The Effect of Overseas Language Training on the Development of Foreign Language Accuracy

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해외어학연수의 외국어 정확성 향상에 대한 효과

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Abstract The Journal of Industrial Management Society in Republic of Korea. In order to explore the effect of overseas language training on the development of foreign language accuracy, this study investigates the errors in English compositions produced by 27 Korean university students who received overseas language training for 15 weeks. For data collection, students were made to take two tests, a pretest and a posttest, a semester apart. The differences in composition elements and errors between the two tests were examined and statistical analyses were performed. Results showed that while the average length of the compositions and sentences increased, the number of sentences decreased in the posttest. Also, more errors were found in the posttest where the students tried to construct more complex sentence structures. The students' ability to generate sentences were found to have improved, while their competence in using grammatical elements accurately within sentences did not see great improvement. This implies that overseas language training was not effective for aiding the development of one's grammatical accuracy of a foreign language over a 15-week period for the students.

Key Words : Overseas language training, foreign language accuracy, grammatical competence, English composition, error analysis

요 약 본 연구는 해외어학연수의 외국어 정확성 향상에 대한 효과를 조명하기 위해 한 학기 동안 해외대학에서 어학연수를 받은 27명의 한국 대학생들이 한 학기의 시간차를 두고 작성한 두 영작문 간의 차이와 오류들을 조사하고, 그러한 차이가 통계적으로 유의미한지를 검정하여 외국어 정확도 면에서의 변화를 분석하였다. 어학연수 이후에 영작문의 길이와 문장의 길이가 증가하였으나 전체 문장수는 감소하였다. 학생들은 더 많은 수의 단어를 더 복잡한 구조의 문장에서 사용하여 오류의 수도 증가하였다. 이를 볼 때, 어학연수 이후 학생들의 문장 생성능력이 향상되고 복잡한 형태의 문장들을 쓰려고 시도한 것을 알 수 있다. 본 연구의 결과는 한 학기 동안 해외어학연수를 받은 이후 대체로 학생들의 문장생성능력은 다소 증진하였지만, 문법적 요소들을 문장 속에서 정확하게 사용하는 문법적 정확성은 크게 향상하지 않은 것으로 나타났다. 이는 비록 해외 어학연수가 집중적으로 목표언어만 학습하여 언어입력을 확대할 수 있을 뿐만 아니라, 목표언어에 자연스럽게 노출될 수 있는 환경적 이점을 제공하긴 하지만, 한 학기라는 기간 안에 문법적으로 정확한 문장을 생성해내는 문법능력을 향상시키는 데는 크게 효과적이지 않았다는 것을 시사한다.

키워드 : 해외어학연수, 외국어 정확성, 문법적 능력, 영작문, 오류분석

1. Introduction

Language is a medium of communication, and language accuracy is required to communicate successfully with others. Knowing whether a sentence is correct or not in a language is called grammatical competence, and it is one of the basic building blocks of acquiring a language [1]. Grammatical competence, however, is not just knowing grammatical rules, but also being able to perform the language functions properly using grammatically correct sentences [2]. Grammatical competence directly affects the four skills of a language; speaking, listening, reading, and writing, all of which are performed using grammatical rules. Since grammatical competence plays an important role in communication, successful communication depends on one being sufficiently grammatically competent. Thus, grammatical competence can be understood as an indicator of language accuracy.

Many universities in Korea have established partnerships with universities abroad, and a large number of university students participate in overseas language training programs every semester with the aim to improve their foreign language skills. Unlike domestic learning environments, where foreign languages are learned in artificial settings, overseas language training provides the opportunity for intensive language training and allows students to be naturally exposed to, and practice the target language in their surrounding environment. Thus, overseas language training can aid the natural acquisition of linguistic elements and improve oral communication skills and the speaker's overall fluency of a language. The present study seeks to investigate whether the advantages of overseas language training in terms of learning environment are also effective in improving written accuracy.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Overseas Language Training

