Language-Related Revisions in Published Articles Written by Non-native PhD Students in Applied Linguistics Discipline

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Abstract

One of the most important accomplishments for academics is to publish their research outputs in accredited journals. Journal editors and reviewers often call for an extensive range of modifications before granting acceptance. The present study delved into the type and rate of these revisions on the manuscripts submitted to highly indexed ELT journals by Iranian PhD students in applied linguistics. It explored the proportion and focus of language-related revisions in terms of grammar, lexis, and discourse. To this end, 24 published research papers written by Iranian PhD students along with their first draft manuscripts were selected, and their introductions, results, and discussions were analyzed and cross-checked to identify language-related modifications. The results showed that the most frequent type of modifications required by journal editors and reviewers were discoursal followed by grammatical and lexical revisions. The lexical revisions required were all unwarranted. The findings can help young researchers in applied linguistics to preemptively minimize the need for language-based revisions in their academic writings through addressing the identified problematic areas in their manuscripts.

Keywords: academic writing, discoursal revisions, English for research publication purposes, grammatical revisions, lexical revisions

Introduction

Once a non-native English speaker claims to be a foreign language writer with an acceptable level of proficiency, they need to compile academic texts and write in a new setting with different sets of vocabulary and structures, and strict standards compared to general writing having some informal words and expressions. Despite the fact that all academic written pieces are regarded, according to Dane (2011), as 'stilted, distant, and overly qualified' (p. 3), it is a necessity for the authors of both native and non-native communities to compose their work following the strict standards of academic writing. The main issue to be tackled in the current investigation is

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English academic writing for the purpose of publication referred to as English for research publication purposes (ERPP), of non-native applied linguistics academics.

Taking into account research articles, it is not always as easy as it seems to have an article accepted for publication in a top-tier journal. While it is quite a challenge, succeeding in having articles published in the mainly English-language journals is essential for authors, their institutions, and the academic community. This demonstrates the importance of writing for publication having its own submission rules and regulations to follow, which differs from country to country and even from publication to publication. Cargill and O'Connor (2006) argued that for the majority of the authors to reach academic proficiency for publication, two aspects are of paramount importance. Firstly, they will have to develop a certain point of capability in English as a foreign or second language. Secondly, they will have to be cognizant of what criteria English-speaking journal referees and editors expect them to fulfil. A research article will undergo many modifications or changes by authors and reviewers before it is published in journals.

The present research aims to approach what language-related revisions journals require researchers to do in the field of applied linguistics by discovering the most frequent changes made to the pre-reviewed articles in terms of lexis, grammar, and discourse. We hope that this study furthers young researchers' knowledge of how they can get their studies published and broadens the horizons of this research area. To clarify the aim of the study, we elaborate on writing for publication below.

Writing for publication

In writing for academic purposes, research articles are the most important writing activities. A research article is usually a piece of academically written text defined as 'a research process or research and development results or the current state-of-the-art in a certain field of science or technology' (Hering & Hering, 2010, p. 1). Under the pressure of publish or perish, it is a crucially important task for academics to know how to write for publication. When it comes to doctoral students, universities assert that they must have international scholarly publications in order to be considered distinguished researchers (Guo, 2012). Many universities around the world require their academics to publish research articles in top-tier journals in order to get promoted. For example, Huang (2012) stated that Chinese Educational Ministry promote the academics as lecturers, associate professors, and professors provided that they manage to have their articles published in accredited journals. O'Connor (1995) put forward the idea that before doing anything in the path to getting published, the researcher has to undergo some very preliminary stages. He supposed that more than a few moves are needed to make to prepare a research paper for publication. First, the authors have to ensure that the studies are meant to answer exactly the research questions posed. Furthermore, a researcher has to be certain about the fact that the experiments meet established standards. Moreover, the procedure of keeping records of the investigation should be agreed upon by the different parties involved in the practice. Consequently, the research work has to be evaluated continuously if the work is appropriate for submission.

Writing for publication is considered a demanding task. Derntl (2014) admitted that everyone likes to write and publish their scholarly work in English, but that may not be in every researcher's talent pool to be able to write and then survive the hindrances of making reviewers accept the work submitted which is usually, in his opinion, nerve-wracking. In his article, he attempted to present an introductory report on basic topics of composing and organizing research articles to be submitted to the related journals. He held the opinion that a scientific article shall be

a valid publication by which he meant that it must be published in a peer-reviewed journal. Even though writing for publication is widely regarded by researchers as a difficult task, the role of literacy brokers such as reviewers, editors, colleagues and friends who are native speakers of English (Lillis & Curry, 2006), and so forth, helps lessen this difficulty, as more and more research articles are being published in accredited peer-reviewed international journals.

