A Microgenetic Analysis of Language Related Episodes (LREs) in EFL Beginner Classes: A Case for Collaborative Poetry-Reading Task

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Abstract:
Growing evidence in the second language learning research indicates that involving in collaborative task performance is conducive to language learning; thus, SLA research is obliged to specify the factors that enhance the efficacy and efficiency of collaborative task performance. Additionally, investigating language related episodes (LREs) occurred in task performance provides a window for SLA researchers to obtain more insight into the quantity and quality of doing focus on form. Tocalli-Beller and Swain (2005) argued that involving in one special kind of LREs i.e., cognitive conflict episodes (CCEs) substantially fosters language learning. Further, despite convincing evidence for usefulness of LREs for language development, SLA research has not thoroughly investigated the multitude of factors affecting the quantity and quality of LREs. This study, including an intact class of 20 Iranian beginner EFL students, was conducted to shed some light on the role of poetry in provoking LREs in general and CCEs in particular; additionally, it probed into learners’ reactions to the use of poetry in classroom. Results of the study revealed that poetry prompted learners to create more lexical rather than grammatical LREs and CCEs. Further, the results of open ended questionnaire and teacher’s diary disclosed that students showed interest in reading more poems in the class. In the light of findings, some practical implications for stakeholders are provided.

Key words: Cognitive conflict episodes (CCEs), collaboration, poetry, Sociocultural theory

Introduction
A growing body of second language research argues for the contributive role of collaborative task performance in language learning (e.g. Swain & Lapkin, 1998, 2000, 2001; Nassaji & Swain, 2000). Additionally, a premium was placed on collaborative focus on form in communicative era by resorting to sociocultural theory. Originating from Vygotsky (1987), sociocultural theory considers learning and development as social and cultural processes which are firstly co-constructed at interpsychological level. That is, learning originally occurs at social plane then it is appropriated or internalized through some mediatory tools (Lantolf, 2000). One of the most considerable symbolic mediatory tools is language which substantially contributes to knowledge building and learning (Lantolf & Thorne 2006). From this viewpoint, output is no longer construed as the sheer product of thought, but it is a mediatory tool through which we can concretize our abstract thought and put it to reassessment and re-evaluation and hence make it more complete (Swain, 2000). One type of output which is of critical importance for SCT is collaborative language production. Sociocultural theory holds that involving in collaborative dialogue assists learners to create and bridge gaps within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) i.e. “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by individual linguistic production, and the level of potential development as determined through language produced collaboratively with a teacher of peer” (Ohta, 2001, p. 9). Second language researchers have made an attempt to investigate the efficiency and efficacy of focus on form instruction by resorting to the tenets of SCT (e.g. Swain 1998; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Watanabe & Swain, 2007). To do so, they largely targeted language related episodes (LREs) i.e. “instances in which learners may (a) question the meaning of a linguistic item; (b) question the correctness of the spelling/pronunciation of a word; (c) question the correctness of a grammatical form; or (d) implicitly or explicitly correct their own or another’s usage of a word, form or structure” (Leeser, 2004, p. 56). LREs attracted the attention of a great deal of second language research since it was postulated that they might assist learners to discover the relationship between form and meaning; further, they provide a window to observe learning in progress (Donato, 1994; Swain & Lapkin, 1998). The current
of investigating LREs specified that a category of them i.e. cognitive conflict episodes (CCEs) provided a better ground for focus on form and consequently language learning (Tocalli-Beller & Swain, 2005). Tocalli-Beller and Swain demonstrated that engagement in collaborative cognitive conflict episodes (henceforth CCEs) fosters language development due to the fact that CCEs prompt learners to reflect on their points of difference more accurately and to bring the points under their conscious awareness which, as asserted by Schmidt (1990, 2001), is of critical importance for language learning. Some evidence has been provided for the point that some factors may affect learners' views and, as a result, their willingness to create and involve in focus on form; the speculated factors include: students' cultural background, goals, age, language proficiency, and task characteristics (Leeser, 2004; Tocalli-Beller & Swain, 2005; Watanabe & Swain, 2007). One of the task characteristics is text type; it can be argued that some texts set a more productive ground for creating LREs and consequently CCEs. Poetry, as a kind of literary texts, due to the use of literary devices such as metaphor, structural ambiguity, alliteration, semantic density, and some phonological patterns can construct a better ground for involving learners in meaning negotiation and focusing on language. They articulate that structural complexity, a device for poetic richness in poetry, provokes prompts diverse understanding of it; additionally, semantic density or density of allusions is one of the manifest characteristics of literary text. Thus, this study set out to examine whether poetry is conducive to creating LREs in general and CCEs in particular. Highlighting students’ voices for the use of poetry in the classroom was another mission of the study.

