

The Effect of Using Metatalk Activity on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Knowledge of Tense

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Abstract—The present study aimed to investigate the effect of metatalk activity on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Knowledge of Tense. 60 intermediate institute learners took part in this experiment. They were randomly chosen from among a population of intermediate via an PET test score of at least on standard deviation below the mean. They were then randomly assigned into two experimental and control groups of 30. A pretest of English grammar was administered to both groups, then they were taught grammatical tenses for 8 sessions but with different methodologies: the experimental group was treated with metatalk activity while the control group received traditional method. A posttest of grammar was then administered to both groups. The data of the study were analyzed using the independent samples t-test and correlation coefficient. The results demonstrated that Iranian EFL learners in the experimental group received higher knowledge of tense score after being treated with metatalk activity for 8 sessions.

Index Terms—EFL learners, grammar, metatalk, tense

I. INTRODUCTION

It has been demonstrated by some scholars that it is essential to focus attention on grammar of L2 to attain high levels of proficiency (Doughty, 2003; Swain, 1995, 1998). So, regarding the extended significance of the use of English language correctly, the grammar instruction has gained a major place in language teaching. Debates of how to teach it includes accounts of a variety of pedagogical options available to teacher and the relative advantages of each option (see, e.g. Ellis, 1997, as cited in Ellis et al, 2002). Among the controversial issues raised by classroom SLA research is whether and how to include “grammar” in second language classrooms (Doughty & Williams, 1998). The present study attempts to investigate metatalk to find out if it has any positive effect on learning grammar. Metatalk, as a facet of foreign language (FL) teaching has not been the major interest for investigation over the years. The question of whether metatalk results in more accurate grammatical knowledge is of high importance, but one that has not been fully investigated. In accordance to the results from some studies, metatalk may have a positive effect only on the accuracy of a few individual grammatical structures.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Definition of Grammar

Grammar is ‘a difficult term to define’, because of the diversity of phenomena it refers to and the disagreements among grammarians concerning its nature (Byram, 2000; p. 248). It is defined as “That department of the study of a language which deals with its inflectional forms or their equivalents, and with the rules for employing these correctly; usually treating also of the phonetic system of the language and its representation in writing” (Little et al., 1985; p. 878). Within communicative language teaching theory, as language learning is considered a social and cognitive process, learners must acquire both knowledge of grammatical structures and the knowledge of how to use the grammatical structures in discourse interaction (Widdowson, 1978). A useful pedagogical grammar, developed according to the principles of the language teaching theory it refers to, and its critical assumptions about the nature of language and its relationship to language learning, is needed by language teachers to access to details the regularities of linguistic aspects in native speaker discourse (Tomlin, 1994). VanPatten and Benati (2010) argue that the meaning of the term grammar depends on the users and the contexts where it is used. In instructional settings, grammar refers to the rules and formal traits of language that learners must master as part of coursework. This kind of grammar is often called pedagogical grammar and the focus tends to be on supporting accurate use of grammatical structures in speech and writing.

Linguistics is concerned with providing an explanation about the language structure and function in the process of human communication. In this respect, “grammarians account for sentences which are well-formed or grammatical

(formally correct), acceptable (meaningful) and, in some models, contextually appropriate" (Byram, 2000; p. 248). Linguistics illustrates how grammar is subdivided in morphology and syntax, and that it is "one of four 'levels' of language, [with] phonology, lexis and semantics. In Linguistics, 'grammar is often used to refer to the mental representation of language that native speakers possess regarding the formal aspects of language' (VanPatten & Benati, 2010; p. 91). Grammar as such is the representation of native speaker's competence: it refers to abstract features of language and how they are manifested in the actual language. This difference in thinking about grammar is, in essence, about the difference between prescriptive and descriptive grammar. Descriptive grammar refers to 'how people actually use language'; prescriptive grammar instead tends to be associated with the imposition of 'good language use' on others' 'bad grammar' (VanPatten & Benati, 2010; p. 91). Myhill (2011a; pp. 9-10) observed the following:

"Modern linguists all operate with a conceptualization of grammar as descriptive: a way of describing how language works. They analyze and examine language in order to describe language structures and patterns of language use. Descriptive linguists do not attempt to determine what 'correct' usage is or to make judgments of language use. In contrast, many non-linguists hold a prescriptive view of grammar: that there is a set of rules for how language should be used which are outlined and set down for common reference. A prescriptive grammar establishes a norm and sets a value on that norm, and critiques, as inherently inferior, usages which do not conform to that norm. Just as different understandings of the word 'standard' are at the heart of the Standard English debate, so too is the difference between descriptive and prescriptive perspectives at the heart of the grammar debate. One way to look at the language debate about Standard English and grammar is to see it as a fundamental difference in understanding between academic linguistic discourses and political and public discourses".

