Corpora in the EFL Classroom: Exploring the Effects of Data Driven Learning (DDL) on Iraqi EFL Freshmen's Grammatical Development

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Abstract

The advantages of using corpora directly in English grammar teaching and learning can be enormous, for it exposes learners to authentic text and authentic instances of actual language use. The direct application of corpora in the classroom can be done through Data Driven Learning approach (DDL). Through this approach students make use of concordances and try to discover by themselves the rules and patterns of a given grammatical item or word; shifting the way of the learning process to a more inductive and implicit learning style. The access to DDL activities can be of two types: 1. The immediate hand-on concordance for advanced learners and 2. Paper-based activities prepared by teachers in advance for lower level learners. Accordingly this study focused on the latter since immediate corpus data might be quite overwhelming for freshmen Iraqi EFL learners at their beginning stages of learning. Forty-five Iraqi freshmen learners participated in the study all of them studying English as their major at the English Department/ college of Arts / Al-Qadisiyah University. The study lasted for only two weeks and adopted the four-step procedure developed by Chujo and Ophidian, (2008): (step 1)Hypothesis formation, (step 2) extensive teacher-student discussions, (step 3) homework activities and (step 4) inside class activities. In addition a questionnaire was conducted by the researcher in order to explore learners' attitudes and opinions towards the implementation of DDL activities on teaching grammar. The analysis of students' responses on the DDL activities and the statements of the questionnaire revealed very positive findings concerning DDLactivities inside the EFL classroom.

Key words: Corpora, Data-Driven learning (DDL), Inductive learning, Concordances, Key word in context (KWIC)

الملخص

أن من مزايا استخدام المدونات الالكترونية في تدريس وتعلم قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية هائلة وكثيرة، فبواسطتها يمكن تعريض المتعلمين للغة الأجنبية على نصوص أصلية وحقيقية مستخدمة من قبل المتحدثين الأصليين للغة.ان استخدام المدونات الالكترونية في تدريس اللغة الانكليزية بصفتها لغة أجنبية يمكن ان يكون مباشرا. ومن DDL خلال استخدام هذا التطبيق مباشرتا يمكن للمتعلمين ان يستفيدوامن قوائم التكرار الموجودة في تطبيق وان يحاولوا بأنفسهم تخمين قوانين النحو الخاصة بتركيب معينا وللكلمة المراد التحقق من تركيبها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مدونات، التعليم الموجه بيانيا، التعلم الاستقصائي، قوائم التكرار.

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1. Introduction

In Iraq as most Arab countries, students start learning English from the primary stage precisely at the age of eight. Never the less, most Iraqi freshmen University students studying English at their first yearstruggle in understanding Grammar rules and instructions even the most basic grammar rules. A study conducted by Bdaiwi, Al-Shujairi and Tan (2017) on Iraqi Pre-University students' grammatical errors revealed that most students do face difficulty in grammar tenses as well as some serious problems related to articles and prepositions. They concluded that these difficulties were due to the traditional methods teachers adopt when teaching grammar and that a more learner-centered approach is needed along with some technology use in the class. These results are consistent with those of Ridha (2012) who showed that most errors committed by Iraqi EFL university students in their writing tasks were grammatical ones especially errors related to Tense and Article. It is perhaps because of the lack of authentic teaching materials and the old methods used in grammar teaching that Iraqi students perform weekly in grammar.

