Maximizing the Potential of Intermediate EFL Learners' Formal Style of the Written Language through Dialogic Interaction

*Iman Bakhoda  
MA Student at Allameh Mohaddes Nouri University  
bakhodaiman@gmail.com

Mina Babaee  
MA Student at Allameh Mohaddes Nouri University  
minababaee63@yahoo.com

Karim Shabani  
Assistant Professor at Allameh Mohaddes Nouri University  
shabanikarim@gmail.com

Abstract

As a fundamental notion at the heart of dynamic assessment (DA), dialogic interaction derives from Vygotsky's (1987) sociocultural theory with the insight that appropriate use of mediation blooms learners' emerging capabilities and enables them to perform beyond their current level of developed abilities. The presentation of attuned mediations to the learners need through instructional dialogic interaction provides mediators with an opportunity to assess the learners’ current zone of actual development (ZAD) and assist them to develop new capabilities for reaching independency into a new ZAD. The theoretical understanding of the present study involved the co-construction of the formal written language from Vygotsky's (1978) instructional implication. Drawing on sociocultural perspective, this case study scrutinized the dialogic interaction of Poehner's (2008) interactionist format of DA based on Aljaafreh and Lantolf's (1994) hierarchical (implicit to explicit) presentation of mediations. The present paper focused on the interaction between the learner and the teacher for optimizing the formal style of writing. Dyadic interaction contributed to guide learners walk through the problem and to enhance learning through the interaction. The impetus for the study came from working with intermediate colloquial and inaccurate writers. Exploiting the collaborative dialogue with the learners was a follow-up to the learners' self-awareness in the stilted style of writing. Following a sociocultural perspective, this study revealed the fact that how much teacher-student communication stretched the learners' potential level of competence in writing formally. This case study is in line with Sternberg and Grigorenko's (2002) interactionist approach in order to enhance the learners' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in the formal written language. The analysis of the interaction demonstrated that formal writing development took place as a result of responding to the learners' individual needs through dialogic interaction with the teacher.

Keywords: dialogic interaction, writing, formal style.
Introduction

Words are like tools in the sense that it should be used carefully in order to keep them in good working order. One very important issue is to decide if a specific word is better used in writing or in speech. The ability to distinguish between these words is one sign of the careful writer. Using the words loosely in the written language, with no regard for their specific context, it can lead to serious mistakes of understanding and judgment. As a matter of fact, good usage of words ends with respecting the audience in your writing. The words writer choose reflect the formality or informality of the rhetorical situation. Academic writing often calls for the use of formal diction, in contrast to the less formal language of everyday conversation. One of the significant notions in academic writing is formality. Stilted style of writing in the academic genre will make the sentence sparkle and will awaken interest in the audience.

Formality as a general term is a related concept in sociolinguistics. Several scholars (e.g., Bauman and Sherzer 1974; Bloch 1975) scrutinized formality from different perspective. They examined the nature of the formality and roughly divided it into three senses of properties of a communicative code, properties of the social setting in which a code is used, and properties of analyst's description. Other scholars (e.g., Gossen 1974) concentrated on "formal speech" in the realm of formality.

Considering the written form of the language, formality has become a very controversial topic. However, little studies, if there is any, conducted to cultivate formality in writing. In the light of the finding of a study reported by Mendis (2010) on the formality in academic writing it was found that phrasal verbs are characteristic of colloquial or informal language and use more in conversational speech than in academic discourse. To strive toward improving the quality of writing in the academic genre a quest for delving more in formal style of writing is highly required. In order to meet this need the present study concentrated on the formality in the academic writing from a new perspective. Given the importance writing has acquired in EFL for a long time, it becomes highly crucial to investigate on how to improve the quality and clarity of the communication in academic discourse. Formality as a basic strategy to accomplish this goal revealed that there is a need in EFL teaching to include instruction based not only on cohesion, collocation, vocabulary but, more specifically, on stilted style of writing.

Traditionally written language was evaluated by standardized procedure which emphasized on the end product. As product assessment of the written discourse concentrated on the students' past abilities with no regard for their ongoing capabilities and without taking into account their immediate needs, more recently an increasing body of research centered on dynamic assessment by evaluating the process of learning (Haywood et al., 1990). Built on the current understanding of sociocultural theory (Lantolf 2000) which highlighted the interactive and dialogic interaction between an expert and a novice, this study aimed to promote formality in writing through the innovative dynamic assessment procedure.