With regard to descriptive/prescriptive views of grammar and standard language varieties are contrasting views of grammar as fixed or changing. Myhill (2000; pp. 155-156) noted that "There exists a belief that grammar is a monolithic entity: just as many non-linguists find it hard to appreciate that Standard English and dialects each have their own equally systematic and organised grammar, so many non-linguists are also unaware that grammars vary from one language to another". Likewise, Bybee (2012; p. 61) stresses the constant flux of grammar, noticing that whilst the 'Language Police always deplore the loss of grammar', it is 'barely noticed that languages also develop new grammar'.

B. The Importance of Teaching Grammar

There is a considerable impact of grammar instruction on noticing and the grammatical points and using them accurately and creatively, inhibiting fossilization, and encouraging classroom participation actively. Initially, Hinkel and Fotos (2002, pp. 6-7) state that if learners are continuously exposed to a certain grammatical structure in formal instruction, they are more likely to notice the structure and realize the difference between grammatically correct speech and their current speech. Thus, the students' observation will help them to use the structure in communication automatically (Cited in Yu, 2013).

Another benefit of grammar instruction is to hinder fossilization. CelceMuricia and Hills (1988; p. 149, cited in Yule, 2013) define fossilization as using "a broken, ungrammatical, and pidginized form of a language". Moreover, they comment that purely meaning-based instruction, which does not focus on grammar, can facilitate this fossilization because some complicated structures cannot be acquired by natural conversation (Cited in Yu, 2013). Furthermore, Vasilopoulos (2012; p. 8, cited in Yule, 2013) in his essay titled *Adapting Communicative Language Instruction in Korean Universities* mentioned that "Korean EFL students may have difficulty developing grammatical form through an unfocused approach, especially if a large part of their exposure to L2 comes in the form of their classmates' production of L2, which may contain many errors". In other words, Korean students' exposure to English is insufficient for language fluency; this environmental limitation inhibits their ability to self-correct their own grammatical errors. Due to this, teaching grammar hinders the fossilization of students' language use.

In spite of the mentioned points regarding teaching grammar, it also helps learners to use language more accurately and innovatively. Littlewood (1981; p. 172, cited in Yule, 2013) also argues that if EFL students learn grammar in CLT classes, "they can not only use set phrases or insert alternative words into fixed patterns, but also make choices within the grammatical system itself". All in all, teaching grammar is beneficial for EFL students' actively classroom participation. In this respect, Vasilopoulos (2012; p. 3) comments that "EFL learners who are already familiar with grammar instruction can speak English with confidence only when they are convinced that their speech is grammatically correct. Specifically, EFL learners can be strongly motivated when they can prepare notes before inviting oral responses" (cited in Yule, 2013).

C. Verb Tense

Verb tense as an aspect of grammar receives a great deal of attention in English instruction. The tense, as a primary feature of the English verb, is generally identified as the inflectional affix of the verb and also causes the syntactic or morphological change of the verb in expressing time relation (Jacobs & Rosenbaum, 1970; Lester, 1976, cited in Mardani & Azizifar, 2014). Mardani and Azizifar (2014) mentioned that this inflection or morphological change also characterizes modals and aspect. They added Tense errors are the most common ones that students make and teachers of English find it difficult to solve it among students. According to Mardani and Azizi (2014, p. 418) "Verbs in English have two parts: the time and the aspect, or way of looking at that time". Time, as a universal concept, is realized variously as past, present, future. Although in most languages it has not been claimed yet about the syntactic

