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The Effects of Teaching Articles Based on Huebner's Model on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Use of Articles

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Ramin Mohammadi Chabok¹
Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon , Iran
Mohammadreza Khodareza²
Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon , Iran

Abstract

The aim of this research was to find out the effects of using Huebner's model on intermediate EFL learners' use of article. Thirty learners from two high schools in Chaboksar (one of the city of Guilan Province) were chosen and after applying OPT test, they were divided into two groups. Both groups participated in a pretest exam. The control group was taught articles traditionally and according to their book. For the experimental group, the researcher adopted Huebner's model in four sessions. Then the post test was run. Using T-test and ANCOVA for the analyzing data, showed that Huebner's model had a positive effect on EFL learners' use of articles.

Keywords: The English Article system, The Article system in Persian ,Definite Article, Indefinite Article, Interlanguage

1. Introduction

Attaining native like proficiency is the ultimate goal of most of language learners. Most of the learners try to get mastery over the structure system of L2, but not all of them can reach this goal. Some structures seem to be mastered more easily, some seem to be troublesome for learners; one of them is article system. English article system is one of the most frequent and also confusing structures of English system (Master, 2002). As (Atay, 2010) stated in his research: "article choice in English is highly complicated, context-specific and beyond simple rules. They are unstressed function words, hence perceptually non-salient and semantically light-weight".

Most of the students even in advanced levels seem to have problem with it. This system includes the indefinite article *a(n)*, the definite article *the*, and the zero (or null) article. Researchers proved that the article system is one of the most difficult structural elements for ESL learners, causing even the most advanced non-native speakers of English (NNS) to make errors. This area has made lots of researchers to have investigations and they mentioned lots of reasons for these difficulties. As we know these articles are frequent in English system, as (Berry ,1991) mentioned, the frequency of articles that "*the/a/an* together account for one in every ten words in the average academic text". According to (Hewson, 1972, p.131), "the definite and the indefinite articles are among the tenth discourse". Sinclair (1991, cited in

¹Bio: M.A Student in English Language Teaching, Department of English, Tonekabon Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon, Iran.

²Bio: Ph.D in TEFL , Assistant Professor. Department of English, Tonekabon Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon, Iran. Corresponding author: mkhodareza@yahoo.com

Master, 2002, p.332) listed *the* as the most frequent word and *a* as the fifth most frequent.

In Huebner's model, the use of English articles is determined by the semantic function of the NP in discourse. According to the model, English NPs are classified by two discourse features of referentiality—namely, whether a noun is a specific referent [+/-SR], and whether it is assumed as known to the hearer [+/-HK]. These two aspects of referentiality thus give rise to four basic NP contexts that determine article use. Nouns classified as Type 1, [-SR, +HK] are generics, and are marked with *a*, *the*, or *zero*. Nouns classified as Type 2, [+SR, +HK], are referential definite and are marked with *the*. Type 3, [+SR, -HK], includes first mention nouns, whose referent is identifiable to the speaker but not the listener, e.g. nouns that the speaker is introducing into the discourse for the first time. These are marked with *a* or *zero*. Type 4 nouns, classified as [-SR, -HK], are non-referential. This type includes nouns that are nonspecific for both the speaker and the hearer; *a* and *zero* are the relevant articles.

1.1 Background and literature review

A number of later cross-sectional morpheme studies have been carried out, including some of languages other than English. One of the best is (Pica's , 1983) who found a natural order in learners' language. In natural order that was proposed by (Krashen, 1977) he used a hierarchy in that he claimed the articles are acquired in the second level (after -ing/plural/copula) so we can expect learners to have been mastered over the first level and then they have less errors in higher proficiency levels.

In a study done by (Young , 1996) he considered the use of English articles by high and low proficiency Czech and Slovak learners of English. He found that low proficiency level learners use definite article more. Also he found that both low and high proficiency learners use form-function relation in their use of definite and indefinite articles. His learners used indefinite articles to mark information not assumed to be known by learners (-HK). The tendency to use indefinite article with this function increased with proficiency.

(Zdorenko and Paradis , 2007) study aims to determine whether child L2 acquisition is affected from L1 with respect to the articles and to investigate whether children from +ART and -ART languages follow the same acquisition sequence. In the study there were 16 participants in total; nine children from +ART L1 background, and seven children from -ART background. They were all in ESL context. The results indicated that accuracy rates with the definite article were considerably higher than the indefinite article for both groups. Just as a minor difference, -ART group had lower accuracy with the definite article than the +ART group at the very beginning. It was also stated that the acquisition order was same both for child L1 and L2 and adult L2 acquisition.

As mentioned before some studies focused on error analysis like (Barrett et al, 2011) he made a study to examine English L2 article use with Taiwanese English learners to determine the potential factors influencing English article substitution and error patterns in their academic writing. The results indicated that learners overused both the definite and indefinite articles but

underused the *zero* articles. The definite article was substituted for the indefinite article in specific environments. Although no significant difference existed between specific and non-specific semantic environments in *zero* article errors, a significant difference emerged between plural and mass/non-count nouns.

(Parish, 1987) modified Huebner's model to study a Japanese learner's acquisition of English articles over a 4-month period. The data analysis showed that the *zero* article was the first to be acquired, followed by the definite article, and finally the indefinite article. (Master, 1987) performed a pseudo-longitudinal study of article usage in spontaneous speech. His study seems to suggest the similar sequence which is found by (Parish, 1987), if one only looks at the percentage of articles correctly supplied in obligatory context.

(Master, 1995) also yielded some findings on the sequence of article acquisition. His analysis showed that the most frequent error was omission of the definite article, as cited by (Liu and Gleason, 2002). Given that the subjects were very advanced ESL students (Master's degree-level TESOL students), it would imply that *the* was perhaps acquired rather late in the ESL development of the article system. More importantly, it showed that the frequently missed *the* was largely the result of the subjects' not knowing that certain noun phrases were unique in the speech community. This finding would imply that certain uses of the definite article might be more difficult than others.

Based on Bickerton's (1981) Semantic Wheel Model, the study collected Chinese learners' performance on an article test, and then made a semantic analysis of the results. The main findings include: 1. The two features of referentiality, namely, whether or not the noun phrase has a specific referent and whether or not it is assumed known to the hearer ([±SR] and [±HK]) have a statistically significant influence on Chinese learners' article accuracy; [+SR, +HK] and [-SR, -HK] are proved to be the easiest while [-SR, +HK] is the most problematic. 2. Chinese learners tend to associate the definite article with [+HK] contexts rather than [+SR] contexts, for the overuse of the definite article in [+HK] environments is significantly higher than that in [+SR] contexts. Finally, several suggestions on English article instruction are pointed out for teachers in college.

In a study by Huebner (1979, 1983) on an adult L1 Laotian subject, it was found that *the* emerged early and the learner overgeneralized it. The indefinite article was learned late in L2.