Review of Related Literature

Implementing literature in EFL

Convincing evidence from EFL classes supports the use of literary text for the purpose of fostering language learning on the grounds that literature engages learners’ affective and cognitive dimensions. Ghosn (2002) justify incorporating literature on the following grounds:

First, authentic literature provides a motivating, meaningful context for language learning, since children are naturally drawn to stories. Second, literature can contribute to language learning. It presents natural language, language at its finest, and can thus foster vocabulary development in context. As Collie and Slater (1987) have pointed out, it stimulates oral language and involves the child with the text; it also provides an excellent medium for a top-down approach to language teaching. Third, literature can promote academic literacy and thinking skills, and prepare children for the English-medium instruction. Fourth, literature can function as a change agent: good literature deals with some aspects of the human condition, and can thus contribute to the emotional development of the child, and foster positive interpersonal and intercultural attitudes.

However, Ghosn is not alone in giving support to using literature in ELT programmes; in the same line, Van (2009) posits that implementing literature in ELT programs is conducive to language learning because,

- it provides meaningful contexts;
- it involves a profound range of vocabulary, dialogues and prose;
- it appeals to imagination and enhances creativity;
- it develops cultural awareness;
- it encourages critical thinking;
- it is in line with CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) principles.

Needless to say, one of the main genres of literature is poetry which has a considerable potentiality for providing a fecund ground for language learning.

Poetry in EFL Classes

Poetry with its own specific characteristics can play a conducive role in language learning. Hanauer (2001), in his analysis of poetry-reading tasks, points out that reading poetry works as a meaning construction task which entails high levels of exact consideration, analysis, and elaboration of textual meanings to shape a gradual interpretation of the poem. Hişmanoğlu (2005) argues for the incorporating poetry into language learning programs on the grounds that it contribute to

- the appreciation of the writer’s composition process, which students gain by studying poems by components, and
- developing sensitivity for words and discoveries that may later grow into a deeper interest and greater analytical ability

Further, Hişmanoğlu (p. 61) quotes from Saraç (2003) that the use of poetry is beneficiary since it
- provides readers with a different viewpoint towards language use by going beyond the known usages and rules of grammar, syntax and vocabulary,
- triggers unmotivated readers owing to being so open to explorations and different interpretations,
- evokes feelings and thoughts in heart and in mind,
- makes students familiar with figures of speech (i.e. simile, metaphor, irony, personification, imagery, etc.) due to their being a part of daily language use.

Panavelil (2011, p. 12) also draws upon many EFL/ESL practitioners to offer a comprehensive account of the salient advantageous roles poetry can play; his account is worth quoting at length:

1. Poetry can be used as a valuable resource to introduce and practice language by exposing students to "authentic models-real language in context" (Brumfit & Carter, 1987). According to Tomlinson (1986) using poetry contributes far more to the development of language skills in real contexts than "a total concentration on the presentation and the practice of language items"(p.42).

2. Poems provide students with an opportunity to enrich their vocabulary in a new way by offering meaningful context, in which they could be used and hence be remembered more effectively (Lazar, 1996)

3. Poems encourage students in developing their creativity while providing a break from regular classroom routines (McKay, 1982). As students study the poems, they can simultaneously discover interesting ideas for creative writing. According to Collie and Slater (1987), "using poetry in the language classroom can lead naturally on to freer and creative written expression"(p.72).

4. Poetry based activities are motivating as they generate strong emotional reactions. As Hess (2003) notes, "Entering a literary text, under the guidance of appropriate teaching, brings about the kind of participation almost no other text can produce. When we read, understand, and interpret a poem we learn language through the expansion of our experience with a larger human reality" (p.20)

5. According to Lazar (1996), poems also provide students with insight into developing cross-cultural awareness and this in turn will help them in acquiring fluency in the target language (p.75).