Empirical studies on ERPP

Several studies have been conducted on non-native speakers ERPP in countries like Japan (Gosden, 1995, 1996) and Hong Kong (Flowerdew, 1999a, 1999b). Gosden (1996) examined some aspects of writing practices in English by interviewing 16 Japanese novice researchers. He found that the revision processes between drafts were mostly concerned with correcting grammar and sentence structure and improving vocabulary. Flowerdew (1999a) focused on 585 Hong Kong scholars working in diverse fields. Two-thirds of these scholars said that they were at a disadvantage when writing papers in English, compared to their native speaking counterparts. Flowerdew conducted another study (1999b) in which he addressed the problems that 26 Hong Kong scholars in various fields had experienced when writing in English for publication. He identified several problems such as less facility of expression, longer writing time, less rich vocabulary, and L1 transfer in the composition process.

Lack of English writing proficiency is deemed to be a major difficulty in article writing. In his thorough study, Cho (2009) investigated issues in English article writing among graduate students and professors at a research-based university in Korea. Overall, the most problematic area based on the results was the linguistic side of journal papers, while the most prominent features of articles were meta-linguistic elements such as the overall structure and paragraph development. In their article concerning the field of management, Kaplan and Baldauf (2005) investigated some types of linguistic problems non-native writers of English encounter when attempting to publish in scholarly journals, and some of the difficulties that editors face when working with authors. The results indicated that first, taking simple language problems such as spelling of some particular words or incorrect pronoun references for granted, organized language problems, which are related to ideology, discourse, and metalinguistic aspects of the problems, often cause problems like when long stretches of text appear in a manuscript and are rarely limited to individual shorter sentences.

Benfield and Howard (2001) studied non-native speakers' manuscripts submitted to the Annals of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery to find out different sorts of linguistic inadequacies reviewers usually observed among them. Their purpose was to explore the language problems of non-native speakers. They found that there were no major differences between the native and non-native speakers' manuscripts in rejection rates as well as scientific quality. Nevertheless, Benfield and Howard reached a statistically significant difference between native and non-native speakers' pieces of work in the number of comments made by reviewers regarding language alongside with the quality of writing. Besides, they conducted an error analysis of 10 of the non-native speakers' manuscripts at the end of which they pointed out far more errors than the reviewers had already mentioned. They found that most of the overlooked errors were on missing or incorrect articles. The researchers concluded that the reviewers were inclined to concentrate more on word choice and grammatical mistakes in general.

Some researchers have addressed the unfairness that non-native speakers or EAL speakers encounter when trying to get their papers published. Hyland (2016) found through attitude surveys given to EAL speakers that the majority of journals are often prejudiced against them when seeing

any non-standard language. He calls this linguistic injustices and argues that it is an outdated respect for native speaker competence, which causes EAL writers to lose confidence or hope, and does not take into account the fact that novice L1 English researchers, too, have difficulties in their writing.

Through analyzing 192 published articles written by non-native speakers in eight different journals and comparing them with native speakers' papers from the same journals, Martinez (2018) found that a number of lexical words and phrases are observed in non-native speakers' articles that are employed less frequently by the native speakers. He concluded that the results might be indicative of ELF in writing for publication.

Research has also been conducted in terms of both content- and language-related revisions. Mungra and Webber (2010) addressed the changes made to the first draft of the submitted articles under the term of language-use comments. To do this, they gathered some of the clinical research manuscripts written by Italian medical authors. They divided language-use corrections into several categories and then evaluated the rates of each category. They found that about 57% of the comments made on the pre-reviewed drafts of the articles and papers were content comments. That leaves a huge proportion of about 43% to language-use and discourse and rhetorical comments editors give on the reviewed manuscripts. It could be concluded that reducing language-related problems may result in the final acceptance of articles to a great extent. Regarding Iranian context, Gholami and Zeinolabedini (2015) examined the first drafts and published versions of 60 research articles in the field of medical science in order to find the most frequent language-related problems in terms of lexis, grammar, discourse, and mechanisms of academic writing, which include spelling, hyphenating, spacing, case lettering etc. Their results showed that journal editors and reviewers addressed discoursal errors more than the other categories.

As the literature showed, the status, nature, and different aspects of writing for publication remains in vague as regards PhD students in applied linguistics most likely because the authors in this field are considered advanced users of English, accordingly their writing proficiency has been taken for granted. For one thing, there have not been any studies on the proportion of changes made on submitted manuscripts, and the rules and regulations of writing for publication have not been totally investigated in the field of applied linguistics. For another thing, it has not been estimated whether the ballpark of the mentioned changes have been applied on the linguistic angles of the works. Furthermore, research is needed to find out how much of the linguistic changes applied are often on grammatical, lexical, discoursal, or any other type of writing corrections. Considering these, we conducted this study to address the stated issues as its sole objective regarding Iranian PhD students of applied linguistics by responding to the following research questions (RQ):

RQ: What language-related revisions in terms of lexis, grammar, and discourse do Iranian applied linguistics PhD students make on their manuscripts based on peer review reports from journals?

Methods

Corpus

The study was conducted in an Iranian context using a local corpus. The literature cited in the preceding chapter, however, was mostly conducted in the contexts of other countries that enriched the base of the study. We used a number of published articles by Iranian PhD students in applied linguistics between 2016 and 2019.