relationship between time and tense, in English it has been, i.e., time and tense bear explicit relation, especially, the past time (Václav Novák, 2008, cited in Mardani & Azizi, 2014). The notion of tense is syntactic while that of time is semantic. The definition of the term 'tense' can be found in many dictionaries or grammar books. "The verb-Forms which show differences in time are called tenses" (Swain, 1992; p.605, cited in Mardani & Azizi, 2014). "Tense is any of the forms of a verb that show the time, continuance, or completion of an action or state that is expressed by the verb" (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2000, cited in Mardani & Azizi, 2014). According to Carter and McCarthy (2007; p. 405, cited in Mardani & Azizi, 2014) "tense gives information about time while aspect gives information about the speaker's perspective on time. Thus it could be said that aspect expresses how the speaker views an action." "Aspect is a grammatical category that reflects the way which the action of a verb is viewed with respect to time" (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990; p. 51, cited in Mardani & Azizi, 2014). According to Mardani and Azizi. Swain (1992) emphasizes the fact that when we want to express whether the action is continuing or a past situation is connected with the present moment, we speak about changes in verb-forms. "Changes of this kind are often called changes of aspect" (Swain, 1992; p. 605, cited in Mardani & Azizi, 2014).

D. Definition of Metatalk

Swain's (2001; p. 50) definition of metatalk in her investigation of the role of student performance in task-based learning was as "the metalinguistic function of her output hypothesis: a learner uses language to indicate an awareness of something about their own, or their interlocutor's use of language" (as cited in Tsuzuku, 2015). According to Vanderheijden (2010) an example of metatalk could be asking the partner a simple question like, —Shouldn't that word have X ending? Swain makes no mention of L1 or L2 use in metatalk; the assumption is that the language of expression is also irrelevant. Another assumption made by Swain is that metatalk is a cognitive tool. She characterizes it as a surfacing of language used in problem-solving. As such, it not only serves students in language learning, it also serves researchers as a visible sign of cognitive processes as work. This characterization firmly aligns such learner interaction with a sociocultural learning theory (as cited in Tsuzuku, 2015).

Swain (1985) initially introduced the term metatalk (MT) in relation to the Comprehensible Output Hypothesis. She commented on Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis and concluded that, in practical terms and based on her observations, input is not sufficient for the attainment of native-like proficiency in the L2. She then turned her attention to output. Swain proposed three functions of output in L2 learning: noticing, hypothesis-testing, and metalinguistic reflection (or metatalk). She concluded that in output production, L2 learners may notice the gaps between what they want to say and what they can actually say (as cited in Zhang, 2013), may experiment with the language and test their own hypotheses, and may engage in metalinguistic reflections on their use and knowledge of the target language (Swain, 1998). While the terminology might vary, metalinguistic reflection, metacognition, and metatalk carry the same fundamental description and function in L2 development.

Kuiken and Vedder (2005) discussed metacognition, saying that it has a facilitative effect on L2 acquisition as it helps learners understand relations between meaning, form, and function. It has been highlighted the potential of metacognition as it is facilitated by interaction. Language production has been described as enabling learners to deepen their awareness of grammatical and lexical matters, test hypotheses with others, receive feedback and reprocess their output. In this manner, learners engage in co-constructing their L2. Ellis (2000) discussed the nature of tasks and interaction in connection with metacognition. She addressed production tasks in which learners are prompted to solve problems. It is in these settings that MT, or metacognitive verbalization, arises as learners are engaged in meaningful interactions. Such verbalizations may lead learners to understand the relationship between meaning, form, and function. At the same time, these verbalizations allow researchers to observe learners working with hypotheses as they experience the language learning process.

Another relevant term with a slight variation in meaning that has been introduced by Swain (2006) is languaging. She proposed this term to be a form of verbalization used to mediate cognitively-demanding activity. Swain (2006, p. 89) defined Languaging as "the process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language". She introduced this term from a sociocultural psychology standpoint and claimed that, as L2 learners engage in languaging while producing and comprehending language, they benefit from an important source of L2 learning (Suzuki & Itagaki, 2009; Swain, 2006). Although the terms metacognition, metalinguistic reflection, languaging, and MT might vary slightly in form, they share the same functions at their core: the observation of language as an object of inquiry; the verbalization of such observations in a meaningful context; and the development of L2 knowledge that emerges from the process. In this study, the focus is that of MT in its oral form.