6. McKay (1982) points out that poems provide inspiration and can serve as a good model for creative writing (p. 63).

7. Heath (1996) opines that poems deal with universal themes and human concerns, they offer opportunities for students to project their feelings and emotions, thus fostering personal involvement in learners (p.54).

However, Panavelil (2011) points out that some arguments have marginalized the role of poetry in EFL teaching on the accounts that poetry deviate and distort the standard language; further, its language is construed as complicated.

**Empirical Studies on the Use of Poetry in EFL/ESL Classes**

Hanauer (2001) made a valuable attempt to elucidate the processes undertaken by second language learners while engaging a poetry-reading task. Twenty advanced language learners read a poem in pairs; their voices were recorded and transcribed to be analyzed on the basis of grounded-theory framework.

On the basis of the in-depth qualitative analysis of the dyads’ voices, he formulated a coding system entailing 9 categories which can give an account for responses derived during reading a poetry task – “noticing, questioning, interpretive hypothesis, restatement of interpretive hypothesis, elaborative statement of the interpretive hypothesis, integrative interpretive statement, presentation of world knowledge, and general statement” (Hanauer, 2001, p. 303). Out of the nine categories, eight of them dealt with meaning construction i.e. only one of them was not directly associated with meaning construction. Results of the study revealed that 95.94 per cent of the turns during poetry reading were ascribed to on-line meaning construction. The two post prevailing categories employed were noticing and construction of a local interpretive hypothesis; 56 per cent of all utterances are subsumed under these two categories. Frequent reliance on these categories verified that the learners were mostly engaged in a close reading and comprehension task. Further analysis disclosed that noticing category entailed participants’ direction of attention to a specific line or part f the poem, grammatical usage, or repetition.

Moreover, this study provided some counter argument against some criticisms leveled at poetry reading task as a fostering source for second language knowledge. Despite the criticism that learners notice literary features rather than linguistic form, the results showed that 84 per cent of the noticed utterances included specific lines, noticing
unusual grammatical usage and noticing repetition in the poem i.e., only 9.57 per cent of the noticed and discussed element of the poetry were directly associated with literary knowledge. However, this study was limited to EFL learners at advanced level of language proficiency. Furthermore, it does not give account of the resolution of noticed forms and their possible effect on the learning of noticed forms.

**LREs and second language learning**

Gaining deeper insight into the processes of language learning by looking through the lens of LREs has caught the eyes of a number of studies (Leeser, 2004; Storch, 1999, 2002; Williams, 1999; Watanabe & Swain, 2007). The studies brought to light that LREs are positively correlated with language learning. One of the first studies which investigated LREs in classroom context was Williams (2001). The study found that learners manage to focus on form, though infrequently. Additionally, the primary type of LREs was lexical i.e. learners majorly requested for words.

Leeser (2004) conducted a study on the effect of grouping learners in terms of language proficiency on the amount, type (lexical or grammatical) and outcome (correct, unresolved, or incorrect) of LREs by involving 21 pairs of adult L2 Spanish learners from a content-based course in a passage reconstruction task. The results unravelled that the learners considerably focused on form; additionally, out of the all generated LREs, 39.86 per cent was identified as lexical while the rest of them (60.14%) was recognized as grammatical. Further, it came to light that pairing two learners with high language proficiency contributes to creating more grammatical rather than lexical LREs (67.11% grammatical, 32.89% lexical) which pairing two low proficiency level learners led to more focus on lexical items in comparison to grammatical ones (41.67% grammatical, 55.33% lexical).

Philip et al (2011) carried out a study on learners’ awareness of form during collaborative role-play and discussion tasks over a three-week period of a tertiary intermediate-level French class. The results indicate that collaborative task performance, even during task intended to enhance fluency, prompts creating LREs though its number was relatively low. From among the provoked LREs, 80% of them were associated with lexical items. They argued that task and social considerations impact learners’ inclination toward focus on forms. Williams drew a conclusion that ‘What learners notice is that they need words’ (2001, p. 339). From the results, one can induce that attending to morphosyntactic elements which have little to contribute to meaning require task or teacher’ special focus (Philips et al., 2011). Results revealed that learners were able to correctly answer 40% to 94% items on the tailored-made post-test developed on the basis of the LREs occurred during collaboration.