A key factor in collecting corpus data, according to McEnery, Xiao, and Tono (2006), which can influence its validity, is the issue of representativeness. Representativeness could be defined as the extent to which the data of a corpus being texts represents the whole population (Martinez, 2018). Two key elements affecting the representativeness of most corpora are the range of genres in corpora, and the way text chunks belonging to each genre are chosen, that is sampling. Given this, a smaller corpus size will be sufficient if the range and sampling are each homogeneous. The only genre used in current study was research article (RA). For the articles to be more homogeneous, we only selected the journals involved in applied linguistics and further narrowed them down to language learning and teaching journals. At first, we identified 30 research publications by Iranian researchers in well-indexed ELT journals. To this end, we emailed Iranian PhD students of applied linguistics to solicit pre-reviewed drafts of the manuscripts as well as their review reports from the journals in which the manuscripts were finally published. We could only collect 24 articles both in the form of pre-reviewed and published copies. Regarding copyright and ethical issues, we obtained permission from the authors to reproduce extracts from their papers and even create their word files with some deliberate changes in some names and terms to respect their anonymity. All the articles without their pre-reviewed drafts were excluded from any further analysis. Sometimes, the authors failed to keep track of the submitted drafts, and at times, the pre-reviewed drafts were rejected in the course of the reviewing. We excluded both types of the mentioned cases from the corpus of the study. The 24 remaining articles were all co-authored and published after subsequent revisions. It is worth mentioning that the authors of the articles declared that they had received no convenience editing assistance from other colleagues or professional editing institutes and the only source of feedback for them was the journal editors and reviewers' comments. The 24 articles belonged to 17 PhD students. Table 1 shows journals in which the identified manuscripts were finally accepted and published.

Table 1
List of journals and number of papers made available from each one

Journal Name	No. of papers	Indexing	IF (2022)	SJR (2022)
System	8	SSCI, Scopus	6	1.97
Language Learning	5	SSCI, Scopus	4.4	2.2
Language Teaching Research	6	SSCI, Scopus	4.2	1.44
ELT	5	SSCI, Scopus	2.5	1.17

Data Categorization

Drawing on the categories used by Gholami and Zeinolabedini (2015), the researchers conducted the process of data categorization. The categories adopted were grammatical, lexical, and discoursal, covering all areas of revisions observed in the papers. The first type of language-related corrections was the revisions made to the grammatical aspects of the submitted manuscripts, which contained

- Verb tenses: based on the context and meaning of the sentence a different tense of the verbs was observed to be used in the published copy of the article.

- Subject-verb agreement: using *"was"* instead of *"were"*, *"has"* instead of *"have"*, *"are"* instead of *"is"*, vice versa, etc.
- Plurals: using plural form of a word when the singular form is suitable and vice versa.
- Articles: included redundant usage of definite article *"the"* alongside with some cases in which the authors had used or not used the indefinite articles *"a"* and *"an"* properly.
- Prepositions: included the cases in which one preposition was replaced by another one incorrectly. For instance, when it was supposed to be *"on"*, *"at"* was employed or when it was proper to use *"by"*, *"via"* was initially written.
- Pronouns: examples included using wrong, vague, or ambiguous pronouns for a reference such as *"they"* for *"their"*, *"his"* instead of *"him"*, *"her"* for *"she"*, etc.
- Word forms: consisted of the cases in which an adjective was used instead of an adverb or vice versa, different types of adjectives were used improperly, etc.

The researchers chose several extracts from the articles of the corpus for the study. Figure 1 shows a grammatical revision in which the first box is from the pre-reviewed and the second one from the published copy of the article under investigation:

The results of the ANOVA are also reported in Table 3. The table indicates that there is a significant different between the means of at least two groups, $F(2, 187)=276.890$, $p<.001$. The effect size, calculated using the eta squared, was .75 which is much higher than the .14 threshold for a large effect. (Cohen, 1998)

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Figure 1. A grammatical revision extract

The second type of language-related changes made to the pre-reviewed drafts of the published research articles was the revisions concerning lexical aspects:

- Redundancies: adding irrelevant redundant intensifiers and adjectives that were removed by the journals in the published copies.
- Wrong part of speech: when wrong parts of speech were observed.
- Vague words: when the authors had used vague ambiguous or somehow not enough explanatory words in the first place, but were replaced later on.
- Stylistics: *"something"* instead of *"very little"*, *"many"* for *"a number of"*, *"radical"* instead of *"serious"*, *"as follows"* replaced by *"outlined below"*, *"shown"* instead of *"proven"* and such replacements of variety and taste.
- Insertion: addition of one or two words for the sake of clarity or elaboration on the part of the editors.

Figure 2 is a lexical revision extract in which *the table indicates that* was replaced by *it is evident from the table that* in the published copy.