Literature Review

Some studies (e.g., Heylighen, 1993) delved into the concept of formality in detail to reveal more deeply the nature of the formality. In a study conducted by Heylighen and Dewaele (1999) the concept of formality was scrutinized in detail. Two different types of formality which are called 'deep formality' and 'surface formality' were proposed by them to explore different version of formality. In a comparison between a formal and an informal style it was elucidated that a formal style has some features such as detachment, accuracy, rigidity and
heaviness. An informal style, On the other hand, is more flexible, direct, implicit, and less informative. In an attempt to measure the formality F-score was proposed. The results indicated that nouns, adjectives, articles and prepositions are more frequent in formal styles but pronouns, adverbs, verbs and interjections are more frequent in informal styles. The results also indicated that as the distance in space, time or background between the interlocutors increases, the formality becomes larger accordingly.

Many research studies in the realm of formality to date have focused on formality of speech (e.g., Blanche Benveniste 1991). In an attempt to measure the formality of speech, several scholars (e.g., Blanche Benveniste 1991) concentrated on the frequency of utilizing careful words and grammatical form or the frequency of applying the auxiliary "be" in English. Finally it was expounded that considering formality in this regard is extremely language and culture dependent.

Friedrichs (1972) investigated the formality with respect to Russian pronouns. As a matter of fact the discourse context, the topic and the relation between the interlocutors determine the usage of the second-person pronoun sty and vy in a continuum from a polite form to a familiar form in Russian pronoun. The results confirmed the fact that pronominal variation in Russian literary illustrated the psychological and cultural dynamics, including status relations, emotional feelings and rhetorical manipulation.

Giving consideration to the written form of the formality, a couple of studies conducted in this regard. A distinguishing feature of academic writing is formality. In a study conducted by Shaw and Liu (1998), a writing course in English for academic purpose was presented to overseas university students in the field of Engineering, Science, or Agriculture in two or three months. They were asked to write an essay about a single topic for half an hour. The students' essays were analyzed comprehensively. Different perspectives of the students' written language were examined. Then, overt instruction over the problematic segments was provided. The post writing of the students' essays denoted that the participants' written language moved toward academic style of writing and less like speech after the instructions provided to them over a period of time. But again this kind of instruction has some shortcomings as students would become overload by too much instruction and Vygotskian regression (Frawley and Lantolf 1985) might occur.

In a similar vein, Chi (2010) scrutinized the impact of instruction in the academic writing with respect to the use of suitable vocabulary for the purpose of writing academically. After receiving the first draft from the students, the teacher targeted the tone and style of writing as well as the vocabulary and provided feedback on the drafts accordingly. The researcher utilized random sampling from the students' draft for the further analysis. These papers manifested adequate, or above average writing competence but with serious problems in the before-mentioned areas in formality. Then, the researcher collected the second draft from the students in order to make a comparison between the first and the second draft. Afterwards, small sample of students were invited to the interview session for the verification of the analyzed data. In the interview session the students were supposed to complete a proofreading exercise in order to manipulate the original text for apropos tone and style required for the academic writing style. The results indicated that the students' limited range of vocabulary is a central factor for preventing them to write in a formal style. Hence, the study recommended strengthening the students' general vocabulary and dictionary use through providing direct instruction.

As illustrated by the findings of the above studies, most educators believed that providing direct instruction in formality is the best possible strategy for enhancing the students' awareness towards formality. Because many of the previous studies of formality involved surveying the explicit instruction of formality in the classroom through merely analyzing the students’ past performance, they may not be a valid guide for perceiving the students actual
independency regarding formality. Consequently, the study reported on in this paper not only sought to present an innovative perspective towards instruction and assessment but also sought to illustrate the growth of each students’ ZPD in formality arena through providing mediation in the form of dialogic interaction.

Methodology

Study Design

The research described below focusing on the dialogic interaction between the teacher and the students for enhancing formality in the students’ academic writing. A body of research has already emerged on dialogic journals in language teaching and learning (e.g., Peyton and Staton, 1993; see also Allison, 1998), on whose basic assumptions the researchers of the present study were able to build the required analysis. This study followed Sternberg and Grigorenko’s (2002) interactionist approach to mediate in intermediate-level students’ writing ability in an English language institute. The study used pretest-mediation-posttest paradigm for the purpose of enhancing formality in EFL learners through ZPD-based feedbacks.

There are two main methods of sampling: probability sampling (random sampling) and non-probability sampling (purposive sampling). In Cohen’s terms (2000), probability sampling, as the name accounts, involves random selection of participants. It is advisable for large-scale studies where the purpose is to achieve a trade-off, that is, it enables the researcher to make generalizations and seek representativeness of larger population. In contrast, non-probability sampling consists of non-random selection of participants. It does not represent wider population, that is, it is non-representative. In addition, it does not attempt to generalize findings beyond the sample in question and it is expedient for small-scale research. To quote Dörnyei (2007), probability sampling is more appropriate for quantitative research where it seeks representativeness and generalization; whereas, non-probability or purposive sampling is more appropriate for qualitative research which aims at non-representativeness and the researcher does not intend to generalize findings to wider population. In the light of the above literature, the participants in this study were selected with opportunity or convenience sampling which is a type of non-probability or purposive sampling. Best and Kahn (2006) define convenience sampling as a type of sampling in which the researcher chooses sample from those to whom he/she has easy access. The extent of generalizability in this type of sample is negligible.