Investigating language learning process through the lens of LREs has recently gathered momentum; however, investigating factors affecting LREs is still in its early days.

**Statement of the Problem**

Growing body of research indicates that implementing collaboration fosters second language learning. Further, research shows that task features affect the quality of focus on form in collaborative task performance. Ellis (2003), in light of reviewing research on the effect of discourse mode in task based learning, concludes that “discourse modes can elicit very different kinds of language” (P. 125). On the other hand, in spite of the convincing argument for the use of poetry as an enriched source for language learning, teachers in Iranian classes mostly rely on their course books and rarely incorporate poems into their classes. One of the possible justifications for not making use of poetry is that SLA research has failed to provide EFL practitioners with substantial evidence for the productive processes derived from using poetry in classroom. Even now, as rightly noticed by Hanauer (2001), seemingly arguments from both camps, for and against use of literature in general and poetry in particular, are not substantially founded on empirical evidence. Thus, this study, in reply to calls from SLA researchers such Hanauer (2001) and Mattix (2002), set out to shed some empirical light on the effect of poetry as a springboard for enhancing the quantity and quality of LREs and their outcome. Additionally, an attempt was made to collect learners’ reactions to reading English poetry in classroom context.

**Research questions**

1. Does collaborative poetry reading result in creating language related episodes (LREs)?
2. If yes, which type of LREs (lexical or grammatical) occurs more frequently in collaborative poetry-reading task?
3. Does involving in a poetry reading task provoke a considerable number of cognitive conflict episodes (CCEs)?
4. If yes, which kind of CCEs (lexical or grammatical LREs) occurs more frequently in collaborative poetry-reading task?
5. What are Iranian beginner EFL learners’ reactions to using English poetry in class after the experiment?
Methodology

Participants and Setting
Participants were an intact class of second grade junior high school students in Tehran, Iran. They have been learning English for two years; they took part in English class once in a week during the first year but, over the second year, they attended the class twice a week. The class included 20 students who were from the suburb of Tehran. Thus, it can be argued that their social and cultural backgrounds share a great deal of commonality. With regard to gender, they were all male. As expressed by their teacher who held an MA in TEFL, they have never worked on English poetry in class, but they have read some short stories. It is worth mentioning that this class was included in the study due to its availability to the researcher.

Instrumentation

Tasks
Three poems for kids were taken from www.poetry4kids.com. Firstly, the second researcher asked the intact class teacher to select two poems which were appropriate to students’ level of proficiency from the site. Later on, some comprehension questions were formulated for each of the poems and words which were highlighted as unknown to the students by the intact class teacher were glossed below the poetry text with their Persian equivalents (See appendix A).

Procedures
The study was conducted during two subsequent sessions in nearly the educational year in Iran. The teacher allocated 45 minutes of two sessions to working on the poetry tasks in collaborative form. They received each of the poems every session and worked on it for 45 minutes. First, the teacher read the poems aloud to the learners to let them know some familiarity with the poem pronunciation and prosodic features; then, they were asked to read the poem and answer the ensuing questions in pair. Students’ voices while collaborating to read and answer the comprehension questions were recorded for later transcription and analysis. Additionally, a test was given to learners after the third session to measure their gains in vocabulary. It is worthy to add that the words ticked as known by more than two of the learners were excluded from the data analysis.

Learners’ attitude toward using the poetry in the classroom was collected through an open-ended questionnaire administered at the end of the study. Furthermore, the teacher was asked to record students’ reactions in his diary for five weeks after the study. Teacher’s diary was analyzed for learners’ reactions.

Data Analysis
In order to investigate LREs, drawing on Vygotsky’s (1978) genetic analysis, a microgenetic analysis of the students’ collaborative dialogues was conducted. The focus of microgenetic analysis is how the overt examples of learning occur when learners are collaborating to co-construct knowledge (Gutierrez, 2008) “over a relatively short span of time (for example...learning a word, sound, or grammatical features of a language)” (Lantolf, 2000, p. 3).