A large number of Korean students participate in overseas language training every year with the belief that learning a foreign language is far more effective residing in a country where the language is used as a native language or a second language. The question of whether overseas language training has a positive impact on foreign language development has been asked for decades. Studies on the effect of overseas language training on foreign language learning have shown that it does have a positive impact overall. This has been associated with various factors beneficial to language learning, such as students being able to engage in intensive learning in the class environment as well as being immersed in the target language in the natural environment while taking language training overseas. Also, students are given the opportunity to acquire many aspects of linguistic skills that are harder to attain in the home environment where language learning is restricted to the classroom [3]. So far, various aspects of overseas language training have been explored, such as acquiring social linguistics skills in a study abroad context; the relationship between the degree of social contact and language use during overseas language training; learners' perspectives on overseas language learning; as well as the effect of overseas language training on listening skills, grammatical morphemes, lexical use, fluency, syntactic ability, form, function, communication strategy, etc. [3-7]. Many of these studies have provided support for the benefits of overseas language training for foreign language development.

2.2 Grammatical Competence

Language is divided into three dimensional elements such as form, meaning, and use. The three are closely interconnected and crucial to communication [8]. Grammar, the form of a language, is defined as sentence structure; a system of rules governing the arrangement and relationship

of words within sentences [9]; the rule of combining words to make the correct sentences; or the basic framework that allows countless different sentences to be produced in any language [10]. By definition, grammar is the means to effective communication. Grammatical competence serves to help learners internalize the rules and forms of a foreign language and apply them naturally when using that language. It allows learners to acquire the target language structure correctly, improves their control over the language structure, and enables them to have unlimited linguistic creativity. A number of studies examining the relationship between grammar and learning foreign languages found that grammatical competence promotes language acquisition and improves linguistic accuracy in communication [8-11].

3. Research Design

3.1 Participants

27 Korean university students, consisting of 16 male and 11 female students across various majors and years, participated in this study. They were between 20 to 26 years of age and had studied English for roughly 7 to 12 years before participating in the language training program. The participants attended a 15-week language training program at a university in the Philippines where they took 30 hours of English classes a week. Of the 30, 4 were writing classes. No class was dedicated exclusively to grammar. Students also had the chance to use English in various activities and in their daily life outside of classes.

3.2 Data Collection

The participants were subject to a pretest and a posttest a semester apart to investigate differences in grammatical accuracy in their English compositions before and after their overseas language training. Writing tests were conducted on the first week and the last week of the language program, respectively, at the partnering university in the Philippines. The topics of the tests (pretest: *Self Introduction*, posttest: *Vacation Plans*) were assigned in consideration of students' English proficiency levels, as well as the burden a writing test might pose during an overseas language program. English compositions were collected with the help of the university.

3.3 Data Analysis

A total of 54 English compositions written by the participants were used for data analysis comparing the differences in grammatical accuracy. First, the overall composition elements in each composition, such as the average number of words and sentences and the length of the sentences were measured. Following this, errors were identified and classified into three linguistic categories: morphological errors, lexical errors, and syntactic errors. Errors were further classified into 16 subcategories (8 morphological error types, 5 lexical error types, and 3 syntactic error types), and the frequency and ratio of errors in each category were counted. Next, the means and standard deviations of errors in the pretest and the posttest were obtained using SPSS 21.0 (a significance level of 5%). T-tests were run to verify if there were statistically significant differences in errors between the two tests.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Overall English Composition between the Pretest and Posttest

The average number of words and sentences, as well as the length of the sentences in each composition were examined in order to discern the differences in accuracy between the pretest and posttest. T-tests were performed to verify if the differences were statistically significant. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics in Pretest and Posttest

	Pretest		Posttest		t	p
	Mean	Std.	Mean	Std.		
Length of composition	183.1 words	55.96	201.0 words	93.13	−1.09	.284
Number of sentences	21.9	6.60	18.1	10.22	2.08	.048*
Length of sentences	8.5 words	2.15	11.6 words	2.12	−5.29	.000*

(N=27   p<.05)

The compositional elements of the participants' writing saw overall improvement after the treatment period. The average length of composition in the posttest (201 words) increased by about 9.8% from that of pretest (183.1 words). Also, the length of sentences (pretest: 8.5, posttest: 11.6 words) increased by about 36.2%. The average number of sentences (pretest: 21.9 and posttest: 18.1) decreased by about 17.5%. This shows that students increased the length of their compositions by using more words per sentence, thereby indicating that their ability to construct sentences was enhanced during language training.