The study used pretest-mediation-posttest paradigm to scrutinize the impact of providing mediation in formality on making students write academically. The mediation sessions were audio-recorded for the further analysis. A comprehensive comparison between the pretest and the posttest evinced the impact of mediation in the form of dialogic interaction on the students writing ability. The following table illustrated the overall steps of the present study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sessions</th>
<th>Weeks</th>
<th>Task Description</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Interaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Write about your hometown.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Write about your self-interested topic then the teacher help them to narrow down</td>
<td>Recorder</td>
<td>The teacher provided mediation to the students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants

The participants of the analyses discussed in this paper were 9 intermediate-level EFL students (aged 13 to 15) studying English at an intermediate level in Mehr institute in Babol, during the winter term of 2014. They were all female with a four-year background in English. The participants were selected using convenience sampling method. There is a common reason for the whole participants to participate in this study that they build the capability of writing formally in the academic genre. In order to preserve their anonymity, all participants were given pseudonyms. The participants were so enthusiastic toward the writing course and they found it so influential to the extent that they asked for repeating the course for the following semester.

Materials and Instrument

Several instruments were employed in the study including pretest and posttest, audio-recorded data, students' written composition and a sample composition. Students were required to write composition about their self-interested topic. After students brought final draft of their composition next session, one of the compositions was selected randomly for offering the mediations. The data were audio-recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

Procedure

This study followed pretest-mediation-posttest format to enhance formality in the students' written language. During the pretest the students were asked to write a composition about their hometown. No mediations were offered in this stage and it was held in a completely traditional way. Then, there was five mediation sessions in order to contribute the students reach independency over the formality in the written language. During each mediation session, which lasted almost two hours, the teacher provided mediation in the form of dialogic interaction between the teacher and the students in order to increase the students' ZPD towards formality phenomenon in writing. The mediations were offered in an impromptu manner in the classroom and they were not prespecified but in a completely interactionist format. Afterwards, there was a posttest again in a completely conventional format. Comparing the pretest and the posttest revealed the fact that near independency were almost gained regarding the formality in the written language.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data sources in this study were students' composition and transcribed audio-recorded data. The data were subjected to qualitative analysis. Analyzing the data was carried out in the three phases of pretest, mediation and posttest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>1 Write about your hometown.</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

down the topic. composition
is the sum of these 6 areas of cohesion. Each student score was obtained by counting the number of errors in each part of formality and subtracting it from 60.

Besides, the qualitative research stressed the impact of the mediation sessions on the students' ZPD. Transcribed audio-recorded data during the mediation session were analyzed qualitatively to scrutinize the effect that mediation sessions had on the development of the students' writing abilities.

Pretest
Analyzing the pretest reflected the students' weaknesses in different segments of formal writing style. Six components of formality in the written language including vocabulary, structure, paragraph writing, contractions, personal pronoun and wordiness were taken into account in the present study. As it is defined in Cambridge Dictionaries Online (1999), grammar, vocabulary and contractions are characteristics of formality among other features of formality. Bender (2014) indicated that students overlooked the rules of paragraph writing in the formal writing. To him, formal writing also entails absence of personal pronouns and avoidance of wordiness which students do not take into account in their writing. The pretest aimed to illustrate the students' actual ability in the realm of formality regardless of any instructions.

Table 2. Students’ Pretest Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Paragraph Writing</th>
<th>Contraction</th>
<th>Personal Pronoun</th>
<th>Wordiness</th>
<th>ZAD score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sargol</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahsa</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negin</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatemeh</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedayeh</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atefeh</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amineh</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navvabeh</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

✓ = the correct use of cohesion in these areas; - = lack of using cohesions

The above table revealed the students' performance in the selected sections of formality. One of the major areas of formality that all of students encountered problem with in their pretest was vocabulary. In this study the vocabulary misuse occurred because of the students' limited vocabulary knowledge to the extent that sometimes they even used their native vocabulary in their compositions to express the words they did not know in a specific context. For example, in her composition, Mahsa used her native language to express her idea, "babol is very good. And have good 'emkanatetahsili''". As it is obvious in this excerpt, her lack of competence was hindered her to use "educational welfare". Sargol's limited vocabulary made her use "rest" instead of "pleasure" in the following excerpt: "I think all the people for rest come to the park".

One area of formality that is highly important is the perfect usage of grammatical structure in which students usually show a slapdash application toward this area. For example, Sargol had this problem in the parallelism: "rabbit had a pink ears and black eyes and rabbit's body was white". In this case, instead of using "white body", she erroneously wrote "rabbit's body was white."
Interestingly, all of the students did not have any ideas regarding paragraph writing. Their compositions did not have any introductory or concluding sentence and did not follow any chronological order as well.