Some Iranian researchers tried to find out a pattern in Persian learners of English use of articles; for example, Sarani (2003) conducted a study to find out the major areas of difficulties that students face in the target language, i.e. the occurrence of articles in different syntactic features. Subjects were divided into two groups with different lengths of exposure to English to see what kind of errors, if any, get automatically repaired over a period of time. He examined it and he established a hierarchy of difficulties that Persian undergraduates faced in the use of articles. His findings revealed that most of the errors the students committed were due to the nature as well as the

grammatical complexity of the articles in English, i.e. L1 independent which cannot be explained in terms of transfer from the native language.

Farahani, Roodbari, and Ghodrati (2011) conducted a study on Iranian learners identifying the kinds of errors they commit in the use of articles. All the sixty two students were asked to write on various topics and the data was collected on the basis of their written works. Sometimes one topic which was chosen by the researcher was given to the students and they were asked to write on that special topic. This data was studied with a view to find out the sources of errors committed by them. The errors were also arranged according to their probable sources like L1 transfer, Overgeneralization, False Cognate..., etc. After four assignments of this kind (error avoiding assignment), 12 learners were selected. Nine types of errors were identified, and their frequency computed. The results show that deletion of the article possess the greatest problem among the learners and this is because Persian doesn't have any equivalent for the definite article (*the*), while the equivalent for *the* in Arabic is *ال* and there may be other equivalents for *the* in other languages.

Khoshgowar(2002) had a research which is entitled English Article Production in Guided Conversation by Afghan Dari EFL Learners, analyzed patterns of use of English articles (*a/an, the, zero*) in guided conversations with Afghan Dari speakers who are intermediate or advanced English learners and who do have an article system in their primary language, Dari. In this research, six intermediate and six advanced learners participated by discussing similar topics (their first impressions of the USA, their life in Manhattan, their classes, and their future plans). These conversations were recorded and transcribed. The collected data were analyzed on the basis of referentiality, information status and various properties of nouns. The results indicate that the participants were most accurate in their production of the indefinite article ' *a/an* ' in referential and non-referential contexts with new information, the definite ' *the* ' in referential contexts with known information, while the *zero* was difficult for both ELP (intermediate) and Post-ELP (advanced) learners mostly in referential contexts.

Momenzade, Youhanaee, and Kassaian(2014), also tried to prove that Persian learners use fluctuation Hypothesis because Persian lacks definite article. Their study attempted to explore the acquisition of the English article system by Persian speakers. The sample taking part in their study consisted of forty-three Persian-speaking learners of English as a foreign language. Using data elicited through a grammaticality judgment test and a translation test from forty-three learners at three levels of grammatical knowledge, their study showed that learners had persistent difficulty in acquiring both definite and indefinite articles in English. Based on their study, it was only at the highly advanced level that learners showed mastery of the indefinite article but still remained non-native-like in their use of the definite article.

Ahmadi and Vahdani(2015) conducted a study on the EFL learners. They chose 45 learners from three different proficiency levels; they wanted to find out the relationship between their proficiency levels and their use of articles, also their performance in both recognition and production tests were tested. They found out that all learners had problems in their use of definite and

indefinite articles, even advanced learners failed to recognize and produce the correct articles in this research. This research proved that learners usually perform better in recognition tests than in production tests. We can say that overuse and underuse were common in all proficiency levels and misuse of articles happened not so often. The fact that learners tend to ignore using an article in a specific situation (underuse) showed that learners usually avoid using articles when they do not know how to apply them. Different types of articles seem to make different kind of burden for learners.

Ansari (1993) has an investigation with this title “non-generic use of the definite article by Persian EFL learners” in this study he chose his 49 subjects from undergraduate students of Tabriz University. They were placed in three different proficiency levels based on Cambridge placement test. Ninety-one sentences were used to test the use of *the*. Subjects were asked to put *the* where they think it’s necessary. After collecting data his results showed that by improving the proficiency level of learners, their ability in the use of article in structural and situational context improved too. But there is no difference between their proficiency level and cultural/textual use of articles. Also at intermediate level, students' over use of *the* will improve.

Thomas (1989) carried a research with 30 adult learners from 9 different L1s; German, French, Italian, Spanish and Greek (+ART languages) and Korean, Chinese, Japanese and Finnish (-ART languages). The ages of the participants ranged from 24 to 46. In order to collect data, participants were coupled within each group (-/+ ART languages). The results of the study revealed the fact that learners from the -ART languages tended to omit articles.

Atay(2010) carried a research in which he studied the article choices of learners from three different proficiency levels and effects of definiteness and specificity to their article choice were investigated. One hundred and twenty students from three groups of learners at different proficiency levels (40 elementary, 40 intermediate and 40 upper -intermediate students) were tested. The task consists of 40 short and contextualized dialogues. The target sentence in each dialogue is missing an article and learners were asked to fill the gap with an appropriate article; *a/an, the* or \emptyset on the bases of their understanding of the proceeding context. Dialogues in the task belong to four different contexts; i.e. definite/specific, definite/non-specific, indefinite/specific and indefinite/non-specific. His findings show that those L1 Turkish learners overused certain articles in certain contexts. In +definite/-specific and -definite/+specific contexts especially intermediate level learners overused the indefinite article *a* and definite article *the* respectively.

2.1 Objectives of the study

This study tries to find out the effects of teaching articles based on Huebner’s model on intermediate learners. The result of this study can somehow help learners and teachers to find out their difficult area in definite and indefinite articles and then teachers or learners themselves can improve that part; so knowing that teachers can teach articles in a more effective

way. The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between EFL learners' proficiency level and their use of English article system and to answer the following question:

a-Does teaching articles based on Huebner's model have any effect on intermediate EFL learners' use of articles?

3.1 Hypothesis

HO: Teaching articles based on the Huebner's model has no effects on learners' use of articles.

2. Methodology

1.2 Participants

The populations of this study were all the high school students in Chaboksar. Two schools were chosen randomly and according to the population of their learners, and after making sure about their levels, 30 students were chosen. The learners' ages varied from 14-16, both male and female learners were included. All the learners were in second grade of high school; in their book they had the concept of articles. All the learners were supposed to participate in this study, but as the researcher wanted a homogeneous samples he ran a proficiency test and learners who got 30-50 were involved in the test. After the test about 30 students were chosen.

2.2 Materials and procedure

For doing this study, thirty intermediate learners were chosen according to their performance on placement test. Then they were divided into two groups. Before the researcher started his experiment, he would run the pretest exam. It consists of 30 multiple questions which the researcher had adopted them from Modern English book 1. The tests are supposed to show learners performance on choosing articles. Thirteen tests were devoted to definite articles and 13 tests to indefinite articles 4 items were devoted to *zero* articles too. The reliability of the test is calculated about 0.65. After administrating the pre-test the researcher started the experiment. The first group which we called EX1 would receive the treatment based on Huebner's model. In each session the researcher taught one of the components of this model. In the first session he would discuss [-SR, +HK] (generics), which were marked with *a*, *the*, or *zero*. Then he would provide some examples to clarify them more, he would also ask them to say as many examples as they can. The second session, Type 2 [+SR, +HK], was taught which are referential definite and are marked with *the*. Again like the first session he provided them with some examples. Type 3, [+SR, -HK], includes first mentioned nouns, whose referent is identifiable to the speaker but not the listener, again like the previous sessions the researcher explained them to learners and ask them to mention more examples. e. Type 4 nouns, classified as [-SK, -HK] were taught in the last sessions. The second group or the control group consisted of 15 learners. They had the same proficiency level as EX group.