many attempts have been made in trying to apply Corpus based teaching methods and techniques into the English language teaching classroom. One of the most influential direct application of Corpus linguistic to classroom teaching and learning is called Data-Driven methods related learning approach which was first coined by Tom Jones (1991). Many studies have revealed that DDLis proving to be very useful in English language teaching and learning. It encourages the authentic use of language materials by providing both teachers and learners an opportunity to act with real life situations through tasks taken from everyday life interaction (Osolsobě& Vališová,2012; Boulton, 2012; Hadley, 2002). This "condense exposure" (Gabrielatos 2005: 10) that DDL offers can play a great role in raising learners' awareness of different types of language patterns. It has also been noted that the applications of DDL activities in teaching English grammar is shifting the way of teaching from the traditional explicit methods to the more modern implicit ones. One of the most important benefits of teaching grammar implicitly through DDL is giving students an opportunity to explore and discover by themselves the rules of the language taught and how it works, as it is put by John (1997: 101) "Every student a Sherlock Holmes". This highlights the roles of both the student and the teacher in the learning process as the later taking the role of "language researchers" (ibid) whereas the former taking the role of monitors and a facilitators. In addition, many studies have proved that DDL is not related to learners' proficiency levels. Advanced learners, intermediate and lower level learners can benefit effectively from this approach(Takanashi,2009; Boulton,2012; Lin, M. H., & Lee, J. 2015).

Despite these important facts on the benefits of the DDL approach to teaching English Grammar, still it is not used widely in the language teaching classroom especially in Iraq. Most teachers in Iraqi schools and universities scarcely do use corpora in their language teaching classrooms despite them knowing its

positiveimpact on English language teaching and learning. This can be, the researcher believes, due to many reasons like: large classrooms, no or week internet access, lack of computer equipment, electricity issues at schools and universities and finally unqualified teachers.

Considering what is mentioned above the present study will try to: 1.explore the effect of paper-based DDL activities on Iraqi EFL freshmen learners' grammar development and 2. investigate learners' attitudes and opinions towards this new kind of approach. To the best of the researcher's knowledge this kind of study has not yet been conducted in Iraqi universities nor in any educational setting in Iraq.

2. The Direct Use of Corpora in language Teaching (Data-Driven learning (DDL):

From the beginning of its appearance corpus linguistics has had great applications in language teaching. Many researchers concerned with the uses of Corpora in language teaching distinguished between two uses, Direct and Indirect uses (Leech, 1997; Römer,2008; and McEnery and Xiao,2011). The impact of corpora on language teaching had been indirect more than direct since the indirectapplications of corpora are more concerned with "WHAT and WHEN to teach" (McEnery and Xiao 2011: 374). Even those who have never heard of corpus linguistics had in some why dealt with it indirectly, for example using a learner dictionary or reading a reference grammar are all based on corpora research. Indirect applications of corpora in language teaching include: syllabus designing, material development and reference publishing like: dictionaries and grammar textbooks.

On the other hand the direct use of corpora in language teaching is all about "HOW to teach" (ibid). It is often related with Data-Driven Learning (DDL) approach to language learningas first coined by Tom Jones (1991) who defines it as "the use in the classroom of computer generated concordances to get students to explore regularities of patterning in the target language, and the development of activities and exercises based on concordance output." Jones definition emphasized learners' autonomy and gave learners the roles of explorers instead of the traditional roles of receivers. Echoing the same perspective that of Johns', Odlin(1994, pp. 319-320) defines DDL as "an approach to language teaching that gives central importance to developing the learner's ability to "puzzle out" how the target language operates from examples of authentic usage".

Thus, DDL as an approach to language teaching and learning seeks to transfer the traditional detective learning strategies to a more inductive learning ones especially "strategies of perceiving similarities and differences and of hypothesis formation and testing" (Johns1991: 31). This transfer can only be done if there is a transfer in teachers-learners roles, a thing that DDL approach can effectively provide. For it works under the notion "that the task of the learner is to 'discover' the foreign language, and that the task of the teacher is to provide a context in

which the learner can develop strategies for discovery – strategies through which he or she can 'learn how to learn'" (Johns 1991: 1).