Considering the contraction part of the formality, all of the students utilized contractions if they had any in their compositions. This is due to the fact that they did not have any ideas regarding formality and they were totally unaware that using contractions lead to informality. Regarding personal pronouns, all of the students used personal pronouns in their writing because they did not have any knowledge that using personal pronouns is in paradox of formality in the written language. However, some of the students such as Hedyeh or Mahsa used few personal pronouns due to the fact that their prewriting was just only five or six lines. Another area of formality in the written language that is scrutinized thoroughly in this study is wordiness. Students’ lack of competence sometimes made them use a long sentence to convey their ideas instead of using a concise structure. As a matter of fact, students were focusing on conveying their ideas in any way that they could instead of concentrating on words related to that specific context.

**Mediation**

In the mediation section six areas of formality was mediated for the purpose of contributing the students to reach independency in these areas of formality. Sometimes the sentences in the academic composition become outrageous with vogue words, redundancies or erroneous structure and make the reader chuckle. Hence, it is important to make students aware of the factors in formal writing. The teacher proposed mediation in the form of dialogic interaction with the students in six areas of formality including vocabulary, structure, paragraph writing, contractions, personal pronoun and wordiness. The overall purpose of the mediation phase was to enhance the students’ ZPD in formality arena. The abovementioned areas of formality with the mediation in the form of dialogic interaction were analyzed comprehensively in the following sections.

**Vocabulary**

Vocabulary was selected as one of the areas of formality that is gained value to be investigated as students frequently revealed misused of vocabulary in their prewriting. Later on, in their subsequent writings students also had difficulty in employing the suitable word in the suitable context. The importance of providing mediation for this part of formality should not be underestimated, as it contributes the students towards native-like fluency in written language and increase their overall communicative competence. The following excerpt, taken from Negin's composition followed the students' ZPD in vocabulary.

**Protocol 1**

T: look at this sentence, "In addition, one can use different things to talk with relatives but video call is one of the best idea because in it they can both talk and see with their dears". Do you find any problems in this sentence?
Ss: [silent]
T: look at the second part of the sentence and pay attention to the words.
Ss: [students read the sentence silently and had a questioning face toward the teacher]
T: look at the words. Are they used appropriately?
Ss: [silent]
T: They can both talk and see with their dears?
Atefeh: their relatives?
T: SEE with their dears? Through video call?
Negin: visit?
T: visit is usually in person, huh?
Asa: watch?
T: watch TV or watch movie… It cannot be used for this context.
Sargol: meet?
T: Thank you. Good. Meet or chat is better to use in this context because we talk about video call.

The students could not provide answer in response to the teacher implicit question (do you find any problems in this sentence?). This made the teacher narrow down the location of error to the problematic part of the sentence. At this point the students read the sentence again and turned to their teacher with a questioning face. Teacher did not provide response but help the students find the error by asking students to pay attention to words of the sentence. She even implied the collocational error by providing mediation in this way, "look at the words. Are they used appropriately?". Students' not responding to this mediation made the teacher to repeat the problematic part of the sentence with a questioning voice without highlighting the exact erroneous word. At this point, Atefeh changed 'dears' to 'relatives' erroneously. The teacher ignored her response by providing a metalinguistic clue in the form of raising intonation: "SEE with their dears?" in the hope that this might lead them to revise this utterance. Then, the teacher continued this mediation by uttering: "through video call?" in order to draw attention to the fact that the word 'see' is not suitable for this context. The Teacher did not verbally respond to error but instead pauses to allow time for students to potentially notice and correct the problem themselves. Although Negin detected that there is a problem with the word 'see', she mistakenly changed the word 'see' with 'visit'. The teacher elaborated for her that the word 'visit' is usually used in person. In a similar vein, Asa erroneously changed 'see' to 'watch' and the teacher elaborated that this word cannot be used for this context. Finally, Sargol provided the suitable word (meet) for the video call.

In the same composition another mediation for vocabulary was provided at the same line hoping that this time the mediation results in the correct selection of lexical choices immediately:

**Protocol 2**

T: look at the same sentence again, "In addition, one can use different things to talk with relatives but video call is one of the best idea because in it they can both talk and meet their dears". Do you find any other problem in this sentence?
Amineh: ghalate grammaniya kalameh [grammatical error or lexical error?]
T: lexical
Ss: [silent]
T: again look at the second part of the sentence, "because in it they can both talk and meet with their dears".
Asa: because by it
Fatemeh: no through it. Chon vasilastvabarayevasile ham through miad. [Because we talk about a tool and for tools we should use through]
T: Yes Fatemeh. Thank you, "video call is one of the best idea because through it they can both talk and meet their dears".