They had the same four sessions but they were not told anything about the classification. The researcher just explained them briefly about some special

situations in which they should use articles. To mention some he said about using articles with known nouns. They were given some examples as well.

3.2 Data analysis

The researcher analyzed the data obtained via calculating a t-test between the post – tests of definite and indefinite article scores of the experimental and the control groups of the study and ANCOVA between the pre – tests and post – tests of the experimental and control group of the study to see any progress happened from pre – test to the post – test or in fact during the treatment period.

3. Findings

The findings of this research showed that teaching articles based on Huebner’s Model had a positive effect on intermediate EFL learners’ use of articles .

Table 1

Descriptive analysis of the data of the control group of the study

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Er.	Std. Dev.	Variance
Preco	15	11.00	7.00	18.00	13.0000	.76842	2.97610	8.857
postco	15	9.00	9.00	18.00	15.2000	.64881	2.51282	6.314
Valid N (listwise)	15							

According to table (1), the total number of participants (N) was 15 in the pretest and posttest of the control group. The minimum score or the smallest score for pretest was 7 but the minimum score for posttest was 9 but the maximum score or the largest score for the pretest and posttest of the control group was 18. The mean score for the pretest and posttest of the control group has been shown as 13 and 15.2 respectively. The Standard Deviation has been calculated as 2.97 for the pretest and 2.51 for the posttest, that is the average deviation of all scores from the mean score of the pretest and posttest was 2.97, and 2.51 respectively. The variance for the pretest scores was 8.85 and for the posttest scores, 6.31 . The valid N has been shown as 15 which referred to the number of non-missing values of the control group, that is, all the participants in the control group participated in the research. The descriptive analysis of the pretest and the posttest of the experimental group have been shown in table (2).

Table 2

Descriptive analysis of the data of the experimental group of the study

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Er.	Std. Dev.	Variance
PreEx	15	10.00	7.00	17.00	11.9333	.78962	3.05817	9.352
PostEx	15	7.00	13.00	20.00	15.8000	.62640	2.42605	5.886
Valid (listwise)	N 15							

According to table (2), the total number of participants (N) has been 15 in the pretest and posttest of the experimental group. The minimum score or the smallest score for the pretest was 7 but this value was 13.00 for the posttest. Also, the maximum score for posttest was 20 while this value for pretest was 17. For the standard deviation obtained for the experimental group, there sounds to be more variability among the pretest of listening scores than the scores in the posttest of the listening. This may show that the participants' posttest scores being more homogenous after presenting the treatment of the study (Using Huebner's model). There were 15 participants and there has been no missing value which means that all participants participated in the experiment of this study.

Table 3
The T-test result of the study

		t-test for Equality of Means				
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Article use	Equal variances assumed	3.004	28	.006	2.40000	.79881

According to table (3), the t-test results of the study between the posttest scores of both experimental and control groups of the study are shown. The observed t value was calculated to be 3.004. The degree of freedom (df) was 28. The level of significance (sig.2-tailed) was calculated as to be .006 which has been used in calculating the data for the rejection or support of the hypothesis of the study. The mean difference was shown as 2.4, that is, the difference between the mean scores of the post-tests of the control group and the experimental group of this study was calculated as 2.4. The next inferential analysis of data in this study was indicated to be the degree of covariance between the pretest and the posttest of using articles in both the experimental and control groups of the study.

Table 4
Covariance analysis of the control group of the study

Source	Type II Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	69.750(a)	1	69.750	48.619	.000
article	20.777	1	20.777	14.483	.002
Pretestco	69.750	1	69.750	48.619	.000
Error	18.650	13	1.435		
Total	3554.000	15			
Corrected Total	88.400	14			

a R Squared = .789 (Adjusted R Squared = .773)

Table 5
Covariance Analysis of the Experimental Group of the Study

Source	Type II Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	62.968(a)	1	62.968	42.126	.000
articles	49.050	1	49.050	32.815	.000
pretestEX	62.968	1	62.968	42.126	.000
Error	19.432	13	1.495		
Total	3827.000	15			
Corrected Total	82.400	14			

According to tables (4 and 5), the covariance between the two sets of pretest and posttest scores in the experimental group is 48.61 and 42.12 in the control group of the study. This means that the scores of experimental group is higher than the control group, so the experimental group has undergone a progress compared to the control group whose score is lower than the experimental group. Thus, it can be concluded that the experimental group worked better than the control group because of being treated with traditional method of teaching.

4. Discussion

First of all, according to the descriptive analysis of the given data and based on the table (1), (2), the mean scores of the pretest and posttest of the control group was 13 and 15.20 and for the experimental group was 11.93 and 15.80 respectively. So, these two tables showed that there was no significant change in the mean scores of the control group, but this change was very significant in the mean scores of the experimental group and it is an evidence for rejection of the hypothesis.

In addition, the results of the T-Test in table (3) showed that the observed t value was calculated by the SPSS was 3.004 (t observed = 3.004) while the critical t value determined on the basis of considering df and the 2-tailed significance level of 0.05 ($p=0.05$) was 2.048. So, the observed t value was higher than the critical t value and high enough to reject the null hypothesis of the study. Also, it was presented in the table (3), the level of significance for two-tailed value calculated by the SPSS to be .006. This value was less than 0.05 (based on the SPSS regulations) and it confirmed the rejection of the hypothesis. It could be concluded that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the posttests of the control group and experimental group. There is no chance for calculating the difference between the means of the posttests of the study, so it shows that using Huebner's Model is so effective on using articles of Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

According to tables (4 and 5), it was shown that the rejection of the hypothesis of the study by indicating the experimental group participants' progress from pretest to the posttest of the study. The covariance value between the pretest and posttest scores in the experimental group was

higher than of the control group. This meant that using Huebner's Model has affected the Iranian intermediate EFL learners' use of articles. Also, the covariance value between the pretest to the posttest scores in the control group was lower than that of experimental group.

5. Conclusions

As it has been mentioned earlier in this study, articles are important for learners' native like performance, while most of the learners tend to omit or overuse articles and this make their English somehow artificial. As the findings of this research showed all learners have problems in their use of articles. Most of the course books that are taught in language schools, lack a precise guide for definite and indefinite articles, which can be another issue to address for further studies. Further researches are recommended on different learners especially in highschools that have been exposed to English more. Also it will be a good idea to have a research on different types of definite and indefinite articles separately based on different model. A short text with missing articles can be used to find out learners' production ability; designing a test in which learner can produce articles orally or write a short paragraph will be advantageous. Designing a teaching method based on these findings can be useful, also if teachers are eager to do an action research on their own classes about the use of articles for different levels, this subject is recommended.