There are so many types of corpora each specific for a certain purpose and previous studies have proved thatall learninglevels can equally benefit from DDL if the appropriate corpus is chosen for both learners' level and experience(Hunston, S. 2002; Takanashi, 2009; Lin & Lee,2015;). Studies also showed that the effectiveness of DDL lies in the appropriate tool that is used to exploit it(Evison, 2010; Gilquin& Granger, 2010; Flowerdew, 2012;). Concordance software isconsidered the most influential tool used with DDL, allowing learners to observe both grammatical expressions and vocabulary items within a large data of authentic language highlighted through words or expressions that are repeated within a group of sentences. This tool can make learners predict and explore by themselves or in groupsthe way language works especially how certain grammatical patterns combine in a sentence.

But implementing DDL in teaching grammar to the less advanced level could be, the researcher thinks, quitechallenging due to the enormous corpus data available and the overwhelming concordances lines that the learner will be encountered with. Thus, paper-based DDL activities prepared by the teacher in advanced could be of great help in introducing this type of approach to the beginning learners. Kirschner, Swellerand Clark (2006) proved that the use of DDL paper-based activities in teaching language patterns helps to motivate learners at the beginning levels especially those with limited experiences and insufficient background knowledge. They also showed that these types of paper-based activities are better than immediate hand-on concordances(ibid). Another advantage of paper-based DDL in teaching grammar is highlighted by Boulton (2010), who suggested that even teachers who have little experience in dealing with corpus tools and techniques can prepare paper-based DDL activities and make use of this new approach in their teaching of grammatical items.

Putting these important facts in mind and taking into consideration the challengesmentioned in the introduction thatmost Iraqi teachers and learners face in their educational process, the current study will depend on paper-basedDDL activities in teaching grammar to Iraqi EFL freshmen learners at the University level.

3. Methodology

${\bf 3.1}$ The Participants and the Study Design :

The study was mostly a qualitative one which was carried out at an Iraqi state university where the researcher teaches. Forty-five Iraqi EFL freshmen learners participated in the study. They are all non-native speakers of English whose first language is Arabic and are studying English language as their major at the Department of English/ College of Arts/Al-Qadisiyah University in the academic year 2018-2019. Itshould be noted that all participants share the same English language proficiency since students who want to apply for studying English language in any Iraqi University should have at least gained 70 out of

100 in their high-school English. Accordingly only 45 out of 88 students have been admitted in the English Department/ College of Arts /University of Al-Qadisiyah. According to the syllabus concerning the first semester in English Departments/ College of Arts throughout Iraq, grammar lessons should be three hours per week and should depend on the traditional grammar book ofPraninskas "Rapid Review of English Grammar." The study lasted for only two weeks due to the fact that sticking to the syllabus is a must in Iraqi Universities and integrating a new material within the formal syllabus for a whole semester will expose the teacher to some sort of accountability. Thus the participants received 6 hours of DDL paper-based grammar instructions throughout the two weeks. The instructions covered the topics mentioned in the formal syllabus which were unit two (Auxiliary verbs) andunit three (present vs. past tense). These topics should be covered within two weeks according to the syllabus plan. In order to investigate the effects of DDL on Grammar teaching and learning a four step procedure developed by Chunjo&Oghigian (2008) was adopted in presenting DDL instructions, followed by a questionnaire conducted by the researcher for revealing students' attitudes towards the implementation of this type of procedure in grammar learning.

3.2 The Four Step Procedure ByChujo&Oghigian (2008):

The study followed the four step procedure developed byChujo and Oghigian, (2008) as shown in table (1). In the first step students worked in groups and explored paper-based DDL activities concerning specific grammatical items and patterns. The researcher divided the students in this stage into nine groups each group with five students. They were told to explore the concordance lines given and then discuss with each other what they find along with forming hypothesisabout the grammatical rules they are working on. Then in the second step the instructor discusses with the students what they have come up through clarifying and correcting their hypotheses. In the third step students practiced some previously prepared paper-based DDL activities at home as homework so to test their retention of the grammatical rules they have found. Lastly, the fourth step concentrated on some practice inside the class with the teacher monitoring and reinforcing students' work and responses.