In the above interaction between the students and the teacher, in response to the teacher's initial question, Amineh posed a basic question (lexical or grammatical?) that directed the teacher's mediation toward collocation phenomenon. In fact, according to Aljaafreh and
Lantolf (1994) the teachers' initial question acted as co-regulation which stimulated Aminieh to respond in a way that led to a more explicit mediation on the part of the teacher. After challenging the students with the process of selecting suitable word in the formal written language, they paid more attention in their subsequent writing in the selection of words. During the subsequent mediation sessions students' amelioration in utilizing formal vocabulary enhanced to the extent that even if they did not choose an appropriate word for their composition, after a short mediation they came to appoint the words apposite to the context. In their subsequent composition, students manifested more attention regarding good usage of words. For example, as soon as the teacher wrote the erroneous sentence on the board, Sargol targeted the informal vocabulary (continue your lesson) without any mediation and provided a more formal word for that context (continue your education).

**Structure**

Another area of formality that is targeted in this study is the grammatical structure. In fact, paying attention to the correct use of the grammatical structure in the composition reflected one of the crucial features of formality. It shows that you care about your work and have adopted a disciplined attitude to writing academically. In the present study the teacher attempted to make the students aware of noticing the correct structure in their writing by providing mediation for some problematic grammatical structures. In order to illustrate the teacher's sensitivity towards the grammatical structure, one part of the cohesion that was mediated in the classroom is selected for the description. The following interaction between the teacher and the students in parallel structure domain revealed the fact that the teacher was so sensitive regarding grammatical structure and attempted to raise their awareness towards this domain in the realm of formality.

**Protocol 3**

T: look at this sentence, "in fact when you don't have money you can't go to school, you can't buy a book and continue your lessons". Do you find any problems in this sentence?

Ss: [silent]

T: look at the result clause. Does it sound good?

Ss: [silent]

T: [the teacher underlined 'you can't' in the sentences and a question and an exclamation mark "?!" before 'continue your lesson']

Asa: we should use 'you can't' again before 'continue your lesson'?

T: exactly because they should be similar.

Sargol: but it is wordy.

T: very good Sargol. You mentioned a very good point. In order to avoid "wordiness" we can use 'you can't' just once and omit it in the second and third sentences.

The most implicit mediation for the parallelism involved asking the learner whether they can find any problems in the sentence or not. The students' silence toward this question made the teacher narrow the students' focus to the portion of the sentence where the error had occurred. In order to call the students' attention on the parallelism phenomenon implicitly, the teacher even utilized a question mark followed by an exclamation mark '?!' before the sentence that needed the expression "you can't" to become parallel. This mediation turned out to be a powerful mediation as it led one of the students, Asa, to notice the error and to provide the possible correct construction.
In the same composition, there was another faulty parallelism that was corrected by the students after the very first mediation:

**Protocol 4**

T: look at this sentence, "one should work hard and make money for herself/himself to have a good life". Do you find any problems in this sentence?

Mahsa: one should make money.

T: excellent, why?

Mahsa: because they should be similar.

The above interaction between the students and the teacher reveal the fact that the students ZPD in the parallel structure increased drastically. In the above excerpt after exposing to the faulty parallelism, the teacher wrote the sentence on the board and provided the most implicit mediation in the form of whether they could find any problems in the sentence or not. But this time as soon as the teacher provided the mediation, one of the students, Mahsa, provided the suitable answer by the justification that they should be similar.

**Paragraph Writing**

A crucial factor in formal writing is taking into account the overall framework of writing. This factor was completely ignored in the students' prewriting. In other words, the students put their thoughts on paper in a haphazard way without taking into account to the chronological order of the ideas, introductory or concluding sentences. The following interaction between the teacher and the students aimed to make students aware of this significant factor in the formal written language. After adopting one of the compositions randomly, the teacher wrote the first paragraph on the board in order to provide mediation in this segment of formality.

**Protocol 5**

T: look at the first line of this paragraph, "all of the sports are energetic." Could you find any problems in this sentence?

Ss: [silent]

T: look at the first paragraph, does it have a good start?

Ss: [silent]

T: can you begin this paragraph differently, I mean by telling reader what this paragraph is about?

Ss: [silent]

T: look at the paragraph again; the topic is "how can volleyball make you happy?" now, there should be an introductory sentence for the paragraph based on title.

Fatemeh: there isn't any introduction in this paragraph.

T: OK, good. Now can you offer a topic sentence for this paragraph?

Fatemeh: we can say, "Volleyball is my favorite sport and it makes me happy in my life".

Asa: Volleyball is make me happy.

T: OK, good. In a formal writing we should pay attention to the structure of the paragraph so a paragraph should begin with an introductory sentence that informs the reader what this paragraph is about. [The teacher selected Fatemeh's introductory sentence and wrote it on the board] OK, now take a look at the second sentence of this paragraph, "in countries we have different kinds of sports for different age groups of people". Can you join the topic sentence with the rest of the sentences?