In the SLA field, MT has been variously defined as: a metalinguistic function (Swain & Lapkin, 1995; Swain, 2000); a means to develop cognitive skills (Swain & Deters, 2007); a function of output (Swain, 1985), a window into the process of language learning (Storch, 2008); a surfacing of language used in problem solving (Swain, 1985, 1998); and a cognitive or semiotic tool that mediates language development (Donato & McCormick, 1994; Swain & Lapkin, 1995; Swain, 1998). Others have found MT to occur on occasions wherein students talk about their own language and discuss it as an object of inquiry, or when language stops being a content vehicle and becomes a tool for analysis and thought that promotes development (Brooks et al., 1997; Gass & Selinker, 2001; Swain, 2001b; Vanderheijden, 2010). It must

be noted that MT is one type of collaborative talk; dialogue in which participants are engaged in problem solving and knowledge building, and which can occur in many domains (e.g. mathematics) (Swain & Lapkin, 2002; Swain, 2000).

Most researchers have reached a compromise about a major definition of MT that includes learners' speech about their own language production. However, they often shift their focus to areas derived from MT. For example, Brooks et al. (1997) considered a student's expression of frustration with L2 learning as an example of MT, while Storch's (2008) definition included notions of increased levels of attention and awareness that result from joint collaboration. In these examples, MT and its boundaries are not clearly delineated. MT is defined as the verbalization of aspects of the target language; that is, learners' awareness of something about the L2 that comes to surface through verbalization. Also, MT is a cognitive and semiotic tool that enables the mediation of lexical development and as such allows learners to work through knowledge layers of each vocabulary item through joint verbalization. MT occurs naturally in linguistic tasks that require collaboration as learners encounter a lexical problem that they work on together (Brooks et al., 1997; Swain, 2001). Hence, MT mediates lexical development by playing a role in how knowledge is enabled and how learners respond to the task, which is known as regulation.

MT is seen as comparable to other forms of mediation within SCT, including egocentric speech, inner speech, and private speech. Like other forms of speech, MT can serve individuals first and foremost by mediating knowledge as they negotiate with an interlocutor. Even if language is used for mediation in a social context, individuals take advantage of it differently and will organize their own thoughts in a unique manner, as compared to their peers in the same social task.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study was an attempt to investigate the effects of using Metatalk Activity on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' knowledge of tense. For this study, the main question was addressed.

RQ1: Does intermediate students' knowledge of tense change according to using metatalk?

A. *Participants*

The sample for the present study included 60 learners studying at the intermediate level in an language institute. They were selected based on a convenience sampling method. The participants of this study then were those whose scores were at least one standard deviation below the mean. The rationale behind such a selection was that the target participants had to be weak in grammar to be able to show possible progression as a result of being treated. Over-the-mean participants might be able to receive high scores in grammar tests. Then, the participants were divided into two groups, one the experimental (N= 30) and the other the control (N=30). All of the participants were females and their ages varied from 14-16 years of age. Their first language was Persian.

B. *The Instruments*

Preliminary English Test: To select homogeneous participants for the current study a preliminary English test (PET Test) was administered. The PET test contained 58 items. This test consisted of listening (25 items in forms of True-False, Multiple-choice, and Gap-filled), reading comprehension (25 items in forms of True-False, Matching, Multiple-choice, and Cloze-test), and writing (8 items including three topics for writing and five sentence transformations) for homogenizing their language proficiency. The allocated time for answering the questions was 2 hours. After correcting the papers, 60 students were selected as the intermediate group based on the PET manual (Those participants whose grades were among 65 to 100 (total grades=100) were selected).

Dictogloss: The dictogloss was used as another instrument of data collection, in terms of its comprehensive use in other studies on metatalk (MT) (e.g. Kowal & Swain, 1994; LaPierre, 1994), the explicit support this type of task has received from experts in the field because it motivates much collaborative talk and MT (Kowal & Swain, 1997; Swain, 2001b). The dictogloss is an activity where learners are introduced to a topic and are supposed to work through the reconstruction of a text on the same topic with a partner.

Grammar Pretest and Posttest: Students took a grammar pretest at the beginning of the study and a posttest after the treatments. Two types of tests were administered: a production-based test i.e. a fill in the blank test and a comprehension-based test, i.e. a multiple-choice test.