A t-test between the pretest and posttest showed a statistical significance in the number of sentences (.048) and the length of the sentences (.000). Extended sentences contained more complex sentence structures, indicating that the students attempted to write longer sentences with more complex structures in their posttest writing. Furthermore, the correlation coefficient showing the degree of correlation between the two tests revealed a high correlation in the length of composition (.022) and sentence length (.010). This shows that students who wrote long sentences and long compositions in the pretest continued to do so in the posttest.

4.2 Errors in the Pretest and Posttest

The total number of errors in each composition was identified and classified into three linguistic categories: morphological errors, lexical errors, and syntactic errors. This was followed by a look at the types, frequency, and ratio of the errors in each category. Table 2 demonstrates errors in the three linguistic categories between the pretest and posttest.

Table 2. Errors in Pretest and Posttest

	Pretest	Posttest	Sig.	Correlation coefficient
Total number of errors	549(11.1%)	570(10.5%)	.821	.239
Morphological errors	303(55.2%)	332(58.3%)	.619	.153
Lexical errors	242(44.1%)	223(39.1%)	.651	.011*
Syntactic errors	4(0.7%)	15(2.6%)	.039*	.522

(N=27   p<.05)

Students were observed to have committed more errors in the post writing (pretest: 549, posttest: 570). It should be noted, however, that while the total number of errors increased by 3.8%, the average length of composition increased by 9.8% (4944→5427 words). That is, the amount of increase in errors was smaller compared to that of composition length, and the ratio of errors (pretest: 11.1%, posttest: 10.5%) decreased in the second composition. There was neither a statistical significance (.821) nor a reliable correlation (.239) in the total number of errors between the two tests. It can be assumed that the reason why students committed more errors in the posttest was because the topic ("*Vacation Plans*") was more difficult to express in English than that of the pretest ("*Self Introduction*"). Longer sentences also contained more complex sentence structures, thereby increasing the risk of errors while generating sentences.

An analysis of the errors showed that morphological errors (pretest: 55.2%, posttest: 58.3%) were the most frequently occurring errors, followed by lexical errors (pretest: 44.1%, posttest: 39.1%), and syntactic errors (pretest: 0.7%, posttest: 2.6%).

This pattern of occurrence in errors in the three linguistic categories was identical in both tests. In addition, while morphological errors and syntactic errors saw an increase (55.2%→58.3% and 0.7%→2.6% respectively) in the posttest, lexical errors actually saw a decrease (44.1%→39.1%). A t-test of paired samples revealed that there was no statistical significance nor a correlation in the mean number of morphological errors and lexical errors. On the other hand, there was a statistically reliable difference (.039) found in the syntactic errors between the two writings. That is to say, a significant level of increase in syntactic errors was observed in the posttest. Moreover, there was a high correlation in the lexical errors (.011) between the two writings, indicating that the students who had committed numerous lexical errors in their first writing produced the same kind of errors in their post writing. This implies that the students' ability to use vocabulary did not improve greatly during their language training.

Following this, the identified errors were further classified into 16 subcategories (8 morphological error types, 5 lexical error types, and 3 syntactic error types). Table 3 presents the types and frequencies of errors observed in the pretest and posttest.

Morphological errors included the omission, insertion, and misuse of articles. It also included the usage of the wrong form of words, ill-formed verbs, wrong tenses, wrong subject-verb agreement, jumbled up word order, wrong determiner-noun agreement, and wrong comparisons. Of all morphological error types, the most frequently observed was the incorrect use of English articles (pretest: 106 cases, posttest; 134 cases). This was common to both tests. The use of articles seemed to be the most difficult and complicated obstacle for the students. The recurrent and systematic issue with the use of articles may be ascribed to the absence of a similar article system in the Korean

language. The second most frequently occurring error type was the use of the wrong form of words. This appeared in the form of mixing up countable and uncountable nouns, singular and plural nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and verbs. Students had difficulty distinguishing the rules governing the usage of grammatically correct word forms and parts of speech. While this type of errors poses smaller obstacles to effective communication, accurate use of morphology would serve a clear integrative function.