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Figure 2. A lexical revision extract

The last group of language-related revisions amongst the published works of Iranian applied linguistic PhD students was the changes made on the discoursal aspects of the firstly submitted manuscripts to gain eligibility for publication. These revisions comprised

- Sentence clarity: included the cases when phrase or phrases were added to the beginning, middle, or end of the sentences for the purpose of clarification
- Logical connections: adding the likes of *furthermore, besides, in addition, moreover, however, thus, consequently, on the other hand, for instance, for example, firstly, secondly, finally*, etc. to a part of the sentence.
- Brevity: was observed when a phrase, sentence, or even paragraph was partially or entirely removed in the published copies of the articles.
- Insertion: happened when sentences of an entire different taste were added to the text in hand
- Discourse markers: examples included wrong or redundant use of the likes of *"so", "because", "and", "but",* and *"or"* which were either removed or replaced by the editors or authors in the final version
- Organizational modifications: when there was a change between the first and final version of the papers in terms of format, font, size, word limit, etc.

Figure 3 shows an extract from brevity under the category of discoursal revisions. Like the previous examples, the first box is from the pre-reviewed and the second one from the final version of the article:

A number of studies have been undertaken to develop bilingual versions of the Vocabulary size Test. To date, bilingual Russian, Korean, Vietnamese, Mandarin and Japanese versions have been developed. The main impetus for the development of such bilingual versions has been the complexity of the distractors and the fact that the examinees often need more than just word knowledge to endorse the items (Nguyen & Nation, 2011).

A number of bilingual versions of the Vocabulary Size Test have been developed incl ing Russian, Korean, Vietnamese, Mandarin and Japanese. In a bilingual version, stem is in English and the choices are in the learners' L1. Here is an example from Korean version.

Figure 3. A discoursal revision extract

Analysis

Three main parts of the research articles, namely the introduction, discussions, and results, which were believed to be mostly composed by the authors themselves and therefore could contain the potential changes, were selected. These sections were then printed out and prepared for the purpose of data analysis.

Twelve papers from the corpus of the present investigation were chosen randomly and analyzed by another rater who was a colleague of the second researcher to find out the degree of inter-coder reliability in data coding. The analysis was done after the elaboration of the topic and objectives by the researchers for the other coder. Table 2 shows the results of this analysis.

The findings, as shown in Table 2, revealed the degree of agreement between the two coders was a high rate of 0.86%.

Table 2
Inter-coder reliability results

	Value	Asymp. Std. Error	Approx. Tb	Sig.
Agreement Measure (Kappa)	.86	.23	8.879	.00
No. of valid cases	12			

Results

As the results show, the rate of content-related revisions was much smaller than the size of language-related revisions in the analyzed articles. This study was not concerned with content-based revisions and such an analysis was beyond the scope of the study. According to the findings, of all the papers investigated, only 12.1 percent of the revisions were content-related changes. This left the great proportion of 87.9 percent to be language-related revisions.

To answer the research question, the researchers found the frequency and percentage that reviewers commented on introduction, results, and discussion sections of the authors' manuscripts in terms of language and its subcategories to produce the final published copies in international ELT journals. Regarding this objective of the study, Table 3 shows frequency of language-related revisions under its three sub-categories:

Table 3
Frequency of language-related revisions

Paper No.	Grammar	Lexis	Discourse	Total
01	10	5	5	20
02	5	1	6	12

03	2	1	6	8
04	10	4	14	28
05	21	6	9	36
06	1	4	5	10
07	0	3	6	9
08	4	3	5	12
09	3	0	10	13
10	1	4	2	7
11	1	2	9	12
12	10	5	4	19
13	9	5	11	25
14	13	7	6	26
15	2	2	8	12
16	0	0	3	3
17	6	4	0	10
18	5	4	4	13
19	11	6	5	22
20	2	0	0	2
21	8	4	3	15
22	16	0	14	30
23	6	17	18	41
24	1	1	4	6
Total	147	87	157	391

As Table 3 shows, grammatical and discoursal revisions were the most frequent categories among the revisions. Figure 4 shows the proportion of all the revisions:
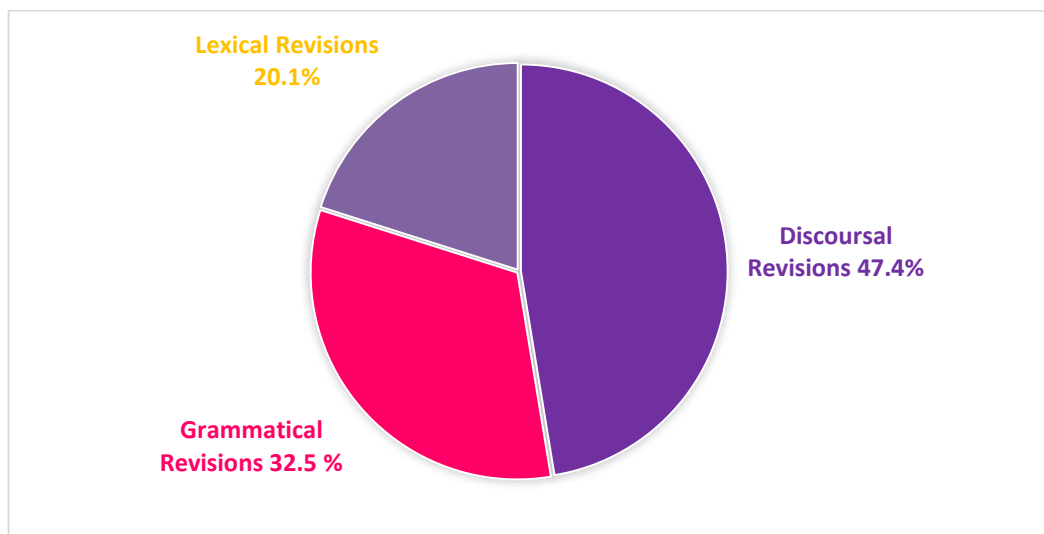