Ss: [silent]

T: does it add any information to the previous line?

Negin: moreover

T: OK, good. "Moreover, in countries we have different kinds of sports for different age groups of people". So, in there should be logical relations between the sentences in the paragraph and you should present your ideas one after another by using suitable linkers. Now look at the last line of this paragraph, "volleyball in addition to be
energetic: can help to be healthy, to increase height and to be in shape”. What do you think about the last line of this paragraph?
Amineh: she talks about the benefit of volleyball.
T: she wants to show that her writing is going to finish. Could you help her to finish this writing?
Hedyeh: in conclusion the sport can be effective.
T: but the writer talks about volleyball, not sports in general.
Fatemeh: in conclusion volleyball can be effective in some ways: to be healthy, to increase height and to be in shape.
T: thank you class.

**Contraction**

A significant sign of formality is that there are no contractions used in the formal written language. This feature of formal writing gained value to be investigated as all of the students were not aware of this fact in formality. The teacher picked up one of the compositions at random and the following interaction took place between the teacher and the students.

**Protocol 6**

T: look at this sentence, “when you don't have money, you can't go to school, you can't buy a book and you can't continue your education”. Do you find any problems in this sentence?
Ss: [silent]
T: academically speaking, could you find any problems in this sentence?
Asa: do you mean the words are informal? Should we change the words?
T: pay attention to the verbs
Ss: [silent]
T: [the teacher underlined the negatives on the board]
Fatemeh: there are problems with negatives
T: OK, what is that problem? What can you do to make it formal? Should we use contractions or the full form in the formal writing?
Ss: complete form? [Hesitantly]
T: yes!! No contractions can be used in the formal writing.

The above interaction revealed the fact that the students were completely out of ZPD regarding contractions in formal writing. The students' unresponsiveness towards the teacher's implicit leading question made the teacher to restrict the leading question to the formality phenomenon. As soon as the teacher restricted the domain of leading question, Asa made a wild guess regarding the formality of the words which made the teacher narrow down the location of errors to the verbs. Even pointing to the verbs failed to prompt a response from the students. Hence, the teacher underlined all of the contractions in the sentences which raised Fatemeh's curiosity towards negative forms but again this mediation did not lead to the correct response. This time the teacher turned to an explicit mediation in the form of providing an alternative for the students to choose from which contributed the students to choose the correct response.

**Personal Pronoun**

Another significant part of formality which is targeted in this study is personal pronoun, more specifically, avoidance of using personal pronoun in the formal writing. All of the students used personal pronouns in their compositions as they were not cognizant of the fact that using personal pronoun is in direct contradiction to the formality. The teacher selected one of the
compositions randomly and provided the following mediations regarding this segment of formality.

**Protocol 7**

T: "in countries we have different kinds of sports for different age groups of people". Could you find any problems in this sentence?
Ss: [silent]
T: who has different kinds of sports?
Ss: [silent]
T: look! This is a formal writing. You are going to write about topic and not just yourself.
Sargol: we should delete we have. Because in countries is general but we have is specific. We should use there are.
T: very good point, thank you Sargol.
The first thing which is noticeable about this interaction is that it is the short interaction and the students were responsive towards the mediations in a short time. First the students failed to prompt a response to the teacher's implicit leading question. Then, the teacher narrowed down the location of error by asking a question which targeted the personal pronoun we, but again the students were unresponsive towards this mediation. At this point, the teacher reminded the students that this is a formal writing and they should not personalize the composition. Eventually, this mediation led to the correct response and Sargol provided the answer.

**Wordiness**

Wordiness is another feature of formality which is mediated in this study. Using too many words instead of one single word is a common fault in the students' writing. Moreover, sometimes students repeat unnecessary words in their compositions in a slapdash manner that makes their writing sound wordy. In a formal written language it is important to communicate succinctly and avoid rambling in order to avoid ambiguity and make your writing appear academic. In order to provide mediation in this regard, the teacher selected one of the compositions randomly and the following interaction took place between the teacher and the students.

**Protocol 8**

T: look at this sentence, 'I think self confidence is sometimes good, and sometimes this is not good'. Could you find any problems in this sentence?
Ss: [silent]
T: [the teacher read the sentence again with an intonation that focus on the fact that this sentence is wordy]
Negin: and bayad haz f she [and should be deleted]
T: OK, so you think there are unnecessary words in this sentence. So what should we do? You have one minute to think about it.
Asa: I think self confidence always isn't good. Be jaye inde bavab ni tahone bade, benevismehamishekhobnist[instead of writing 'self confidence is sometimes good, and sometimes this is not good', we should write, 'self confidence always isn't good]
T: very good Asa. Look this is a formal writing, sometimes isn't good?
Ss: is not good.
Failing to respond to the teacher's leading question in the above interaction, made the teacher repeat the problematic parts of the sentence with rising intonation, perhaps hoping that this will alert the students to the wordiness problem. This mediation led Negin to implied wordiness by mentioning that and should be deleted in the sentence. Although Negin detected
that there is indeed a problem of wordiness in this sentence, she mistakenly proposed that merely delete and in the sentence. The teacher confirmed her that some words should be deleted but she does not verbally respond to the error and provided the students some times to ponder over this issue and correct the sentence. Time is a crucial factor in this interaction as it makes one of the students, Asa, provide an error-free sentence without any signs of the wordiness problem.