Table 3. Types and Frequencies of Errors

Morphological errors	Pretest	Posttest
Missing/insert/wrong article	106(35.0%)	134(40.4%)
Wrong form of word	73(24.1%)	78(23.5%)
Ill-formed verb	69(22.8%)	66(19.9%)
Wrong tense	22(7.3%)	28(8.4%)
Subject-verb agreement	14(4.6%)	2(0.6%)
Word order	12(3.9%)	15(4.5%)
Determiner-noun agreement	6(2.0%)	6(1.8%)
Wrong comparison	1(0.3%)	3(0.9%)
Total	303(100%)	332(100%)
Lexical errors	Pretest	Posttest
Wrong choice of word	97(40.1%)	56(25.1%)
Misuse of preposition	89(36.8%)	114(51.1%)
Misuse of pronoun	33(13.6%)	26(11.7%)
Misuse of conjunction	19(7.9%)	24(10.8%)
Wrong possession	4(1.6%)	3(1.3%)
Total	242(100%)	223(100%)
Syntactic errors	Pretest	Posttest
Sentence fragment	2(50.0%)	4(26.7%)
Run-on sentence	1(25.0%)	3(20.0%)
Miscellaneous	1(25.0%)	8(53.3%)
Total	4(100%)	15(100%)

Lexical errors included wrong choices and/or the omission of words, and the omission, insertion, and/or misuse of prepositions. It also included the inappropriate use of pronouns, conjunctions, and possessions. Students struggled with their English vocabulary as there are no general rules that enable learners to predict the semantic range of a word

[12]. Here, the most frequent errors were wrong choices or the omission of words (97 cases), followed by the misuse of prepositions (89) in the pretest. However, this order was reversed in the posttest with misuse of prepositions (114) and wrong choices or the omission of words (56) having the highest frequency. English prepositions were found to be one of most difficult grammatical areas for the students. However, since English prepositions are semantically 'empty', the gravity of the errors in terms of the extent it interferes with communication is not as high as that of errors in other categories.

Syntactic errors are commonly found in foreign language writing because learners tend to lack the proficiency to comprehensibly express what they intend to say. Here, syntactic errors that occurred at the sentence level included sentence fragmentation, run-on sentences, and miscellaneous structures. There was a great difference in the frequency of errors in sentence construction between the two tests (pretest: 4, posttest: 15 cases). The omission of verbs or conjunctions resulted in fragment sentences or run-on sentences. It is interesting to note that students committed more direct translation-related errors in the post writing. EFL learners seem inclined to map out their sentences in Korean first when attempting to write in English. It seems likely that students, when facing difficulty expressing themselves in English, formulated the composition in Korean first and then tried to come up with the literal equivalent in English. The difficulty and complexity of the topic of the posttest might account for the increased frequency of this type of errors.

5. Conclusion

In order to shed light on the effect of overseas language training on developing foreign language accuracy, this study examined the errors in English compositions produced by Korean university students attending a semester-long language training program at a university in the Philippines. Two writing tests were conducted a semester apart, and an analysis of the overall composition elements and errors was performed to discern the differences between the two writing tests.

It was found that students wrote longer compositions with more words per sentence and more complex sentence structures in the posttest, but with less sentences. This shows that the students' ability to generate sentences had improved and they had attempted to write sentences with more complex structures following the overseas language training. The total number of errors also increased in the post writing. The amount of increase in errors was insignificant compared to the increase in the length of composition. As such, this increase can be linked to the longer length of the compositions and more complex sentence structures. Errors appeared in three linguistic categories and 16 subcategories in both tests. Morphological errors were most common, followed by lexical and syntactic errors in terms of frequency, respectively. There was no discernable change to the pattern of errors occurring between the two tests. While there were no statistically significant differences in the amount of morphological errors and lexical errors, the number of syntactic errors significantly increased in the second writing. The topic of the posttest can account for this increase as it was deemed to generate more complex sentence structures compared to that of the pretest.

The students' ability to generate sentences had strengthened to some extent, but their ability to utilize morphological, syntactic and lexical elements accurately did not improve greatly after the semester of language training. This implies that although overseas language training for the period of one semester enables learners to expand their language input by providing the opportunity to intensively learn and be exposed to the target

language, it has limited effectiveness in enhancing grammatical competence to generate accurate sentences.

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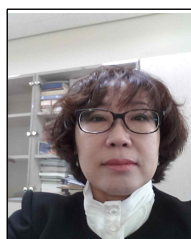
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