Figure 4. Percentage of language-related revisions

According to Figure 4, almost all the three categories of language-related corrections targeted in this investigation contribute to the revisions made in the submitted papers by Iranian

PhD students of applied linguistics. However, the rates of lexical revisions observed are largely smaller than the other two categories making up to one-fifth of the changes. Moreover, as for the second largest group, one truly observes the grammatical revisions making a great deal of 32.5% of the changes made between the pre-reviewed drafts and published copies by the editors. Finally, the discoursal changes made on the pre-reviewed drafts of the submitted articles made up 47.4%.

Frequency and percentage of grammatical revisions

Table 4 shows the frequency and percentage of different categories of grammatical revisions where verb-tenses were the most and subject-verb agreement the least frequent categories among grammatical revisions.

Table 4
Frequency and percentage of grammatical revisions

Grammatical Revisions	Frequency	Percentage
Verb-tenses	44	29.93%
Word forms	23	15.64%
Prepositions	20	13.6%
Plurals	18	12.24%
Pronouns	18	12.24%
Articles	15	10.2%
Subject-verb agreement	9	6.12%
Total	147	100

The most important revision that editors make as the grammatical changes on the linguistic problems was verb-tenses that was almost double the rate of the second category. The least observed revision was subject-verb agreement (6.12%). Overall, among the grammatical revisions made on the Iranian published articles, verb-tenses appear to be the most and subject-verb agreement the least frequent ones. Figure 5 shows a verb-tense revision:

such long distractors require more than just word knowledge. Complex grammatical knowledge as well as high reading skills were required on the part of the test-takers to get the item right. It poses a problem for monolingual vocabulary size tests as these tests cannot be claimed to be tests

Understanding such long distractors requires more than just word knowledge. Complex grammatical knowledge as well as good reading skills are required on the part of the test-takers to get the item right. It poses a problem for monolingual vocabulary size tests as these tests cannot be claimed to be tests of pure vocabulary knowledge. Other factors, such as grammatical knowledge and reading ability, contaminate the measurement.
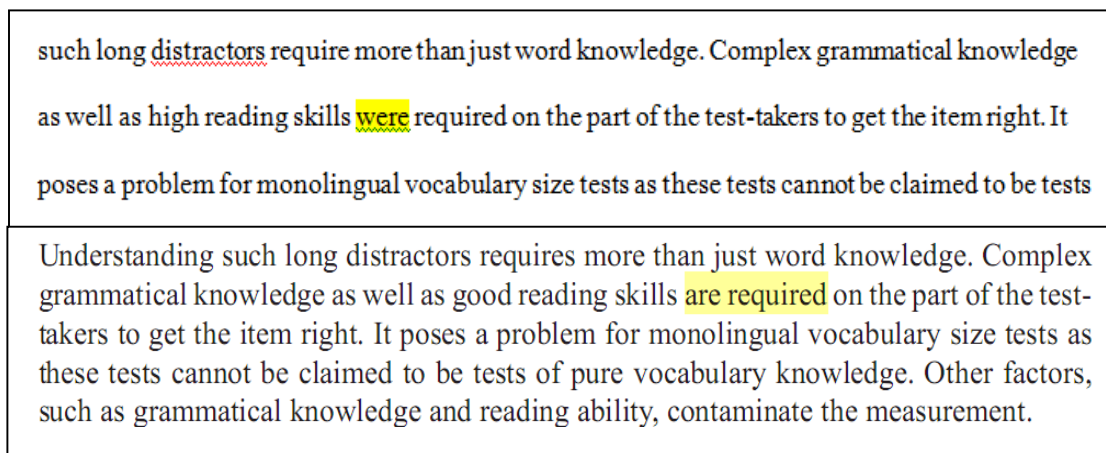
Figure 5. A verb-tense revision

Frequency and percentage of lexical revisions

Regarding lexical revisions, Table 5 shows the frequency and percentage of lexical revisions made to the pre-reviewed drafts of the published articles:

Table 5
Frequency and percentage of lexical revisions

Lexical revisions	Frequency	Percentage
Stylistics	51	58.6%
Vague words	12	13.8%
Redundancies	8	9.2%
Wrong part of speech	8	9.2%
Insertion	8	9.2%
Total	87	100

The table shows that stylistics was the most, and vague words, redundancies, wrong part of speech, and insertion were the least frequent categories, respectively. Among the lexical revisions under the linguistic corrections, the changes in stylistics appeared to be the most important (see Figure 6).