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Concept-Based Instruction on English Past Perfect

Chi Wui Ng¹

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Helen Zhao²

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

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Abstract

Grounded upon the Vygotskian sociocultural theory, Concept-Based Instruction (CBI) is a pedagogical grammar method viewing semantic and pragmatic concepts as minimal units of grammar instruction and laying emphasis on materialization, verbalization, and internalization of concepts. Attributed to complexity of inherent temporal and aspectual concepts, the English tense and aspect system can be efficaciously taught through CBI. This paper provides a brief overview of CBI as well as the English tense and aspect system, which is followed by presentation of a case study focusing specifically on instruction on the English past perfect through CBI. Results of the pilot study indicate that CBI is capable of advancing learners' conceptual knowledge on and ameliorating their grammatical performance of target structures. That said, implemented in a laboratory setting in lieu of a classroom, teaching procedures of the case study put forward in this paper ought to be executed in genuine classroom contexts and require more in-depth investigations into its applicability and pedagogical efficacy in authentic classrooms.

Keywords Sociocultural theory, Concept-Based Instruction, grammar instruction, English tense and aspect, past perfect

1. Introduction

It is a no-brainer that myriads of pedagogical methodologies of disparate theoretical bases have been devised by applied linguists as well as educationalists in resolution of multifarious pitfalls confronted by learners in the course of grammar learning. In light of learners' imprecise grammatical knowledge out of inaccurate rules of thumb prevalently found in foreign language textbooks, Negueruela (2008) built a general instructional model and put forward Concept-Based Instruction (CBI), a pedagogical grammar method aiming at enhancing learners' explicit understanding of fundamental grammatical concepts. The English tense and aspect system is conceptually complicated and notoriously challenging to foreign language learners (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). The current article adopted CBI as the theoretical framework for structuring L2 tense-aspect instruction and empirically tested its efficacy among advanced learners of English in Hong Kong.

¹ Chi Wui Ng is an undergraduate student majoring English Language Education in the Faculty of Education, the Chinese University of Hong Kong. (Corresponding author, ngchiwui@link.cuhk.edu.hk)

² Helen Zhao is Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her research interests include usage-based approaches to second language acquisition, cognitive linguistics and its applications in bilingualism and second language learning, pedagogical grammar, and experimentalized Computer-Assisted Language Learning (eCALL). helenz@cuhk.edu.hk

1.1. *Concept-Based Instruction*

Concept-Based Instruction (CBI) is grounded upon the sociocultural theory (SCT), which was first proposed by the Soviet developmental psychologist Vygotsky and incorporated into second language learning by a group of applied linguists headed by Lantolf. Being a cognitive theory pinpointing the social nature of mental activity, SCT contends that human consciousness results from the dialectical interaction between the brain and auxiliary stimuli appropriated through socially organized activities (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). On the whole, the theory rests upon several central notions: mediation, social interaction, and internalization, all of which lay the basis of the SCT as well as CBI.

First and foremost, mediation is undoubtedly the crux of the SCT. Denoting creation and use of artificial auxiliary means of acting, mediation is founded upon the assumption that humans' cognitive activity, in particular higher forms of mental activity, is regulated by physical and symbolic tools created by human cultures; such a regulation process is denoted as mediation (Lantolf, 2000, 2011). Mediation is scaled into three orders: metacognitive mediation (Karpov & Haywood, 1998), cognitive mediation (Karpov & Haywood, 1998), and 'leading activities' (Vygotsky, 1978). Originating in interpersonal communication, the first order of mediation (metacognitive mediation) employs language as a mediator in that linguistic structures are construed as representing conceptual structures in the human mind, so human thought can be mediated by language via verbalization or a process named 'languaging', which refers to meaning making and construction of knowledge through language (Brooks, Swain, Lapkin, & Knouzi, 2010; Swain, 2006). Also known as cognitive mediation, the second order of mediation adopts culturally constructed tools such as spontaneous and scientific concepts as mediators to shape humans' perception of the environment (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). The third order of mediation regulates human thought through societal structures and institutions such as education (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). Associated with a macro-level context, the third order of mediation influences and interacts with the remaining two orders of mediation to regulate humans' cognition.

Language being one of the mediators of human thought, social interaction, which necessitates extensive use of language, provides a context for mediation to take place. It has been discovered that learning can most productively take place in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is defined as the difference between learners' current developmental level as determined through independent problem solving and a potential developmental level as determined through problem solving under guidance (Vygotsky, 1978). Should learners be provided with assistance in terms of scaffolding, which entails supportive dialogues (e.g., collaborative dialogues and verbal feedback) prompting learners to solve problems, their mental activity can be regulated through languaging and directed to perceive the world in a certain way (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006); it is then likely for them to achieve desired learning outcomes and reach a higher level of development. Regulating learners' thoughts and assisting them in moving forward within the ZPD through languaging, social interaction is an indispensable component of mediation as well as learning.

Both mediation and social interaction undeniably pave way for internalization of knowledge, which is a process of development co-constructed intra- and interpersonally (Winegar, 1997). Having undergone the process of other-regulation, whereby mental activity is regulated by the external environment such as physical and symbolic tools as well as social interaction with other individuals, learners will eventually be capable of internalizing knowledge by moving it to their individual consciousness such that self-regulation, whereby cognition is regulated individually via self-talk or inner speech in lieu of any external tools, becomes plausible (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In other words, internalization is a transformation of materialized, perceptual, or verbal actions, which are contingent upon artifacts or speech, into mental action (Gal'perin, 1992); such a process is crucial in that only when knowledge has been internalized do learners manage to apply the knowledge in their later performance in an autonomous fashion (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Internalization thereby constitutes the ultimate goal of learning under the paradigm of the SCT.

On the basis of the aforementioned cornerstones of the SCT, CBI has been proposed in a bid to internalize learners' knowledge by means of mediation and social interaction. The instructional paradigm holds the tenet that concepts are deemed to be the overarching mediators and so constitute the minimal unit of instruction; they ought to be materialized to learners as symbolic tools and verbalized by learners so that they can eventually be internalized into learners' mind (Gal'perin, 1969). A typical teaching cycle of CBI comprises three phases. Characterized as the orienting basis of mental action, the initiating phase is intended to present learners with relevant concepts via material tools such as charts and diagrams, capitalizing upon those symbolic artifacts to mediate learners' thoughts (Gal'perin, 1969). Having acquired comprehensive understanding of concepts at the first phase, students are expected to carry out verbal action, freeing themselves from concrete material tools and verbalizing relevant concepts in new contexts individually or collaboratively; this provides opportunities for learners to partake in languaging and social interaction, both of which facilitate mediation and internalization (Gal'perin, 1969). The final stage of the instructional model is inner speech, when knowledge has been internalized, and concepts have become completely mental; learners can utilize those concepts with automaticity without hinging on any external tools (Gal'perin, 1969).