C. *Procedure of the Study*

In the current study grammar knowledge was aimed. First, the researcher selected two classes at intermediate level to do the research. Second, the PET test was administered to check the homogeneity of the participants. Next, a pretest of grammar was administered to measure students' grammar knowledge before treatment. Then it was started next stage, the treatment. Some selective tenses including simple past tense, simple present tense, present continuous tense, and present perfect tense were the grammatical points that were taught during eight sessions during one month. In each of the 8 sessions, one special tense was instructed. This paper set out to compare the performance of EFL learners of intermediate proficiency on four tasks: multiple choice, rational deletion (cloze), text reconstruction and composition. Each task was completed collaboratively. In Experimental group after instruction of grammar, these activities were done.

For dictogloss activity (text reconstruction) a text passage of approximately 100 words which contained the special instances of the L2 structure was presented to the participants to be reconstructed in experimental group. The texts were selected from Longman English Grammar Practice. The teacher read the passage out at normal speed twice. The first time students just listened, the second time they could make notes. In pairs or small groups, students had to share what they remembered and attempted to reconstruct the text. The instructor reminded the participants to pay attention to the usage of the L2 forms in the text. In metatalk group the participants were supposed to find a partner to work with during the task. The purpose of this task was working together with the partner in reconstructing a text. These learners were prompted to notice linguistic problems and then engage in discussing language forms so that the structure could be made correct. They discussed the content and shared their ideas in order to reconstruct the text. The time allocated to task performance was 30 min in each session. In control group the selected grammatical items were explained on the white board by the teacher. Then the students took notes. After the instruction, the students were given some texts to answer individually. Finally, a test of grammar was administered to both groups of the study to find out the possible effect of metatalk activity as the independent variable of the study on the participants' grammar knowledge as the dependent variable of the study. There were 20 items in the multiple choice test and 20 items in the fill in the blank test. Since the multiple choice test might provide participants with models for the production of target forms, it was administered after the fill in the blank test. Every correct response received one point and Partially correct ones were scored zero because based on the output hypothesis the correct and precise production of output can be a sign of learning (Swain, 1995, as cited in Abadikhah & Shahriyarpour, 2012). The focus of the gapped words in the fill-in the blank test was verb tenses. The answer was always a single word. In some cases, there might be more than one possible answer and this was allowed for in the mark scheme. A standardized Cambridge test (Cambridge English First Handbook for Teachers) was chosen for pretest and posttest of the present study so reliability of the test was not needed to be tested. The scores of posttest were compared with the pretest scores through statistical calculations.

IV. RESULTS

The data obtained from this study were analyzed via calculating the descriptive statistics as well as the inferential statistical method of independent samples T-test and correlation coefficient for determining the effect of the independent variable of the study on the dependent variable and the degree of progress of the participants from the pretest to the posttest of the study. The descriptive analysis of the data for both experimental and control groups of the study has been summarized below. Table (I) summarizes the descriptive analysis of the data of experimental group of the study.

TABLE I
DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE DATA FOR EXPERIMENTAL GROUP
(PR=PRETEST; PO=POSTTEST)

Tests	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
PRgrammar	30	8.133	3.144
POgrammar	30	14.666	1.925

As is indicated in table (I), the number of participants has been 30 in experimental group (N=30). The mean for the PRgrammar (pretest of grammar) scores was shown to be 8.133 ($X_{PRE}=8.133$) as compared to the mean for the POgrammar (posttest of grammar) scores which was 14.666 ($X_{POE}=14.666$). As for the standard deviations obtained for the experimental group, there seems to be more variability among pregrammar scores than the scores in the postgrammar. This may give an image of the participants' posttest scores being more homogeneous after conducting the treatment of the study (treating with metatalk).

TABLE II.
DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE DATA FOR CONTROL GROUP
(PR=PRETEST; PO=POSTTEST)

Tests	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
PRgrammar	30	9.333	1.884
POgrammar	30	10.033	1.493

As is indicated in table (II), the number of participants has been 30 ($N_{PRC}=30$; $N_{POC}=30$). The mean for the PRgrammar (pretest of grammar) scores was shown to be 9.333 ($X_{PRC}=9.333$) as compared to the mean for the POgrammar (posttest of grammar) scores which was 10.033 ($X_{POC}=10.033$). As for the standard deviations obtained for the control group, there seems to be more variability among pregrammar scores than the scores in the postgrammar. This may give an image of the participants' posttest scores being more homogeneous after conducting the treatment of the study (treating with traditional method).

