more responsibility for their own. Last, Ozkan (2011) aimed to demonstrate how alternative

evaluation could be made by observing participants' recognition and production skills. The participants were English language students at the ELT department at Cukurova University. An authentic assessment approach where both form and meaning were equally assessed is necessary to implement authentic texts in classes for teaching grammar and basic skills. A common problem in grammar teaching was the lack of authenticity because of the wide use of rule-based instruction in many educational institutions in Turkey that included universities, state schools, and private schools. Thus, Ozkan's (2011) research was to supply some realization into modern practices of teaching English language, and especially to show a model lesson for grammar instruction from a critical aspect towards English grammar books and textbooks that are currently used.

To be brief, Biber et al. (1994) identified two main strengths of the corpus-based approach. For them, they provide large database of discourse, and enable the analysis of the actual patterns of use in a language. They concluded that grammar constitutes one of the important areas of applied research. Moreover, corpus-based analyses showed that the notion of core grammar needs qualification, as investigation of the patterns corpora reveals systematic differences across registers at all linguistic levels. Biber et al. (1996) also claimed that the two main areas of research within linguistics were language structure and language use. In this sense, they suggest that a representative text corpus, collection of texts saved on computers, provide important insights into the areas mentioned and create new opportunities of research.

III. Conclusions and Discussion

In this study aiming to review the studies on the effects of online concordancers in teaching and learning grammar, several conclusions were reached. First, positive responses to corpus consultation are given by students, and they are able to define advantages of corpus consultation in the areas of vocabulary acquisition and increased awareness of syntactic patterns. Second, online instruction increases and improves the good and average student's performance and the performance of the lowest performing students'. Third, learners who have clear goals for their language learning are interested in corpus. Fourth, students' course assignments demonstrate an increased awareness of lexico-grammatical usage, especially with respect to vocabulary use, phrases and colligational patterns. In addition, in learning environments where technology is unavailable to EFL students and teachers, use of technology from home and even as a complement to traditional classroom techniques helps motivate and improve EFL students' learning and acquisition of English vocabulary. Online concordancers or authentic materials help and promote learning and teaching grammar and other language skills. The current study concludes that online concordancers improve language learning and they have generally positive effects on grammar teaching.

In the scope of the conclusions reached in the study, some practical recommendations can be made. First, it is necessary to use authentic texts for teachers in the language

classrooms. Thus, teachers should keep up with changing teaching methods, teaching environments and emerging technologies (Aydın, 2013). That is, as recent techniques in teaching grammar require using technologically based materials, teachers should organize the language teaching environment in relation to technology. Moreover, as students feel themselves free and relaxed while using technology, teachers should choose the right materials and organize the language teaching environment appropriately. When teachers know how and why to use online concordancers, students can adapt to the emerging technologies easier. Second, students should be aware of what the online concordancers are, and be instructed about how they can use them, and what will be the conclusions for their grammar learning. When they use online concordancers effectively, they will find out the grammatical structure, make creative sentences, and make less grammatical mistakes. Third, curriculum developers should integrate technology into language curricula. They should organize books or materials according to the emerging technologies. In other words, activities, reading passages, grammar subjects and exercises should be in rapport with online concordancers. As a result, online concordancers should be used for grammar teaching and learning because they promote grammar knowledge and vocabulary. As final note, further research should focus on how the grammar knowledge of students will differ after using online concordancers and whether they have positive perceptions of and attitudes towards using online concordancers.

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