Table 1. The Four-Step DDL Grammar Teaching Procedure by (Chujo and Oghigian, 2008)

N. steps	Description
Step 1	Learners' hypothesis formation through paper-based DDL activities
Step 2	Intensive discussions by the teacher to confirm or correct these hypotheses
Step 3	Evaluating the hypothesis through homework activities
Step 4	Exercises inside the class with teacher feedback on homework

3.3 The prepared paper- based DDL activities:

The DDL activities prepared by the researcher were of three types. The first type are paper prints of original concordance lines in a KWICform (key words in context) taken from the iWebcorpus. These activities are a kind of introduction for the students to what corpora is and how to explore a given word in a given context as in figure (1) and (2). Through this inductive task the nine group of learners explored the words and patterns in context and drew conclusions about the rules that govern the word or pattern. The researcher presented this task to reflect step (1) and (2) in the four-step DDL grammar teaching procedures mentioned in table (1) above were each group form their hypothesis and draw conclusions about a certain word or structure followed later on by extensive discussions on the part of the instructor to clarify or correct these hypothesis. The researcher watched and observed carefully the way each group explored the corpus and how they formed their hypothesis. Correct and wrong hypothesis done by each group during the lessons detected to stage one are discussed later on in the results.



Figure (1) Example on a DDL activity in stage one / The auxiliary (do)



Figure(2) Example on a DDL activity in stage one/ The auxiliary have

The second type of activities were original DDL tasks extracts from CANCODE prepared by Cambridge University press for lower level learners. It encourages learners to make inferences of the form and function of a given word or structure as in figure (3) and (4). These activities were given as homework for learners to practice what they have reached upon and what they have learned in the first type of activities. Through practicing at home, learners test their memory and remembering of the rules they have found. This type of activities reflect step (3) in table (1) which is "Evaluating the hypothesisthrough homework activities". The homework was done at home by the learners alone and they were told to bring it the next day in order to be evaluated by the researcher.

Cos you know it First I thought something I thought you I realised that Beverley But you'd never played games till she went to school +at least two years cos I	had had two days of rain before we got there and had already started healing had happened something bad had happened had met him. had been in the whole weekend. had you really? had never had a cold had never met any of them. had just ordered the ticket but you+
The Profile of the tense: Formation: Adverbs or time expressions	

Figure(3)Extracts from DDL unit 10 based on CANCODE

Can you guess the missing word in a	each set of concordance lines?
would be greatly offended if a guest I was so thrilled at myself I I think I've given my best and I	to pay for anything. It was to pay in advance. A huge meal, to take less money [p] Meanwhile,
think it would happen. [p] Nadine I think. Before they went, they party system. The president	to share her prize with her to come back soon. [o] One could to hold a meeting on the issue
She found another instructor - but his head and burst into tears. He	to pay him more than a pound;
friends Burned Man and Oracle often Jessica, Stephen added: 'The doctors he didn't think I needed surgery. He	me to be honest with myself, and me to weigh up the quality of lif- me to think about it again. [p]
The London Business School who was also a hypnotherapist, but suffered many casualties and he	that unemployment would rise to on me that it would not be easy to me to be prepared for trouble. He
6. my time's up. [p] So when a friend On leaving, we shook hands and she transplant for leukemia, the husband	me to join her women's theatre- me to see her from time to time to me to listen to a plano recital
What part of speech are the missing words? What sort of words come after them?	

Figure(4) Extracts from DDL unit 15 based on COBUILD

The third and last type of activities are exercises prepared by the teacher inside the class, appendix (1). The purpose of these exercises is for immediate feedback and reinforcement by the teacher to the learners. These exercises represent the last step in table (1) above. Authentic data was used by the researcher in preparing the exercises. The exercises were concordances lines based on the iWeb corpus. The researcher chose the lines in the exercises so as not to be overwhelming and hard to understand.

The total number of tasks presented to the learners during the two weeks of grammar lessons using DDL paper activities were 12 tasks. The tasks were divided according to the four-step procedure adopted in the study. Four tasks for each step except step two which was emerged with step one. Table (2) below shows the percentages of learners' performance on the DDL tasks of each step.