To promote second language learning, CBI lays emphasis on materialization, verbalization, and internalization of semantic and pragmatic concepts underlying grammar structures. Possessing a tendency to explain grammar structures through rules of thumb, which are found to be incomplete and unsystematic, the overwhelming majority of foreign language textbooks hinder learners' understanding of target structures (Negueruela & Lantolf, 2006). It is reckoned that only by developing conceptual understanding of semantic and pragmatic concepts underlying target structures and linking those concepts with formal attributes of language can learners master those structures accurately and apply them in communicative contexts (Negueruela & Lantolf, 2006). For this reason, it is of vital importance to

employ CBI in grammar instruction and base grammar lessons on concepts. Intended to arouse learners' consciousness of conceptual knowledge at the level of understanding by means of materialization and verbalization, CBI is unquestionably an explicit learning model (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). Even though proceduralization of knowledge is taken no heed of by CBI, internalization of knowledge is heavily stressed and intended to be achieved by means of mediation and social interaction.

For all its solid theoretical foundations, the potentials of CBI have not been given enough attention in foreign language classrooms, and research on this pedagogy is limited. One of the most prominent studies of the incorporation of CBI into second language instruction is the one conducted by Negueruela (2003), which is a qualitative study of a university class adopting CBI to teach Spanish verbal aspects. Having been presented with materialized concepts and partaken in verbalization activities during the class, learners were discovered to be capable of providing better definitions and exhibiting substantial amelioration in the use of Spanish verbal aspects. Ganem-Gutierrez and Harun (2010) attempted to incorporate CBI into instruction on the English tense and aspect system in a university classroom; learners were found to acquire deeper understanding of the tense and aspect system after receiving conceptual explanations with the aid of material tools whilst verbalization played a regulatory role in the learning process. Despite its pedagogical efficacy corroborated by the two aforementioned studies, being a rather new pedagogical methodology, CBI assuredly has to be studied in greater depth, particularly concerning its applicability in distinct contexts.

1.2. *English Tense and Aspect*

The tense and aspect (TA) system consists of two separate but interrelated notions: tense and aspect, the former of which denotes temporal locations of situations whilst the latter entails internal dimensions of situations (Smith, 1997). Aspect can be further divided into two types: grammatical aspect and lexical aspect. Both tense and aspect are encoded by elements in verb phrases, each of which possesses one full verb as a mandatory component as well as auxiliary verbs as optional constituents (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990). Tense and grammatical aspect are always instantiated in terms of grammatical forms within verb phrases such as distinct verb forms of full verbs and discrepant auxiliary verbs, whereas lexical aspect is inherently carried by meanings of full verbs. Tense and aspect interact with each other to express specific temporal and aspectual meanings.

Referring to when a certain situation occurs, tense predominantly involves two concepts: remoteness and factuality. The English present and past tenses, which are marked by the present and past forms of full verbs or operators respectively, delineate factual situations, and the distinction between the two lies merely in remoteness of situations: the former depicts situations that are non-remote from the moment of utterance whilst the latter depicts those that are remote from the moment of utterance (Yule, 2014). In contrast with the present and past tenses, the English future and hypothetical tenses delineate non-factual situations and are marked by modal auxiliaries (Yule, 2014). The future tense, which is indicated by the auxiliary 'will', depicts possibilities that are neither factual nor remote

whereas the hypothetical tense, which is indicated by the auxiliary ‘would’, depicts non-factual yet remote possibilities (Yule, 2014). Besides temporal distance, psychological or social distance, which is unrelated to time, can also be expressed through tenses.

Akin to tense, grammatical aspect, which denotes how a situation is perceived, is also encoded by grammatical forms within verb phrases. The simple aspect, which requires no additional grammatical marker, views situations as unified wholes that are neither in progress nor in retrospect (Yule, 2014). Viewed internally, situations taking the progressive aspect, which are indicated by the auxiliary ‘be’ followed by present participles of full verbs, are seen as in progress (Yule, 2014). On the other hand, viewed externally, situations taking the perfect aspect, which are indicated by the auxiliary ‘have’ followed by past participles of full verbs, are seen from a retrospective perspective in relation to a certain reference time (Yule, 2014). The perfect progressive aspect can be yielded through combination of the perfect and progressive aspects to describe ongoing situations viewed retrospectively (Yule, 2014). Never can grammatical aspect be treated alone, but it should be interpreted along with lexical aspect so that internal dimensions of situations can be holistically deciphered.

Encoded by full verbs, lexical aspect is chiefly concerned with the concepts of dynamicity, durativity, and telicity; these concepts largely categorize verbs into four types (Vendler, 1967). Dynamicity distinguishes state verbs, which denote constant and stable states, from other verbs, which entail dynamic actions, whilst durativity distinguishes achievement verbs, which denote punctual and isolated actions, from other verbs, which entail states or actions extending through time. Amongst all verbs, accomplishment and achievement verbs are telic, implying that actions depicted possess certain end-points, whereas state and activity verbs are atelic, meaning that states or actions depicted possess no end-points (Vendler, 1967). Discrepant categories of verbs, which possess distinct lexical aspects, can be combined with the same grammatical aspect to convey dissimilar meanings.

Attributed to inherent complexity of temporal and aspectual concepts involved, the English TA system poses much difficulty to second language learners (Salaberry, 2000; Ayoun & Salaberry, 2008). In spite of their presence in all languages, tense and aspect are categorized and marked in unique ways across languages, so it is particularly difficult for second or foreign language learners to acquire the TA system of the target language. Even advanced learners of English exhibiting high formal accuracy of TA markers are found to possess difficulty mastering the semantics of the English TA system accurately (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992). These learners are suggested by the Aspect Hypothesis to possess a disposition to heavily rely on lexical aspects of verbs in lieu of temporal and aspectual meanings to mark grammatical markers (Andersen & Shirai, 1994). This can be an outcome of their lack of accurate and thorough understanding of the English TA system. Aiming at developing learners’ deep understanding of semantic concepts underlying target structures, CBI is considered an appropriate pedagogical methodology that can be drawn upon to teach the TA system (Negueruela, 2003; Lantolf & Poehner, 2014).

Seldom can the entirety of the English TA system be taught at a time, but each lesson apparently ought to focus on one particular tense and aspect; the past perfect is selected as the target structure of the current study. Formed by a combination of the past tense and the perfect aspect, the past perfect is instantiated in terms of verb phrases with the auxiliary 'had' followed by past participles of full verbs; such a combination delineates situations viewed retrospectively in relation to a past reference time (Yule, 2014). Should the past perfect be taken by state verbs, the stative usage is yielded to depict constant states in the past that extended to a moment of retrospection that was also in the past (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990). On the other hand, should the past perfect be taken by dynamic verbs, the event usage is yielded to depict past events that had been completed at a moment of retrospection in the past (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990). It is opined that complexity of concepts of remoteness, retrospection, stativity, and dynamicity effectuates learners' difficulty in mastering the two usages of the past perfect.

In particular, learners' first language being highly influential in second language learning, absence of an equivalent TA system or tense and aspectual inflectional markers in the Chinese language makes it especially difficult for Chinese learners of English to interpret conceptual meanings of English tenses and aspects or master the entirety of the system (Hong, 2008; McArthur, 2002; Odlin, 1989); the English TA system has thereby be notorious for being problematic for Chinese learners of English.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

A laboratory-based case study with 10 participants, all of whom were undergraduate students majoring in English at a university in Hong Kong, were conducted in a laboratory to incorporate CBI into instruction on the English past perfect. All the participants were advanced learners of English, with an IELTS score of above 7. The participants took content courses in English literature and linguistics and did not take grammar lessons in their university education. All of them expressed difficulties with the more advanced uses of English tenses in writing. None of them had prior exposure to CBI or research on grammar instruction.