Learning vocabulary from context or 'incidental learning' as opposed to 'direct intentional learning' are two different ways of learning vocabulary. According to Nation (2001), extensive reading is useful for vocabulary growth and is called incidental learning. He carried out some experiments and put forward some evidence on why incidental vocabulary from context is small (ibid). Some of such reasons as found in the literature are outlined below.

Learning vocabulary from context or 'incidental learning' as opposed to 'direct intentional learning' are two different ways of learning vocabulary. According to Nation (2001) extensive reading is useful for vocabulary growth and is called incidental learning. He carried out some experiments and put forward some evidence on why incidental vocabulary from context is small (ibid). Some of such reasons as found in the literature are as follows:
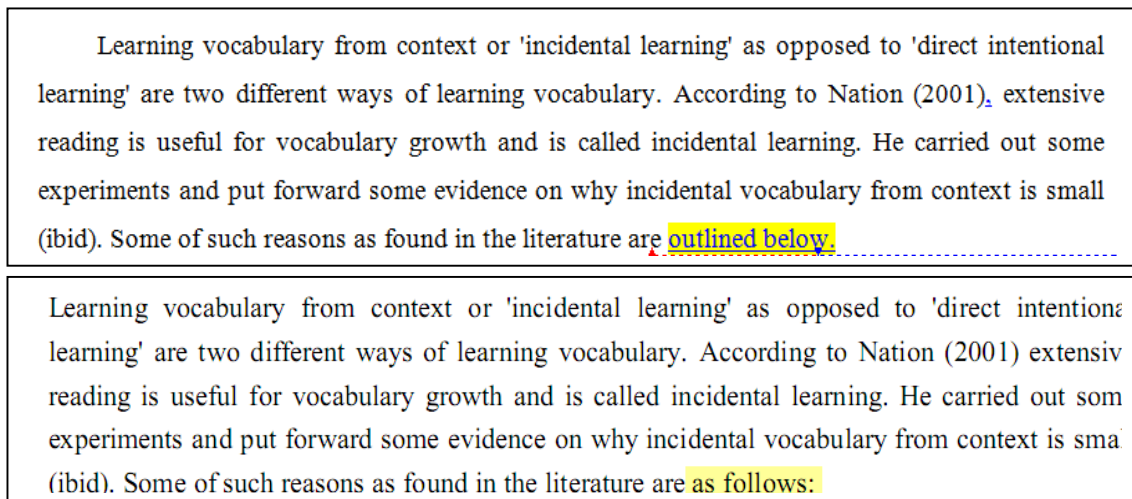
Figure 6. A stylistic revision extract

It was found that 58.6% of the lexical revisions had been done on the stylistic corrections that were almost either due to a difference of taste or register marginality that had made the change necessary. Another important category under the lexical revisions was using the vague words by the authors in their submitted papers constituting 13.8% of the whole revisions. Other changes of lexical category included redundancies, wrong part of speech, and insertion of the new words that were calculated each to be equally 9.2% of the all changes.

Frequency and percentage of discoursal revisions

With respect to discoursal revisions, the researchers separated the discoursal revisions made to the pre-reviewed drafts of the published articles and reported the results in Table 6 in which brevity was the most, and discourse-markers was the least frequent categories among discoursal revisions of the linguistic corrections.

Table 6

Frequency and percentage of discoursal revisions

Discoursal Revisions	Frequency	Percentage
Brevity	49	31.2%
Logical connections	39	24.8%
Sentence clarity	37	23.6%
Insertion	16	10.1%
Organizational modification	9	5.8%
Discourse markers	7	4.5%
Total	157	100%

As table 6 shows, brevity (see Figure 7) made up the most revisions (31.2%) followed by logical connections (24.8%), sentence clarity (23.6%), insertion (10.1%), organizational modification (5.8%), and discourse markers (4.5%).
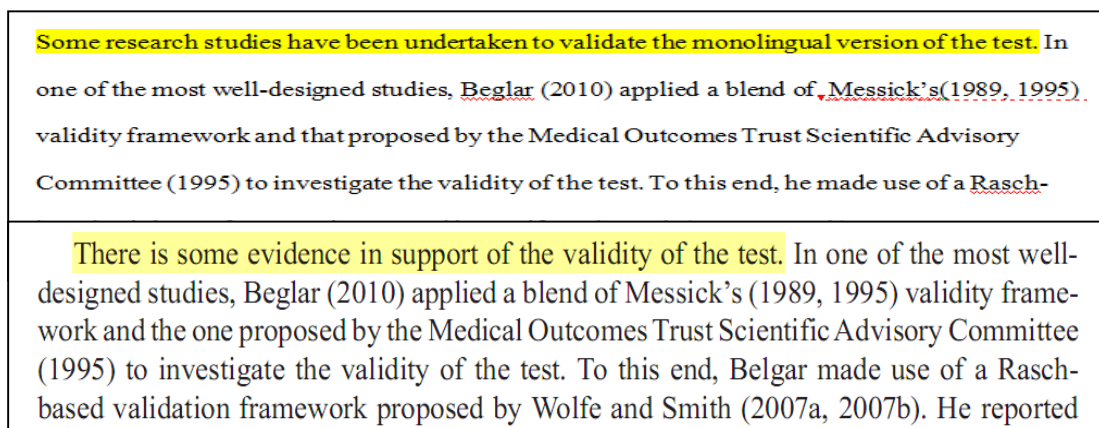
Some research studies have been undertaken to validate the monolingual version of the test. In one of the most well-designed studies, Beglar (2010) applied a blend of Messick's(1989, 1995) validity framework and that proposed by the Medical Outcomes Trust Scientific Advisory Committee (1995) to investigate the validity of the test. To this end, he made use of a Rasch-