Table (2) Percentages of Students' Performance on the DDL Activities of Each Step

DDL - activities according to each step	Percentages of learners' performances		
each step	Correct	Wrong	
Step (1): hypothesis formation	66%	34%	
Step (3): homework for	72%	28%	
grammar retention			
Step (4): practice inside the	82%	18%	
class for reinforcement			

After the two weeks of teaching grammar through DDL activities the participants were asked to answer a questionnaire related to their attitudes towards the four-step procedures they went through during their grammar learning.

3.4 The questionnaire:

In order to investigate learners' attitudes towards theimplementation of DDL activities ingrammar learning and teaching, participants were asked to answer a questionnaire about the four- stage procedures they have gone through during the two weeks. The questionnaire contained eight statements and was based on a 3-point Likert scale: Agree (1), No Strong Opinion (2) and Disagree (3) as shown in table (2) below. It should be noted that the participants were told not to write their names on the questionnaire sheets so that they can feel more relaxed and confident in expressing their feelings and their attitudes towards this type of approach.

Table (3) Students' responses on the DDL questionnaire

Statements	Responses		
	Agree	No opinion	Disagree
1. Learning grammar through DDL	79%	8%	13%
is fun and interesting.			
2. I learn more effectively when I	79%	3%	18%
discover the grammatical rule and			
explore the language by myself. (
Stage 1)			
3. I want to continue studying	72%	2%	26%
Grammar and other subjects			
through this approach			
4. The DDL activities that were	76%	9%	15%
given to us as homework helped me			
in grammar retention (Stage3)			
5. The DDL activities that were	80%	5%	15%
done inside the class were very			
useful in immediate teacher			
feedback& reinforcement. (Stage			
4)			
6. I prefer the integration of DDL	75%	10%	15%
activities with the traditional			
method and not depend entirely of			
the DDL approach alone.			
7. I prefer to depend entirely on	20%	16%	64%
DDL.			
8. I prefer the tradition way of	25%	0%	75%
grammar teaching.			

4. Results and Discussions:

The analysis of students' performance on the DDL paper-based revealed very important facts concerning grammar teaching through DDL and the four-step procedure adopted in the study.66% of the students managed to form correct hypothesis and draw correct conclusions for the first time when exploring the highlighted word in the concordance lines of the activities in step (1). While 34% of them made wrong hypothesis and conclusions. This, the researcher believes, is due to the fact that students have not been encountered with such activities before. An increase in the percentage of correct performance can be seen in stage (3) were 72% of the students did their homework tasks correctly and only 28% had difficulty in grammar retention. This increase could be because of the extensive discussions the students had with the instructor in stage (2) after their hypothesis formation in stage (1). The last stage witnessed an outstanding increase in students' correct performances on the DDL paper- based tasks done and a 18% bad performance. This increase inside the classroom with 80% reflected the consistency of the four-step DDL grammar teaching procedure adopted in the study. The gradual development in the students' correct performances could be noticed in every step especially in their percentages of correct performance on the tasks. Moreover, the observations made by the researcher inside the class during the discussions and task evaluation revealed very important facts concerning the use of DDL approach in grammar teaching. Most students felt very anxious and excited when exploring the language by themselves and drawing conclusions.