Table (III) summarizes the inferential analysis of the post-test scores for the control and experimental groups:

TABLE III.
THE T-TEST RESULTS OF THE STUDY

T-Test Results	Observed t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Between the Posttest Scores of the Experimental and the Control Groups of the Study (Equal variances not assumed)	6.923	47.452	0.000

As is indicated in table (III), the t -value of the study was calculated between the posttests of grammar the participants in the experimental and the control groups. The observed t was calculated as to be 6.923 ($t_{obs}=6.923$) and the degree of freedom was 47.452 ($df=47.452$). The t -observed value, 6.923, at 47.452degrees of freedom is higher than the critical value of t , that is, 2.000. It can be concluded that there was a significant difference between the means of the experimental and control groups. Finally, the level of significance was calculated as to be 0.00 that is used in interpreting the data for the rejection or support of the hypothesis of the study.

The next inferential analysis of the data of this study was related to the degree of the relationship between the pretest and the posttest of grammar (here, Tense) in each group of the study. This was indicated by calculating the Pearson Correlation Coefficient. The results of the Pearson correlation coefficient between the pretest and posttest scores of the experimental and the control groups of the study have been illustrated in table (IV) below:

TABLE IV.
THE CORRELATION MATRIX FOR THE PRETEST AND THE POSTTEST OF THE EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS

	Between the Pretest and the Posttest of the Experimental Group	Between the Pretest and the Posttest of the Control Group
Correlation (Pearson)	0.095	0.878

Table (IV) indicates that the correlation coefficient between the pretest and the posttest scores of the experimental group of the study is 0.095 ($R_{PREPOE}=0.095$) as compared with the correlation coefficient between the pretest and the posttest of the control group to be 0.878 ($R_{PRCPOC}=0.878$). The R_{PREPOE} is much more different in value than the R_{PRCPOC} and thus, is representative of the low relationship as well as significant distance between the scores of the pretest and posttest of grammar in the experimental group. On the other hand, the higher value of R_{PRCPOC} indicates that the scores in the pretest and posttest of grammar in the control group of the study are closer to each other than the scores in the experimental group. It can be inferred from such relationship that there has been no significant progress in the pretest scores of grammar in the control group after being compared with the scores in the posttest.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to investigate the effect of metatalk activity on knowledge of tense. Regarding the research question, the results revealed the superiority of the metatalk activity over the traditional method in the acquisition of the tense structures. The results indicated that there was a significant difference between the students' performance before and after raising the L2 learners' awareness about English Tenses. In other words, metatalk can be influential in acquiring tenses in different questions and statements. It was indicated that the metatalk activity could positively and comprehensively affect L2 learning when they had a specific linguistic focus. The relationship between the participants' pretest and posttest scores revealed that experimental group participants improved their production of the L2 forms. The experimental group participants' outperformance in the metatalk output group might be due to the reception of immediate feedback from their peers on their linguistic choices.

The findings from the present study lend support to Watanabe and Swain's (2007) claim that when involved in the collaborative dialog, the learners are more probably to get higher posttest scores regardless of the difference in their proficiency level. As the results showed the superiority of the collaborative output task, the study played its part in extending our understanding of how collaboration in doing language activities can be conducive in L2 instruction. This collaborative task (metatalk) includes interaction and output production that can promote noticing related to meaning or form; moreover, metatalk is expected to happen especially during the reconstruction period (as cited in Gallego, 2014). Metatalk is assumed to raise awareness and promote noticing (Swain, 1998; Cited in Gallego, 2014), which will consequently have a positive effect on the development of learners' interlanguage.