There is some evidence in support of the validity of the test. In one of the most well-designed studies, Beglar (2010) applied a blend of Messick's (1989, 1995) validity framework and the one proposed by the Medical Outcomes Trust Scientific Advisory Committee (1995) to investigate the validity of the test. To this end, Belgar made use of a Rasch-based validation framework proposed by Wolfe and Smith (2007a, 2007b). He reported

Figure 7. A brevity extract

Discussion

The results of language-related corrections among the revisions made on the papers of Iranian applied linguistics PhD students were not expected in the beginning. This is because, due to the thorough work and practice on the grammatical issues in the language schools in Iran, it was predicted that the rates of language-related revisions would be very low. The findings revealed that lexical, grammatical, and discoursal revisions consist of 20.1%, 32.5%, and 47.4% of the

linguistic changes made to the manuscripts submitted by the authors. In addition, discoursal revisions were found to be more than grammatical and lexical changes that were actually expected in an Iranian context. These results are in line with those of Cho's study (2009) where the most problematic area in scientific paper writing was reported to be language-related. However, what reported to be the most important characteristic of journal papers was meta-linguistic elements such as the overall structure and paragraph development.

In terms of lexical and grammatical revisions, the results of this study are similar to those of Mungra and Webber's (2010) in which they explored content- and language-related revisions in medical research publications. The most frequent revisions after content-related revisions being language use comments were 43.72%, of which 33.06% were lexis and syntax comments. This is similar to the results of the present study as lexical and grammatical revisions together constituted 52.6% of the whole revisions.

Considering grammatical revisions, the findings showed that verb-tenses appear to be the most problematic area for the authors seeking acceptance in international journals. This section of structural errors constituted about 29.93% of all the changes in this regard. Surprisingly, however, the next five sections of the revisions under grammatical changes were close to each other in percentage ranging from 10.2% to 15.64%. These revisions consisted of word forms, prepositions, plurals, pronouns, and articles, respectively. Lower in percentage and frequency than these was the last category of subject-verb agreement. Considering the field of applied linguistics like the case of the present study, one should search for a compelling reason behind the results as the paper authors in this field are considered proficient user of English, so the existence of the grammatical problems can be seen as illogical.

Grammatical-revisions observed in the current research are similar to the findings of Flowerdew and Wang (2016) in terms of verb revisions. Verb revisions made up 20.1% of the whole lexico-grammatical revisions in their study; however, the revisions were not verb-tense. They dealt with several categories one of which was substitution that further had the sub-categories of verb, clause, prepositional group, preposition, nominal group, and so forth. What is noteworthy is that verbs seem to be a major hurdle for non-native speakers wishing to get their studies published as the present study and Flowerdew and Wang's confirm it. A justification could be mother tongue interference, because there might be no native speaker of English having such types of errors. Mother tongue interference could also account for all the other grammatical problems observed including word forms, prepositions, plurals, pronouns, articles, and subject-verb agreement. It is concluded that mother interference is likely to occur for non-native writers of English *regardless of their proficiency level*.

Regarding the lexical revisions made on the submitted drafts of Iranian articles of PhD students in applied linguistics, the results showed that stylistic revisions were the most prevalent type of changes. These types of revisions included the cases in which the editors had replaced one word for another to reach to a better, clearer and in-mind meaning of the sentence under scrutiny. These types of changes were mostly the *taste* of the editors and might prove to be inevitable on the side of the authors as they may not be predictable. Other lexical revisions were also observed such as redundancies, vague words, wrong part of speech, and insertion that add up to about 40% of all the changes altogether.

Results regarding the lexical revisions show that stylistics is the most frequent type of revisions that Iranian PhD students of applied linguistics are faced with. This may be because most of the editors and journal reviewers in international highly-indexed journals are native-speakers of

English. Consequently, the words or phrases utilized by the authors might not fit to the context they are referring to, and are replaced by some better alternatives, and add to the rate of revisions among submitted manuscripts. However, the other side of the coin is promising. The fact that lexical revisions constitute only 20.1% of the whole grammatical problems is evidence that a trend of increasing English as a Lingua Franca exist; in other words, frequent use of some lexical items by non-native users of English has over time led journal editors and reviewers not to consider them mistakes or errors. What supports this is Martinez's (2018) study as he found through analyses of two corpora that there are a number of lexical items used by non-native authors in their published articles in international journals that are not normally used by native speakers of English.