**Posttest**

The results of the posttest highlighted the impact of mediation sessions on the development of the students' ZPD in the formal writing style. Posttest just like the pretest followed a conventional test and it revealed the amount of progress the students made in the formality arena. The following table summarizes the students' performance in 6 segments of formality domain in the written language:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Paragraph Writing</th>
<th>Contraction</th>
<th>Personal Pronoun</th>
<th>Wordiness</th>
<th>ZAD Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asa</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sargol</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>1 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahsa</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negin</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatemeh</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedyeh</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atefeh</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amineh</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navvabeh</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

✓ = the correct use of cohesion in these areas; - = lack of using cohesion in these areas

As it is illustrated in the posttest, all of the students improved drastically in aforementioned areas of formality in comparison to their pretest. For instance, the students became totally independent in paragraph writing although they were not aware of paragraph writing’s rule in their pretest. In a similar vein, students became sensitive about the grammatical structure of their composition and they attempted to check their sentences before writing to ensure about the correct usage of grammar. As a whole, near independency was reached in the six areas of formality and the students' composition became more formal by taking into account the mentioned areas of formality.

**Results and Discussion**

The results can be summarized as demonstrating two crucial factors of the ZPD in the students' formal written language named as social factors and mediations. A salient point that is worth mentioning is that all participants had difficulties in writing formally in their
prewriting and they were only able to perform better under the guidance of the mediator. The mediations were highly influential and the impact of these mediations was reflected in the students' post writing, despite the fact that they manifested poor performance in their prewriting. Quite interestingly, all of the students represented near independency in different segments of formality during posttest. Furthermore, one of the participants (Navvabeh) left the mediational phase that precluded a consideration of mediation on her writing.

Results of Descriptive Analysis

As can be perceived from the students' pretest (table 2), none of the students was independent in any of these 6 areas of formality. The students had serious difficulty especially in structure, paragraph writing, personal pronoun and contractions. As a matter of fact, they were not aware that they should not use personal pronouns or contractions in the formal writing style. The students also utilized vocabularies in their compositions in a slapdash manner. There was a significant difference between the students' pre-and-posttest, to the extent that the students' ZAD score changed from a range of 12 to 36 in their pretest to 51 to 60 in their posttest. Concerning the vocabulary segment of the formality, 5 students reached independency in applying a more formal vocabulary in their composition and three students moved to near independency in this area. Regarding the structure of their compositions, the students performed poorly in the pretest and they were mostly dependent in this segment but at the pretest stage they manifested a significant improvement in this area to the extent that 2 of the students, Negin and Fatemeh, became independent in this domain. In fact, students turned into dictionary in order to use correct structure and vocabulary in an attempt to write formally. Quiet interestingly, all of the students were out of ZPD in paragraph writing's segment, but in their posttest all of them revealed independency in this area. In a similar vein, personal pronoun and contraction's factor of formality were out of the students' ZPD in their pretest and all of the students used them freely in their compositions, but in posttest most of the students became independent in these two domains. Regarding wordiness all of the students revealed somehow dependency in their pretest, but at the posttest 5 students became totally independent in this regard.

Results of qualitative analysis

Nonmetric or qualitative data are typically attributes, characteristics, or categories that describe an individual and cannot be quantified (Marczyk et al. 2005). According to Cohen (2000), for qualitative data analysis the researchers have at their disposal a range of techniques. For example, coding of field notes (Miles and Huberman, 1984) and content analysis of field notes or qualitative data (cited in Hammersley, 1979).

The transcripts of each mediation sessions and the students' composition are the major data that were analyzed qualitatively. In an attempt to enhance the students' ZPD in 6 areas of formality, different range of mediations were offered. The mediations proposed in an impromptu manner in order to capture the students' needs in that particular context. In order to provide mediations within the students' ZPD, the researcher adjusted the mediations based on the students' responses during the mediation sessions.

The extemporaneous mediations in the form of a dialogic interaction between the teacher and the students enhanced the students' cognition from other-regulation to self-regulation. The impromptu mediations were offered to the students from the most implicit to the most explicit. These full ranges of mediations are listed in the following tables as collaborative frame of mediations and regulatory scale of mediations:
The above table depicted the categorization of the mediations which were offered to the students. The impromptu mediations were proposed to the students in a continuum from the most implicit to the most explicit in order to move learners towards independency in the selected areas of formality. The least effective mediations in 6 domains of formality were implicit leading question and the most effective mediations were narrowing down the error's location and explicit question. Students were also responsive to the time mediation and metalinguistic clue in the form of raising intonation.