2.2 Procedure

A pre-test was administered prior to the instruction to elicit participants' prior knowledge on the target structure and provide baseline data for analysis. A post-test, of which the format was identical to that of the pre-test, was conducted following the intervention to reveal the pedagogical efficacy of CBI in enhancing participants' accurate understanding of the target structure. The test materials are described in the Measurements section. The study lasted for approximately three hours.

Guided by the framework of CBI, the teaching procedures were designed on the basis of the aforementioned stages proposed by Gal'perin (1969), involving materialization, verbalization, and internalization of semantic concepts underlying the target structure.

2.1.1 Materialization of concepts

Concurring with the first stage of the teaching cycle of CBI, the procedure of materialization of concepts aimed at presenting students with semantic concepts underlying the past perfect by means of a flow chart as well as a diagram; usage of the past perfect was also introduced to students via sample sentences from an authentic English text. The stative and event usages of the past perfect were explained by the teacher (also the first author of the current article) with the aid of a flow chart (see Figure 1) and two diagrams (see Figure 2), which mediated students' thoughts through materialization of semantic concepts underlying the past perfect.

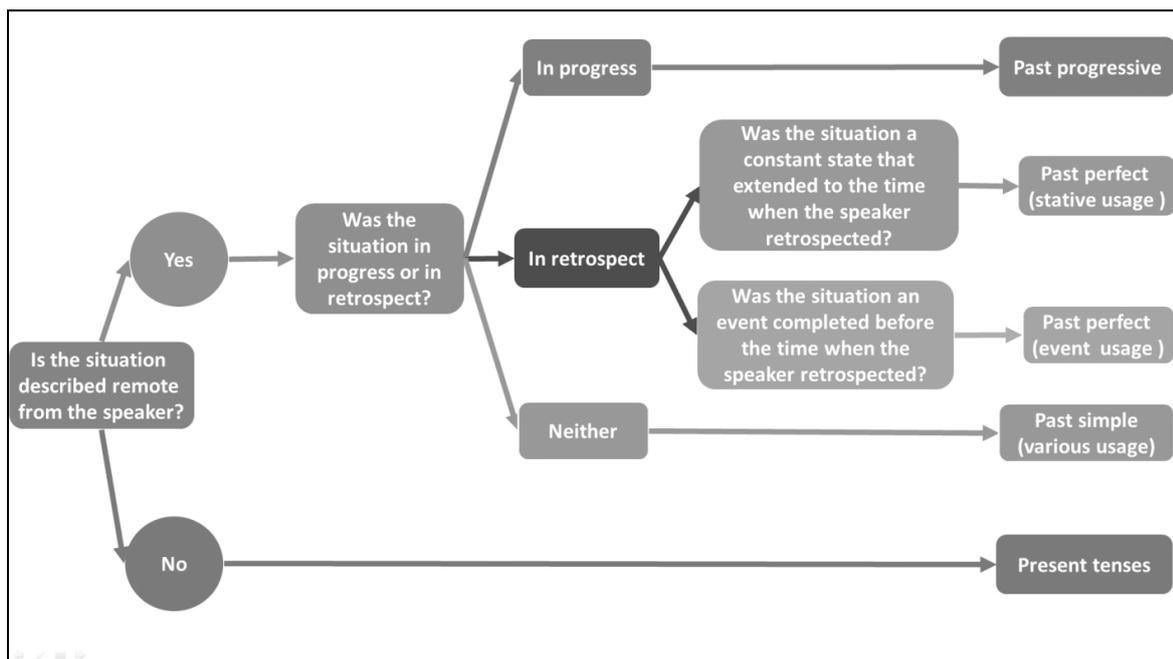


Figure 1. Flow chart used as materialization of concepts

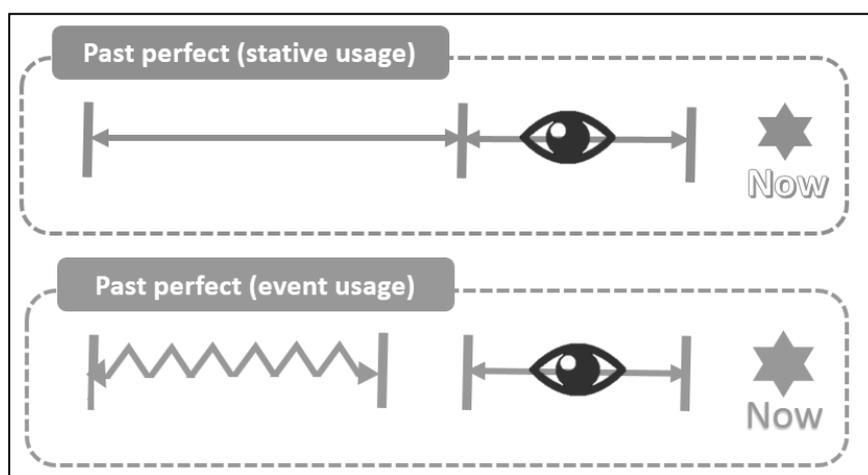


Figure 2. Diagrams used as materialization of concepts

The flow chart guided students to make judgments on choices of tense and aspect; in particular, it illustrates circumstances under which the past perfect ought to be used. The flow chart was complemented by two diagrams. A point annotated as 'now', which represents the moment of utterance, is dissociated from other components in both diagrams; this illustrates the concept of remoteness, which implies a distance between the present and the occurrence of the situations depicted. Moreover, an eye, which represents a moment of retrospection, is present in both diagrams to illustrate the concept of retrospection, which implies looking back. Concepts of stativity and dynamicity are represented by the straight and zigzag lines in the diagrams showing the stative and event usages of the past perfect respectively. Only by having their minds mediated by semantic concepts presented by material tools could students acquire accurate declarative knowledge of the meaning of the past perfect (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). The process of materialization was thereby infallibly an all-important component of the teaching procedures.

Notwithstanding their essence, rarely could semantic concepts be presented in an isolated fashion, but their application in authentic contexts ought to be introduced to students explicitly so that students could deploy the past perfect in everyday language production. Each usage of the past perfect was illustrated with one sample sentence extracted from an authentic text; the temporal and aspectual meaning conveyed by the sentence was explained through semantic concepts that had just been materialized to the students. Not only did sample sentences enable students to decipher application of the past perfect in authentic contextualized usage, they also drew students' attention to the form of the past perfect, assisting them in establishing a connection between semantic concepts and verb forms.