Taking into account the nature of the revisions, the majority of the lexical revisions are in fact *unwarranted*. For instance, what is the difference between *the table indicates that* in the first draft and *it is evident from the table that* in terms of meaning in the published articles? Is it disruptive to meaning? Given the fact that so many people who publish across the disciplines are in fact users of English as an additional language or as a foreign language, should ERPP be the English of L1 users? Whose norms are the norms of ERPP? What kinds of revisions are only warranted considering they are the preferred modes of expression of L1 users of English? While satisfactory answers to these questions need further investigations, it seems that L1 users in general and non-native applied linguistics authors in particular suffer from the myth of being native speaker of English—a hurdle that many hope to overcome in a near future.

Taking into account the discoursal revisions, the most frequent type of changes included brevity, logical connections, and sentence clarity. The editors seemed to be in favor of more compacted but at the same time meaningful sentences, and in terms of discoursal revisions had cut some of the sentences and even paragraphs shorter. Regarding logical connections that made a large proportion of 24.8% of discoursal changes, applied linguistics' authors seemed to have always missed the logical connectors such as *in addition, besides, however, on the other hand, consequently, thus,* etc. and the editors had inserted the words for them in the published copy. Sentence clarity was also an important factor for the journals. Other minor revisions included sentence insertion, discourse markers, and organizational modifications that did not affect the pre-reviewed drafts to a great extent. Although applied linguistics PhD students who provided the researchers with the data utilized in this study are considered proficient users of English, what might justify the discoursal problems they were faced with is that there are not any form-focused instructions like the 'focus-on-form' type (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2002) or conscious raising teaching approaches, currently in Iran, that can be employed in academic writing courses. Examples of conscious raising activities are dictogloss (Thornbury, 2001) and task-based approaches, especially the ones suggested by Willis (1996), and VanPatten's (2004) deductive approach implemented through Input Processing Technique, as Daly (2016) underscores these approaches for teaching discourse in academic writing courses. However, as the data that Daly used were of Chinese authors, it seems that in other countries where English is a foreign language, too, academic writing is not taught using the approaches and techniques mentioned above, indicating a need to modify the way academic writing is taught in EFL contexts.

The most plausible explanation behind the whole results is that the applied linguistic authors of the data in this study might have been reluctant to receive any correction service from literacy brokers. One of the authors of the present study who also provides language editing and proofreading services to authors stated: 'I have rarely had clients majoring in applied linguistics for pre-publication editing services, and almost all clients are from other fields like medicine,

management, and so on'. What this indicates is that applied linguistic PhD students seems to be self-conscious about their writing output which might have by and large led to the revisions mentioned above. Self-conscious emotions include shame, guilt, embarrassment, and pride (Tangney, 1999). The widespread belief that applied linguistics students are proficient speakers of English might have caused some of the researchers in this field to get embarrassed and not to be willing to ask for any scaffolding from editing institutes before submitting their manuscripts to the journals.

Conclusion

This study aimed at elucidating the most problematic language-related areas in the submitted manuscripts of Iranian PhD students in applied linguistics by analyzing the proportion and focus of language-related revisions between the pre-reviewed drafts and published copies of the research articles. The study found that discoursal revisions were the most frequent type of modifications required by journal editors and reviewers. This was followed by grammatical and lexical revisions. In addition, this study also proved that verb-tenses, stylistics, and brevity were the three most frequent categories among all language-related revisions while insertion and organizational modifications were found to be the least common types. Among all the linguistic corrections, stylistics was observed as the most frequent and discourse markers as the least frequent revisions.

The findings can be helpful to curriculum designers and heads of departments in graduate ELT courses to be in line with writing courses catering to the language needs of their students. This holds true in the case of research based graduate courses where students are expected and required to publish profusely in international journals. Moreover, based on the results of the present study, advanced writing courses in the universities could be modified to address the most problematic language-related areas of writing for publication such as discoursal problems that were found to be difficult to handle by the PhD students. Modifying the courses can be achieved by planned and incidental form-focused activities.

Similar to any other studies, we faced some limitations. In the present study, the researchers did not take into consideration content-related revisions in applied linguistics – an area that has not been covered in the previous literature but needs a laborious research study because applied linguistics includes quite a wide range of subdisciplines, and even when ELT is the focus of such a study, the author will face numerous areas of research.

It would be a good idea to take into account the native- and nonnative-written materials and compare them in terms of linguistic and non-linguistic categories to further research into this area. Furthermore, different sections of articles could be compared in terms of content- and linguistic revisions to probe which sections of the papers face the most, and which sections face the least rate of revisions, not only in applied linguistics but also in other fields of study. Moreover, shame, guilt, embarrassment, and pride as the self-conscious emotions with respect to applied linguistic PhD students in EFL contexts are promising to conduct further research on language-related revisions. Finally, yet importantly, the issue of unwarranted revisions in terms of lexis, grammar, and discourse separately or in tandem should be the focus of future research because to our knowledge no research to date has been done in this regard.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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