Within the context of measuring the effectiveness of metatalk, collaboration is thought to produce metatalk, which directs learners' attention towards certain linguistic features through reflection and discussion (Kowal & Swain, 1994; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; as cited in Gallego, 2014). Exploring the complexities of metatalk, Swain (1998) did a study with 48 students in an 8th grade French immersion class and sought to determine whether students could engage in metatalk following the modeled example they were previously provided and whether there was a relationship between metatalk and second language learning. Her study included two groups, the metatalk group ($N=26$; it was exposed to modeled metatalk and explicit rule teaching) and the control group ($N=22$; it was not exposed to modeled metatalk and explicit rule teaching). Results indicated that the metatalk group produced 2.5 times more LREs than the control group (metatalk group: 14.8; control group: 5.8), showing that modeling the metatalk increased the production of LREs. Findings also suggested that students' conscious reflection about language might be a source of language learning (as cited in Gallego, 2014).

Fortune (2005) carried out a study in which students at two different levels of proficiency engaged in a dictogloss task. The major goal was to investigate the metalinguistic terms used by the learners during interaction. It also sought to compare how frequently metalanguage was used by intermediate and advanced learners to establish whether metalanguage use enables more sustained engagement with the targeted form and whether it helps learners to attend to those forms more readily. Results indicated that advanced level students used metatalk 46.4% of the time and that intermediate level students used metatalk only 29.4% of the time. The advanced level students concentrated more on form, and they employed more metatalk in doing so, showing more readiness than the intermediate level students (as cited in Gallego, 2014).

Williams (1999, 2001) investigated whether English L2 learners from different proficiency levels differed in terms of the occurrence and the resolution of LREs during collaborative activities. Analyzing the collaborative negotiations of eight learners from four proficiency levels (beginning, intermediate, high-intermediate and advanced) indicated that the learners tended to discuss lexical items more often than grammatical items, and the overall rate of occurrence of LREs increased as the proficiency of the participants increased. The study also found that learners from higher proficiency levels may be more likely to have more metatalk and to reach more correct resolutions to their linguistic problems during collaborative engagements compared to their less proficient counterparts (as cited in Amirkhiz et al, 2013).

Storch (2008) in a classroom-based study examined the metatalk of learners working in pairs on a text reconstruction task. It investigated the learners' level of engagement with linguistic choices, and whether the level of engagement affected subsequent language development. In the first week of data collection, students completed one version of a text reconstruction task in pairs and all pair talk was audio recorded. In the second week, students completed another version of the task individually. Analysis of the pair talk data demonstrated that pairs attended to a range of grammatical and lexical items, but that the nature of their engagement ranged from elaborate to limited. Elaborate engagement was operationalized as instances where learners deliberated and discussed language items and limited engagement where one learner made a suggestion and the other repeated, acknowledged or did not respond to the suggestion. Analysis of learner performance on a set of items that were common to the two versions of the text reconstruction task indicated that elaborate engagement was more facilitative of learning/consolidation for both members of the dyad than limited engagement. The findings also suggested that it is needed to do more investigations about repetitions (as cited in Azkarai, 2015).

Now it's time to promote a discussion about the limitations of the present study to facilitate a possible replication or adaptation of the present research. In addition to the common drawbacks which a classroom research usually displays, our research study presented a number of other limitations. Because this study was carried out in one institute, the number of participants was limited. Another issue raised by this study concerns the time the learners had to reconstruct each text. In this case the participants were asked to reconstruct the text in 30 minutes. There might be some participants who could not do it well because of lack of time. It seemed that students of both groups needed extra time on doing so. The reason is that some texts were vague for some students and they needed more time processing the grammatical structure of texts.

One of the delimitations of this study was that the results of this study might not be applicable beyond the present context. The current study also can be reiterated at higher levels and universities in order to compare and generalize the results. Another delimitation of this study was that the participants were limited to female EFL learners. In other words, other researchers can carry out the research with different ages and levels of proficiency. Different situational and learner factors are said to influence the learners' use of metatalk in reconstructing the texts among which sex and proficiency level are of great importance. In the current study only one proficiency level (intermediate) was considered and only females participated in the present investigation. The same study may be conducted at other levels of language proficiency in order to obtain results that are more generalizable. Therefore, the present study can be duplicated in other places and the future researches are welcomed to be done on the performance of the same study at the university or high school levels. This study investigated the role of metatalk on knowledge of tense. Therefore the researchers can use metatalk in developing other grammatical skills.

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