2.1.2 Verbalization

Complying with the second stage of the teaching cycle of CBI, the procedure of verbalization was intended to provide opportunities for students to verbalize learnt semantic concepts underlying the past perfect in new contexts via collaborative dialogues in pairs. Provided with five extracts of authentic text, each of which comprised two new sentences with the use of the past perfect, students were required to work in pairs and explain the usage of the past perfect to each other using relevant semantic concepts. More specifically, they were required to find out the past perfect verb form, identify the moment of retrospection, and explain whether the state or event usage of the past perfect was employed in each sentence. Engaging in verbalization through collaborative dialogues, students were provided with opportunities for languaging and social interaction, where their thoughts could be mediated through language, and they could be pushed to a higher level of development within the ZPD through peer scaffolding (Gal'perin, 1969; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Above all, facilitating other-regulation by means of languaging and peer scaffolding, verbalization eventually paved way for internalization of learnt semantic concepts into students' minds, which was the ultimate goal of learning under the paradigm of SCT as well as CBI (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Playing such an integral role in students'

learning, verbalization was decidedly equally accentuated as materialization of concepts in CBI.

Barely was inner speech, the ultimate stage of a typical cycle of CBI, explicitly shown in the aforementioned teaching procedures albeit it was perceived to be students' expected learning outcome after completion of all planned activities. Having internalized semantic concepts underlying the past perfect through the verbalization activity, students could proceed from dialogic speech to inner speech, understanding and utilizing those concepts without any material or verbal aids (Gal'perin, 1969). All three stages of a typical teaching cycle of CBI were thereby incorporated into the teaching procedures of the current study.

2.3 *Measurements*

Each of the tests administered in the case study comprised three parts (see Appendix for test items). Participants were provided with short texts with blanks in the first part, and they were required to fill in the blanks with appropriate verb forms of given verbs; this type of question required them to apply distinct tenses and aspects in context. In the second part, participants were provided with two sentences, where the stative and event usages of the past perfect were employed respectively, and asked to explain the usage of the past perfect in the two sentences. Hinted that time can be represented in a spatial dimension, participants were finally asked to draw diagram(s) to illustrate the usage of the past perfect in the last part of the tests. Students' responses in both tests were analyzed in length by both quantitative and qualitative means to yield a comprehensive picture of efficacy of the aforementioned pedagogical procedures.

3. Findings and Discussion

A comparison between participants' performance in the pre-test and post-test demonstrates that not only did learners develop more accurate conceptual knowledge of the past perfect after the intervention, they also managed to apply the past perfect more accurately.

To begin with, the mean accuracy score of the blank-filling test escalated from 0.25 in the pre-test to 0.94 in the post-test, which indicates a remarkable accuracy increment in the production of the past perfect in obligatory contexts; this suggests that CBI benefit participants' grammatical performance.

In the second part of the tests, which involved written verbalization of usage of the past perfect, explication of usage of the past perfect in given linguistic data using more accurate semantic concepts was observed in the post-test in that concepts of remoteness and retrospection were absent in the pre-test yet present in the post-test. For instance, a participant Sally (pseudonym) explicated usage of the past perfect by saying "(one action) took place before (another action)" and "(one state) up to a time point in the past" in the pre-test; all explication was correlated with the concept of time without incorporation of concepts of remoteness or retrospection. In the post-test, Sally made use of diagrams (see Figure 3) with a distance between "now" and the situation referred to as well as presence of "an eye", which present concepts of remoteness and retrospection, to elucidate usage of the past

perfect in given sentences without being prompted to do so. Written verbalization of another participant Sam (pseudonym), who explicated usage of the past perfect by linguistic means in both the pre-test and the post-test, also provides conclusive evidence for advancement in conceptual knowledge on the past perfect after the intervention. In the pre-test, Sam wrote that the past perfect was used because “(one action) happened before (another action)” and “(on state happened in the past and that is not until present”); such written verbalization was comparable to that of Sally in the pre-test and represented semantic concepts underlying the past perfect inaccurately. Nevertheless, having received the intervention, Sam identified the “retrospection point” either explicitly or implicitly using phrases such as “look back on” (see Figure 4).

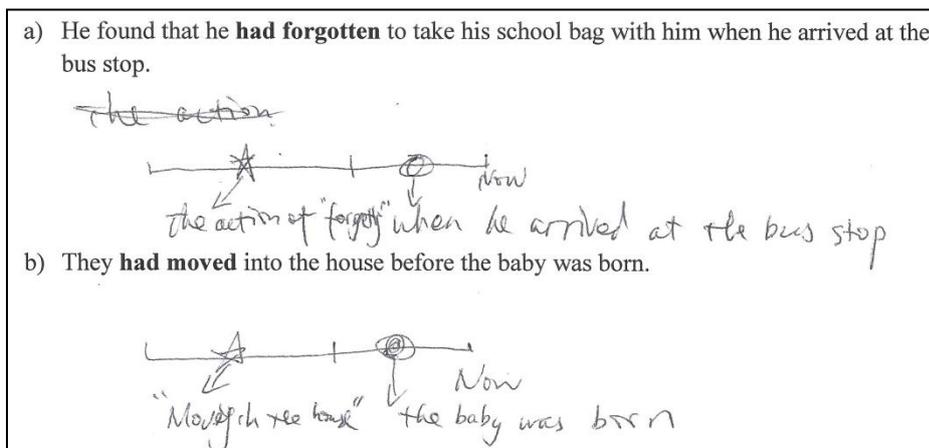


Figure 3. Sally's response in post-test written verbalization

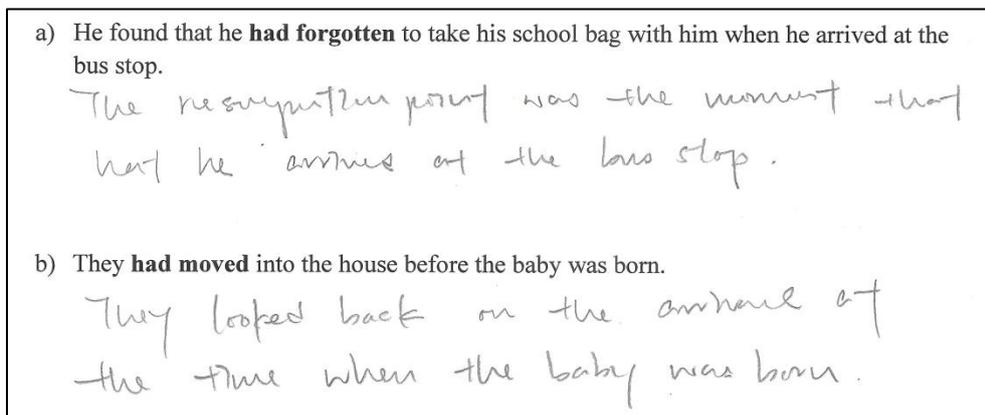


Figure 4. Sam's response in post-test written verbalization

From the above samples, it is evident that both Sally and Sam began to feel more comfortable materializing concepts and interpreting the past perfect either using diagrams or written language as mediational tools after the intervention. Their post-test written verbalizations suggest entrance of concepts of remoteness and retrospection into their conceptual thinking after undergoing processes of materialization and verbalization of concepts during the intervention (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014).