As for students' attitudes and opinions concerning the implementation of DDL activities in teaching grammar the questionnaire shown in table (3) above revealed that most students responded positively at most of the statements especially the statements that were concerned with the stages that they had gone through. It can be noticed that most students preferred stage(4) since 80% of them chose statement 5 "The DDL activities that were done inside the class were very useful in immediate teacher feedback & reinforcement". This can be due to both the presence of the teacher while they are doing the activity and the immediate teacher feedback they get after completing the task.Stage (1) comes next in students' preference with 79% on statement number 2, then comes stage (3) in statement 4 with 76%. As for learners' opinions concerning whether or not they prefer learning grammar through DLL, 75% of the students chose statement (6) " I prefer the integration of DDL activities with the traditional method and not depend entirely on the DDL approach alone". While only 20% of the students preferred to depend entirely on DDL and 25% of them preferred the tradition way of grammar teaching. Students' preference to integrate the new method within the traditional one was quite over whelming. Their preference of integration is, the researcher thinks, because of them being at their beginner levelof learning. Integrating new methods of teaching with the traditional ways could be very influential in language teaching. Finally 79% of

the students found it fun and interesting to be taught grammar through DDL approach and 72% of them wished to be taught other subjects through this new approach.

5. Conclusions:

This study explored the effects of DDL activities on Iraqi EFL students' grammar learning and development. The DDL activities were all teacher—led i.e. prepared in advanced and controlled by the researcher. Being the researcher and instructor at the same time helped a lot in observing the effects of the DDL activities on learners' grammar learning and development. The study followed the four step procedure developed by Chujo and Oghigian, (2008): (step 1) Hypothesis formation, (step 2) extensive teacher-student discussions,(step 3) homework activities and (step 4) activities done inside the class. Thestudy lasted for two weeks, students went through six hours of DDL instructions followed up by a questionnaire conducted by the researcher to explore students' attitudes towards this new approach. The DDL activities done in stage one, three and four were all analyzed and evaluated by the researcher along with the responses of the questionnaire. The analyses showed that:

- 1. Paper based DDL activities prepared in advanced by the teacher can be effective for beginner level university students in grammar learning and development.
- 2. Students managed to explore the language data in stage one by themselves and form hypothesis about the rules that govern the language.
- 3. The implementation of DDL activities in teaching grammar changes the way of teaching to a more inductive one rather than the traditional dedicative way of teaching.
- 4. The role of the teacher in the DDL approach is that of a monitor and facilitator.
- 5. Finally most students responded positively to the questionnaire conducted by the researcher. 79% of them found it quite interesting and fun to study and learn through this type of approach and 75% of them asked to integrate the DDL activities within the traditional method of teaching especially at the beginning levels.

Because of the limitations of the current study, future studies should be carried out with other Iraqi EFL learners at a more advanced level. Moreover, a comparison could be made between two groups of learners: Experimental group and Control group in the use of DDL in learning so as to compare the effectiveness of this approach to the traditional one.

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Appendix (1)

Instruction: Spot the verb phrase and answer the questions:

1.	in some of them that might have been a bit smelly	
2.	Nothing could have been a greater contrast to the Hamptons	
3.	Newspapers and television have been a popular subject for	
	content analysis	
4.	lived to the 25th August he would have been 63 years old	
5.	Indeed, small miracles have been made achieved in improving efficiency,	
6.	He would never have been allowed to remain looking like that	
7.	Japan's success might have been an example for Vietnam.	
8.	cos like, it would have been alright cos 'd be finished like, today or	
	tomorrow (pause)	
9.	There must, therefore, have been another meaning of the parable before	
10.	They have been appearing more recently in japan.	
11.	be teased a lot at school because I may not have been as quick as the	
	others.	
12.	As this area is in Cabus Parish I have been asked to contact you to see if	
	your council	
13.	It must have been a week last Monday.	
14.	She has been playing tennis on and off for three years.	
15.	I have been working on this report since eight o'clock this morning.	
16.	Someone has been eating my chips (= half of them have gone).	
17.	They have been travelling since last October.	
18.	They have been married for nearly fifty years.	
19.	It has been raining for hours.	
20.	He has been writing a book and he is working on another one.	

- 1. From the above concordance lines, what verb phrase is highlighted?
- 2. List the tense of each sentence depending on the verb phrase highlighted.
- 3. What follows the verb phrase?
- 4. Show how the subject effects the verb phrase highlighted?
- 5. List the modal auxiliaries used before the verb highlighted.