To apply microgenetic analysis, following the previous related studies (Kim, 2008; Nassaji & Tian, 2010; Swain, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 1998) focusing on the detection of cognitive processes occurring at interpsychological level, the nature (i.e. meaning, pronunciation, and spelling), and resolution of lexical Language Related Episodes (LREs), learners produced during collaborative word-focused tasks, were taken into account. LREs are defined as “any part of the dialogue where the students talk about the language they are producing, questioning their language use, or correct themselves or others” (Swain & Lapkin, 1998, p. 326).

Additionally a content analysis was carried out on the open-ended questionnaire results and teacher’s diary to identify their recurrent themes.

Identification of LREs and CCEs
Two researchers who had enough expertise in microgenetic analysis analyzed the transcriptions independently. Inter-rater reliability for LREs and CCEs was 92% and 94% respectively. The raters discussed the points of difference and resolved them. Following Leeser (2004), lexical LREs entail “those instances in which learners focused on or sought the meaning of lexical items, including prepositions. They also included talk about the spelling/ pronunciation of words” (p. 64) and those parts of the language in which the learners focused on one aspect of English morphology or syntax.

Furthermore, drawing upon Tocalli-Beller and Swain (2005), the resolution of lexical LREs was categorized as Cognitive Conflict Episodes (CCEs) and non-CCEs. CCEs are defined as those LREs that a disagreement exists over their resolutions at first; learners, then, are supposed to discuss to reach an agreement; however, non-CCEs are those
LREs that no controversy provokes over their resolution all through collaborative task performance and one learner just confirms or repeats the other peer’s response.

Results

The first question was raised to investigate the possibility of LREs occurrence in collaborative working on poetry. The results revealed that poetry was a fertile ground for focusing students’ attention on lexical and grammatical forms. The total number of LREs was 151, as represented in Table 1.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Descriptive statistics for LREs and CCEs in Collaborative Poetry-Reading Task</th>
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<td>Language related episodes</td>
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<td>Lexical LREs</td>
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<td>Grammatical LREs</td>
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<td>Cognitive conflict episodes</td>
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<td>Lexical CCEs</td>
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The second question mission was raised to pinpoint the type (lexical or grammatical) of LREs. The results of the study revealed that students more frequently focused on lexical forms rather than grammatical ones. That is, almost 74% of the LREs were concerned with lexical aspects of the language and only the rest of them i.e. 26% dealt with grammatical forms.

Another attempt was made by the third question to probe into the possibility of occurring CCEs in collaborative poetry-reading task. The results revealed that 84 of the LREs were turned into CCEs. To put it another way, about 54% of the LREs were turned into CCEs. Additionally, the number of lexical CCEs surpassed that of grammatical CCEs. Therefore, poetry-reading task was more successful in creating lexical CCEs than grammatical CCEs. The frequency of LREs and CCEs are portrayed in Figure 1 for making a vivid comparative picture.

Figure 1: The Frequency of LREs and CCEs and Their Subcategories

The open-ended questionnaire results and analysis of the teacher’s diary disclosed that the learners responded positively to reading poetry in the classroom.
Qualitative analysis of the data can shed more light on the point that why learners majorly focused on the lexical aspects of the poems and consequently created more lexical CCES. The qualitative data revealed that the learners were primarily concerned with discovering meaning and showed less concern toward grammatical aspects.

Episode one: grammatical LREs which failed to result in a CCEs

1. S1: I wish I’d go away ... I’d ke mokhafafe I would hast ... I would ...
   I wish I’d go away .... I’d is the contraction of I would ... I would
2. S2: Koli bego ta benevisam (in a complaining voice)
   Say what does it mean in general to write it down.
3. S1: Behtar ast door besham
   It is better to go away

This episode reveals that the learners are involved in translating the poem into their first language. When S1 reaches ‘I’d’, he tries to clarify it by use of metalinguistic knowledge and point out that “I’d is the contraction of I would", but S2 who is primarily focused on getting the meaning of the poem by translating it overlooks this point and in a complaining voice says that “Say what does it mean in general to write it down”. Line 3 indicates that S1 acquiesces with S2’s will and do not manoeuvre on the function of ‘would’ and offer an overall translation of the line.

In what follows two episodes of lexical LREs are microgenetically analyzed to give a better picture of the role played by poetry-reading tasks in creating Lexical LREs and turning them into CCEs.