Participants' elucidation of usage of the past perfect using diagrams in the post-test also manifests more mature and comprehensive mastery of concepts when compared to that in the pre-test; performance of another participant Amy (pseudonym) has been selected as another case for detailed examination. Asked to illustrate the usage of the past perfect using diagrams in the pre-test, Amy represented the past perfect by means of a timeline (see Figure 5), revealing the traditional method whereby the English TA system is taught in elementary and secondary schools in Hong Kong. The concept of retrospection was absent in the timeline drawn by her; this largely resulted from absence of such an essential concept in teacher's presentation of the past perfect (Curriculum Development Council, 1999). In contrast, having received instruction on the past perfect via the CBI intervention, Amy was capable of drawing her own diagram to represent concepts of remoteness and retrospection underlying the past perfect in the post-test; this is indicated by a distance between "now" and the situation referred to as well as presence of "an eye" in her post-test diagram. She did not simply mimic the two diagrams being taught during the intervention. Instead, she managed to create her own material tools for mediation of thoughts; more specifically, she modified the diagrams presented by combining both usages of the past perfect into one diagram. Such a merge sacrificed the semantic distinction between stative and event usages of the past perfect, yet it reflects that Amy had internalized the concepts partially by simplifying and streamlining conceptualization, which may facilitate better storage and retrieval of schematic information for future use (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014).

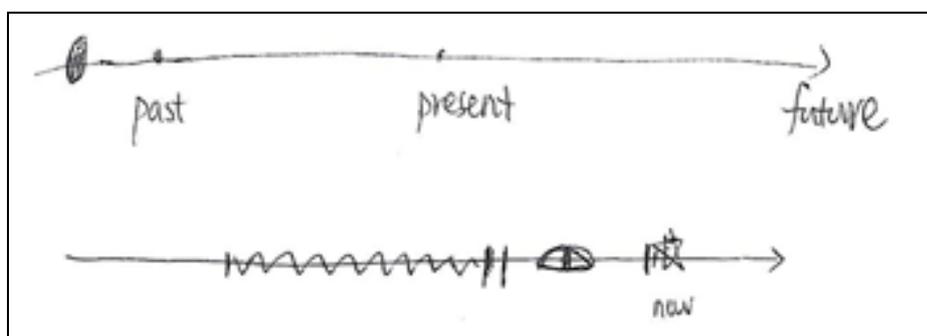


Figure 5. Diagrams drawn by Amy in pre-test (above) and post-test (below)

The aforementioned findings of the current study is concurrent with findings of previous relevant studies (e.g. Ganem-Gutierrez & Harun, 2010 and Negueruela, 2003), which suggest that CBI is effectual in advancing second language learners' conceptual development and deepening their conceptual understanding of target language structures. Attributed to its pedagogical efficacy discovered in antecedent and the current studies, CBI is reckoned to be a desirable instructional approach to be implemented in second or foreign language classrooms in various linguistic and educational contexts for the sake of learners' language learning.

One particular issue pertaining to such a pilot case study that deserves attention is whether it is necessary to present learners with two distinct usages of the past perfect. During the intervention, a participant reflected that she could use the past perfect appropriately without an ability to distinguish between the stative and event usages as long as she deciphered the concepts of remoteness and retrospection accurately. Participants' conceptualization of the past perfect using one diagram (instead of two) in the post-test also indicates their difficulty in making a distinction between the two usages of the past perfect. As a matter of fact, a fine-grained distinction between the two usages provides learners with precise understanding of concepts underlying the past perfect; this necessitates accurate comprehension and production. That said, instructional content ought to be planned in accordance with learners' levels of language proficiency and cognitive maturity. Hardly is it plausible to expect learners at preliminary stages of cognitive development to comprehend the distinction between a stable state and a dynamic action; in this case, it is more practical and feasible to present learners merely with concepts of remoteness and retrospection in lieu of a fine distinction between the two usages on the past perfect during instruction. Even if learners fail to make a distinction between the two usages, they may still manage to comprehend and produce such a verb form fairly appropriately, especially for those less complicated instances of the past perfect.

4. **Conclusions**

By and large, it is in evidence that CBI is a theoretically-informed alternative to traditional pedagogical grammar methods that can compensate for the inadequacy of rules of thumb of present in many a second or foreign language grammar book. Driven by SCT, CBI upholds that grammar lessons ought to be planned and designed on the basis of semantic and pragmatic concepts, which have to be materialized to mediate students' thoughts, verbalized through social interaction, and eventually internalized into students' minds with an ultimate goal of proceduralized application in real-life language use. Being an attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice, the current case study presented in this article incorporates CBI into instruction on the English past perfect, placing stress on temporal and aspectual concepts underlying the English tense and aspect system. It is hoped that the planned teaching procedures in the case study can be implemented in genuine ESL and EFL classrooms so that more insights into applicability and pedagogical efficacy of CBI in authentic contexts can be yielded; this can provide directions for further research on this under-researched instructional paradigm.

The current study is not without limitations. The study involved merely 10 participants and solely one instructional session. Scarcely are our findings meant to be generalized to the entirety of the population of second language learners as well as other target structures. Instead, only does it provide preliminary ideas of potential strengths and limitations of the pedagogical approach. Follow-up studies engaging more participants and focusing on a greater variety of target structures ought to be conducted to verify results of such a small-scale study and illuminate directions of application of the

pedagogy in authentic classrooms. In particular, implementation of CBI in classrooms with learners at distinct levels of language proficiency is necessary to examine pedagogical efficacy of the approach. Meanwhile, usage of CBI for instruction on other language structures, such as other verb forms in the English TA system, English modality, articles, and prepositions, will provide a more comprehensive picture of pedagogical efficacy of the approach in L2 grammar instruction in general.

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Appendix

(A) Pre-test

1. Fill in the blanks with the appropriate verb forms.

- a) Soon after the dog _____ (eat) the sausage, it _____ (start) to behave strangely. It wouldn't stop shaking his head, and he couldn't stand up properly. Mrs. Andrew thought, 'Perhaps the sausage _____ (go) bad.'
- b) Once a man named Grant _____ (find) a box of old papers in a room in the top of his house. He didn't like old things, so he decided to burn them all. He _____ (get) rid of most of them when an old letter _____ (catch) his eye.

2. Explain why the past perfect is used in the following two sentences respectively.

- a) She **had left** before I arrived.
- b) The relative humidity of Hong Kong **had been** stable by yesterday.

3. Illustrate the usage(s) of the past perfect using diagram(s).
(Hint: Time can be represented in a spatial dimension.)

(B) Post-test

1. Fill in the blanks with the appropriate verb forms.

- a) Mary went to the kitchen and _____ (find) Henry there. He _____ (finish) eating the food Mary _____ (prepare) for him.
- b) I saw the house when I first moved there. It _____ (be) empty for about a year and was beginning to need some repairs, but the house was exactly what I wanted. However, by the time I _____ (put) together enough money, I learnt that a property developer _____ (buy) it and planned to turn it into a hotel.

2. Explain why the past perfect is used in the following two sentences respectively.

- a) He found that he **had forgotten** to take his school bag with him when he arrived at the bus stop.
- b) They **had moved** into the house before the baby was born.

3. Illustrate the usage(s) of the past perfect using diagram(s).
(Hint: Time can be represented in a spatial dimension.)