**Table 4 Collaborative Frame of Mediations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Vocabulary</strong></th>
<th>1- Implicit leading question.</th>
<th>2- Narrow down the error's location.</th>
<th>3- Call the students attention to the words.</th>
<th>4- Metalinguistic clue.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure</strong></td>
<td>1- Reading the sentence.</td>
<td>2- Devoting time.</td>
<td>3- Leading question.</td>
<td>4- Metalinguistic clues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paragraph Writing</strong></td>
<td>1- Implicit leading question.</td>
<td>2- Narrowing down the location of error.</td>
<td>3- Explicit question.</td>
<td>4- Specifying the error's location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contradiction</strong></td>
<td>1- Implicit leading question.</td>
<td>2- Targeting the problematic segment.</td>
<td>3- Underlined keywords.</td>
<td>4- Explicit question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Pronoun</strong></td>
<td>1- Implicit leading question.</td>
<td>2- Narrow down the error's location.</td>
<td>3- Explicit explanation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wordiness</strong></td>
<td>1- Implicit leading question.</td>
<td>2- The teacher read the sentence again with an intonation that focus on the fact that this sentence is wordy.</td>
<td>3- Devoting time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table depicted the categorization of the mediations which were offered to the students. The impromptu mediations were proposed to the students in a continuum from the most implicit to the most explicit in order to move learners towards independency in the selected areas of formality. The least effective mediations in 6 domains of formality were implicit leading question and the most effective mediations were narrowing down the error's location and explicit question. Students were also responsive to the time mediation and metalinguistic clue in the form of raising intonation.

**Table 5 Regulatory Scale of Mediations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Vocabulary</strong></th>
<th>1- Do you find any problems in this sentence?</th>
<th>2- Look at the second part of the sentence and pay attention to the words.</th>
<th>3- Look at the words. Are they used appropriately?</th>
<th>4- SEE with their dears? Through video call?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure</strong></td>
<td>1- Look at this sentence “everybody like talk with friends or their relatives in another country”.</td>
<td>2- You have time to think about that.</td>
<td>3- Do you find any problems in this sentence?</td>
<td>4- Everybody LIKE talk with friends?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paragraph writing</strong></td>
<td>1- Could you find any problems in this sentence?</td>
<td>2- Look at the first paragraph; does it have a good start?</td>
<td>3- Can you begin this paragraph differently, I mean by telling reader what this paragraph is about?</td>
<td>4- There should be an introductory sentence for the paragraph based on title.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contraction</strong></td>
<td>1- Do you find any problems in this sentence?</td>
<td>2- Pay attention to the verbs.</td>
<td>3- The teacher underlined the negatives on the board.</td>
<td>4- Should we use contractions or the full form in the formal writing?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The prompts that were offered to the students were illustrated in table 4 and 5. Table 4 revealed the quality of the mediations and table 5 exemplified different kinds of mediations that were offered to the students in the form of a dialogic interaction between the teacher and the students. The mediations were proposed based on the students' immediate needs and in an impromptu manner. The results disclosed the fact that the most effective mediations were narrowing down the students' errors and asking explicit question regarding that error. Students were also responsive to the time factor mediation and metalinguistic mediation such as raising the intonation. The least effective mediation was asking implicit leading question.

**Conclusion**

There were obvious differences between the students' pretest and posttest which manifested the fact that the students did benefit from the mediation sessions. The amounts of progress in each student were different from the other one as each student has a learning pace which represents their unique ZPDs.

Different range of mediations were offered to the students in an impromptu manner and in the form of dialogic interaction to help the students revise the erroneous sentences and to facilitate their learning. The mediations were proposed based on the students' immediate needs in a continuum from the most implicit to the most explicit. By taking into account the students' needs, the teacher could provide the mediations within the students' ZPD.

This study is in line with Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994, p. 480) in that offering a full range of mediations from the most implicit to the most explicit contributed the learner to move from other-regulation to self-regulation. The results of this case study reflected Aljaafreh and Lantolf's study as the learners moved towards independency in the selected areas of formality in writing by providing a continuum of mediations from the most implicit to the most explicit.

Out of the Vygotskian perspective, some of the studies such as Heylighen and Dewaele (1998) scrutinized formality of language in detail in an attempt to measure the formality of the languages. Regarding the written form of formality, Chi (2010) investigated applying formal vocabulary in academic writing but without taking into account learners' developmental ability. In the present study by taking into account learners' developmental ability, different areas of formality were mediated which led learners towards independency in the formal written language.
References