4. S1: I often contradict myself ... uh what does it mean?
5. S2: eh ... uh ... I think man ba khudam mokhalefam ... man bazi vaghta ... uh
eh... uh ... i think i am against myself .... i sometimes ... uh
   I hate myself
7. S2: Az khudam badam miad? (raising voice) ... man mokhalefam
   I hate myself?... I am against
8. S1: Mokhalefam? Uh ... man ba khudam mokhalefam gahi oghat? (raising voice)
   Against? Uh ... I am sometimes against myself ?
   Yes, it’s right. It is clear that Contradict means to be against yourself.
10. S1: Let’s check the dictionary.
11. S2: OK! Look at the meaning ( silence for more than 10 seconds)
12. S1: Ok! Rast migi yani mokhalefam
   Ok you were right, it means I am against myself.
13. S2: Let’s read next line

S1 reads one line of the poem but says that he cannot understand it. S2 interjects to help him by translating the line and hays that I oppose myself, but S1 is not in accord with him and points out that “I hate myself”. The controversy is over translating ‘contradict’. S2 voices his objection to S1’s proposal by repeating his turn in a raising voice and reiterates his own suggestion. Succeeding that in line 8, S1 considers S2’s suggestion by repeating it and expresses his doubts about it by raising his tone. In line 9, S2 attempts to settle the conflict over translating ‘contradict’ by repeating his own proposal and assuring S1 that he is right about it. S1 does not yield to his partner’s request and asks for looking it up the dictionary. Hearing this suggestion, S2 accepts it and keep silent for about ten second to let S1 have enough time to dispel his doubt by means of dictionary. That is, they draw on a mediatory tool at their disposal to resolve the conflict. After silence, S1 expresses his agreement with S1’s translation and they proceeds to another line.

As moment by moment analysis of this episode portrays, learners are striving to elucidate a word meaning; since deciphering the meaning is of significant importance for understanding the whole poem, they challenge each other’s proposals and resort to some means at their dispositions (e.g. silence and dictionary) to reach a precise meaning.

In the following episode learners fail to understand a word; further, the tools at their disposal cannot scaffold them to dispel their conflict so they refer to their teacher as another mediatory tool.

14. S1: That simply isn’t true ... umm what does it mean?
16. S1: No, I don’t think so.
17. S2: Come on! Let’s check dictionary.
18. S1: OK!
This excerpt indicates that S1 is reading a line but he encounters an unknown word which makes the line difficult to be understood. His first attempt is to use collaborative dialogue so as to clarify it. In line 2, S2 repeats the unknown word three times to take time for retrieving it; then, he put forward a Persian equivalent for it. He resorts to L1 as a mediatory tool to decrease task difficulty and maintain the flow of their poetry-reading task. But, his suggestion is challenged by S1’s disagreement in line 16. S2 asks S1 to look it up in the dictionary (i.e. the glossary) and S1 accepts to do so. However, the glossary as a mediatory tool cannot help them to bridge this noticed gap in their interlanguage and reach intersubjectivity. In line 20, S1 turns out another leaf; S1 who is apparently disappointed of settling the controversy down through collaborative dialogue and consulting glossary asks for teacher’s help. In contrast to S1’s call for outside help, S2 tries to solve this problem without other help; even, he asks S1 to be patient and take more time. But, S1 seems uncooperative and frustrated by this problem and wants to get rid of it by means of teacher’s support in line 22. Meanwhile, S2 is resolute to resolve it and makes another suggestion in line 23, but S1 refutes it and call on the teacher again. Finally, when they receive L1 equivalent of the word from teacher, they come to a mutual understanding of the word and move forward.

To investigate learners’ reactions to the experience of poetry-reading task in classroom, the results of the open-ended questionnaire were taken into account. Nearly 70 percent of the learners mentioned that they enjoyed reading poetry and they like to have some poems in their school course books. Additionally, 75 of them believed that reading poetry can add to the efficiency of their language learning. Regarding to the aspects of poem creating difficulty for the learners, 65 per cent of them asserted that use of some difficult and complicated words made the task demanding for them. However, the attached glossary helped us to overcome this difficulty.

One of the recurrent themes in their answers was the attraction of rhyme and rhythms. One of them voiced that

At the outset it was difficult for us to deal with poetry in English. In the first session, I liked to do not venture reading the poem. Later on, when I collaborated with my friend and referred to the glossary it becomes interesting. Further, we found that it has rhythm. It was like Persian poems which I like. I liked to repeat and memorize the poems.

Another point raised repetitively was the encouraging and attractive nature of poetry. The answer by one of the learners is worth direct quoting,

It is interesting for me to read poem. I love to read. I have read Persian poem previously but it was the first time I read English poetry. I enjoyed it a lot. I love to read more and more poems. I love to read it aloud like a song. As you know, it is fun to sing your lesson like a singer. I love to write a poem in English.

Authenticity was another recurrent theme in their answers. One of the uttered that

I always like to read what English students read. Do they read poetry? Do they read story? I got really happy when the teacher said us that the poems have been selected from poems for kids. I love original things.

With regard to the recurrent theme in reply to whether they like to have poems in their school course books, some opinions were pointed out more frequently. One of the learners wrote that

I prefer reading poetry to reading dull dialogues and readings in our books. They are meaningless. Poems are interesting. I love to read poem and practice them with my friends, read them aloud to my parents at home.

Additionally, analyzing the teacher’s diary unveiled that most of the students asked for reading more pieces of poetry in classroom. The teacher noted that some of the students brought English poems and asked him to work on them in classroom. Further, some of the learners memorized some English poems and sang them like a song. Further, they allocated a special part to English poetry in classroom wallpaper.

Discussion

The results revealed that poetry sets a fertile ground for fostering LREs. Additionally, it directed learners’ attention to lexical LREs rather than grammatical LREs and consequently more lexical CCEs. The results of open-ended
questionnaire and teacher’s diary analysis revealed that the learners reacted positively to reading poetry in classroom.

As previously raised in support of incorporating poetry into EFL/ESL classrooms, poetry can be taken as a source of motivation, enjoyment, and personal involvement (e.g. Hanauer, 2001); thus, it can be deduced that reading poetry inspired learners to engage themselves in understanding the poem and to fulfil this objective, they focused on linguistic forms whether lexical or grammatical. In line with Hanauer, it was manifested that reading poetry is portrayed as “close reading meaning construction task that involves high levels of consideration, analysis and elaboration of textual meaning” (p. 295).

Additionally, the results indicated that the learners majorly focused on lexical forms rather than the grammatical ones; this finding accords with Leeser (2004) i.e. when students with low language proficiency are paired together, their main focus is placed on lexical items. One possible explanation could be learners’ overriding concern with understanding the message. They draw on the lexical forms since they hypothesized that by clarifying their meanings they can fathom the poem.

Another plausible explanation is that since their level of language proficiency is low, they are not developmentally ready to notice grammatical structures which are beyond both students in each pair. From Sociocultural perspective, it can be claimed that some of the grammatical forms are not within their mutual ZPDs and there are not required mediatory tools at their disposal to help the learners direct their focal attention to the grammatical forms whereas the difficult words are glossed with their L1 equivalents that work as a valuable mediatory tool for the learners to draw upon and co-construkt mutual ZPDs.

It is worthy to point out that the intact class teacher did not pay attention to teaching grammar and most frequently underestimated the value of grammar. He always gave a grammar pamphlet to his learners and asked them to study grammatical structures on their own out of the classroom context; moreover, classroom achievement exams were majorly focused on reading comprehension and knowledge of vocabulary; thus, there is a possible explanation that the learners have developed the habit of paying less care and attention to the grammatical aspects of language due to negative washback effects of the teacher’s made tests being used. That is, as argued by Swain (1998), this background or educational setting might affect learners’ views and consequently practices toward grammatical forms.

It is worthy to add that this superiority of lexical LREs might spring from the low number of grammatical structures used in the poems. Generally speaking, each pair focused on 4 grammatical forms which can be taken as considerable number when compare to the number of grammatical structures in the poems.

As viewed, the frequency of lexical CCEs was higher than that of grammatical CCEs. It might stem from the points mentioned above i.e. learners with low language proficiency are primarily concerned with meaning so they substantially focus their attention on lexical items and attempt to clarify them through collaboration.

Learners’ positive reactions can be because of the funny and motivating nature of the poems. As the learners pointed out, the poems caught their attention and affection. The rhythmic language of poetry prompted them to enjoy and learn. When they sang the poems they realized that learning English can be through entertainment and fun.

Conclusion

Results of the study corroborated that poetry-reading task has a considerable potentiality to draw learners’ focus to lexical and grammatical forms. Additionally, poetry provides a fertile ground for creating CCEs which are advantageous for language learning. Another interesting finding of this study, though partially investigated, was learners’ positive reaction to reading poetry in classroom context.

In the light of the results making some implications for course book developers and language teachers.

Since the number of grammatical LREs and CCEs was relatively low in comparison to that of lexical LREs and CCEs, second language teachers are suggested to provide language learners with some mini-lessons on grammatical forms and let students gain deeper insight into tasks they are intended to perform by pretask modelling (Kim & McDonough, 2011).

Course book developers are highly suggested to hear voices from classrooms and include some poems in school course books. Additionally, language teachers are recommended to use poems as complementary source in classroom context. For instance, they can use the following poem for teaching colours at beginner classes.

“Red is an apple
Red is a nose
Red is the colour of
My frozen, icy nose!” (adopted from http://www.songs4teachers.com)
The generalizability of the findings must be done with caution due to some limitations. First, the number of participants in this study was limited to one intact class including 20 learners with elementary language proficiency. Furthermore, the study did not rigorously investigate whether language related episodes are learned by the learners. Investigating the effect of poetry on language learning at different proficiency levels by drawing on the tenets of sociocultural theory seem a fruitful avenue for further research. Additionally, undertaking a study on the effect of literary and non-literary texts on LREs seems profitable.

References


Appendices

Appendix A
Open-ended Questionnaire
1. Did you enjoy reading English poetry? Why? (Please explain)
2. Do you like to have some poems in your school textbooks?
3. Does reading English poetry help you to learn English better? Why?
4. Which aspects of poetry was hard for to read? (vocabulary or grammar)

Appendix B
Poetry-Reading Tasks
Name: ………………. First semester score ( ) Name …………. First semester score ( )

Perfect

A Funny School Poem for Kids

Today I managed something that I’ve never done before. I turned in this week’s spelling quiz and got a perfect score.

Although my score was perfect it appears I’m not too bright.
I got a perfect zero;
not a single answer right.

--Karen Nesbitt

1. Which title/name do you suggest for this poem? Why? (please elaborate on your reasons)
2. How many right answers did he have?
3. His scores were perfect so why isn’t he very bright?
4. Why is the poem funny?
   - Put True or False after each Statement.
5. He managed to get a perfect score on spelling quiz. ( )
6. All his answers were right. ( )
I Often Contradict Myself

I often contradict myself.
Oh no, I never do.
I argue with me day and night.
That simply isn’t true.

Oh yes it is. Oh no it’s not.
I do this all day long.
Oh no I don’t. Oh yes I do.
That’s right. No way! It’s wrong.

I’m really quite agreeable.
I argue night and day.
I love to be around myself.
I wish I’d go away.

So if you see me arguing,
it’s certain that you won’t.
I like to contradict myself.
I promise you I don’t.

-- Kern Nesbitt

1. Which title/name do you suggest for this poem? Why? (please elaborate on your reasons)
2. How often does he argue with himself?
3. Does he love to be around himself?

Put True or False after each statement
4. He is certain that we don’t see him arguing with himself. (........)
5. He promises that he never contradicts himself. (.........)
6. Do you argue with yourself? If yes, why?

Contradict تناقض داشتن با، مخالف بودن با، سخن (ان‌کار کردن
Argue بحث کردن، گفتگو کردن، مشاجره، کردن، دلیل ارور، استدلال کردن
Quite کامل‌بینی، تمام‌سازی، واقعا
Agreeable سازگار، دلپذیر، مطروح، پذیرش، میل
Certain بقید داشتن، بی‌بیان، استن
Promise وعده، قول، عهد، پیمان، تویید؛ انتظار وعده‌دادن، قول دادن، پیمان بست
Wrong ّادرست، غیظ
1. Does text type affect the number of CCEs provoked in collaborative task performance?
2. Does task type affect the type of CCEs created in the collaborative task performance?
3. Does text type bring about any significant effect on vocabulary learning?
4. How does text type affect the processes of CCEs created in collaborative task performance?