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ERROR TREATMENT BY EXPERIENCED AND INEXPERIENCED IRANIAN EFL TEACHERS OF WRITING

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ABSTRACT

Research suggests that inexperienced teachers, even those with high levels of competence and proficiency, have considerable difficulty when it comes to making judgments of acceptability (Allwright, 1998). It has been speculated that, to the extent that this is the case, it may have some implications for the error treatment practice of inexperienced teachers, in terms of their identification of error and of their assessment of the gravity of different types of error. If so, this may explain why research findings may show significant differences between experienced and inexperienced teachers reaction to error both quantitatively and qualitatively. The present study attempted to explore this area further. A sample of ten experienced and ten inexperienced teachers were selected and their performances on an acceptability judgment test were compared. Furthermore, their attitudes to error treatment methodology and their views regarding error treatment were probed by means of a questionnaire. Then, the compositions written by at least three students were given to both experienced and inexperienced teachers to correct.The findings of the study revealed that inexperienced teachers appeared to be more tolerant of error, both in theory and practice, than their experienced counterparts. This may mean that presumed differences between experienced and inexperienced teachers with respect to error treatment are less general than has been suggested, and that inexperienced status is less significant than other factors like language ability and professional training. Finally, findings show that this is a more complex area than has already been realized and that it warrants further and deeper investigation.

Keywords: EFL, Error treatment, experienced and inexperienced teachers

INTRODUCTION

Defining one's pedagogy for the treatment of learner error, grappling with such issues as whether, when, what and how to correct, has been described as a 'potential crisis point' in a teacher's classroom life (Allwright,l998). The centrality and significance of this area of pedagogy is the reason for making it the focus of this study.

Given its status as a crisis point for teachers, the treatment of learner error has long been a focus of research, one aspect of which is to compare experienced and inexperienced teachers' approaches. The evidence so far has suggested that experienced teachers deal more leniently with error, and the two groups (experienced and inexperienced teachers) have differing perception of error gravity with respect to various error categories (Allwright, l998).

Thus, while the present study is not breaking new ground, it is hoped that it will prove useful in providing additional data in this area, and extending any understanding already achieved.

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Definition and Justification of Concepts

The Experienced Concept

The concept of "experienced" can be described as: a common-sense idea, referring to people who have a special control over a language, insider knowledge about 'their' language (Davies, 1991, p.1).

As usually conceived, the experienced teachers of English have been exposed to English and taught it over longer period of time and so it is expected to have acquired a unique set of abilities regarding distinguishing right from wrong forms, producing fluent and spontaneous discourse, displaying a wide range of communicative competence and using language creatively (Davies, I99l).

Challenges to the Concept

Of course, as Davies (1991) points out, common sense notions may not always be adequate at more rigorous levels of analysis. The "experienced" concept is widely seen to be such a notion, prompting calls for it to be abandoned(Ferguson, in Kachru,1992)and attempts to find better formulations like 'proficient user' (Paikeday, 1985),'expert speaker' (Rampton, 1990).

Much of the controversy is based on theoretical grounds and a feeling that the experienced, as described for example in early Chomsky (Chomsky,1965), is so idealized as to elude definition and have no basis in the real world. Above all, it is argued that not all experienced teachers have the degree of special control over the language, that attempts to actually define native competence or proficiency are to a large extent inconclusive; and that the intuitions and judgments of grammaticality supplied by even the most educated experienced teachers tend to be highly variable and inconsistent (Medgyes,1994, p.11).

There are other significant difficulties. The experienced English-speaking environment is less easy to define than it was, with more and more 'world Englishes' contributing to the setting of language norms (Kachru,1992). The experienced can lose their command of the language in certain circumstances, like long-term migration (Tay, 1982, pp.67-68). Some also feel that the concept is associated with a rather narrow monolingual view of the world and that it ignores the many who would claim a level of bilingualism equivalent to the experienced status in two or more languages (Paikeday, 1985, P.41), that appears to be the norm in certain parts of the world (Grosjean , 1982, p.l).

The experienced status alone is a sufficient qualification for language teaching, undermining efforts towards professionalism in ELT and devaluing the contribution that trained and proficient inexperienced teachers can make (Alptekin & Alptekin, 1984). This inappropriacy particularly applies where learners are more likely to use English for communication with other inexperienced, and it is as a common scenario in which the number of inexperienced outstrips the number of experienced teachers. In addition, it is argued that both linguistically and psychologically the most effective model for the learner is the successful bilingual. That is, inexperienced teachers may in fact be better qualified than their experienced counterparts, if they have gone through the laborious process of acquiring English as a second language and if they have insight into the linguistic and cultural needs of their learners (Phillpson, 1995, p. 195).

Clearly, it is important to know much more about experienced and inexperienced teachers' behavior and its effects before such apparently reasonable claims can be accepted with conviction, and it is hoped that this present study may help shed some light on the issue in question.

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Defending the Concept

Despite all the problems touched on above, the experienced concept remains in widespread use. Precise definition may be elusive but there is a feeling that the 'furry edges' of the concept are insufficient reason to dismiss its 'essential validity' (Quirk, 1985 cited in Paikeday, 1985); that the concept is, useful precisely because it isn't too closely defined, (Paikeday, 1985, p. 64); and that the "experienced term" is a convenient reference to a kind of prototype (Carroll, in Paikeday, 1985, p.74).

Much hinges on the extent to which it is felt that inexperienced teachers can achieve experienced levels of proficiency and competence. Paikeday (1985) believes this to be sufficiently commonplace for the concept to be invalidated, but others are more skeptical. Medgyes (1994),defending the concept, describes those experienced teachers with a native-like command of the target language as 'pseudo-native speakers', insisting that they may pass as experienced in everyday situations, especially when they are subject to close and expert scrutiny. He cites a number of areas in which this inexperienced view tends to be revealed, like pronunciation and the mastery of interactional as opposed to transactional language use, and he echoes Davies (1991). in stressing inexperienced teachers' difficulties in judging what is grammatically and pragmatically acceptable language use (Medgyes, l994, pp.14-15). Given the significance of this last aspect to the debate about the experienced concept the judgment of acceptability based on the Bachman's model will be clarified.

Judgment of Acceptability

Bachman (1990) has developed a model of communicative competence which gives a sense of the range and complexity of knowledge of which language competence is comprised and underlies our perceptions of acceptability (see Figure 1)' This figure has taken all aspects of competence into account with its own subdivisions. Based on all these various aspects, the various judgments might be taken into consideration. Knowing all these kinds of competence can make learning, teaching processes and the acceptability judgment easier.

The role of the many and varied factors which determine acceptability leads to some inconsistency in judgments even those of experienced, so the more the inconsistency the more problematic becomes the very concept of a language at all and the idea that there is an identifiable group of experienced teachers of that language' But while the grammar of language may be essentially indeterminate (Corder, 1973, p.101), there remains, as Corder goes on to point out, citing Lyons (Lyons, 1968, p.154). in support, a sufficient degree of determinacy to identify some norms and make some statements about what is acceptable and what is not' The validity of the notion of acceptability, and of the idea that it is possible to make judgments in this area will , in any case be assumed in this study. If fact, without such validity it would be impossible to meaningfully engage in language teaching at all.

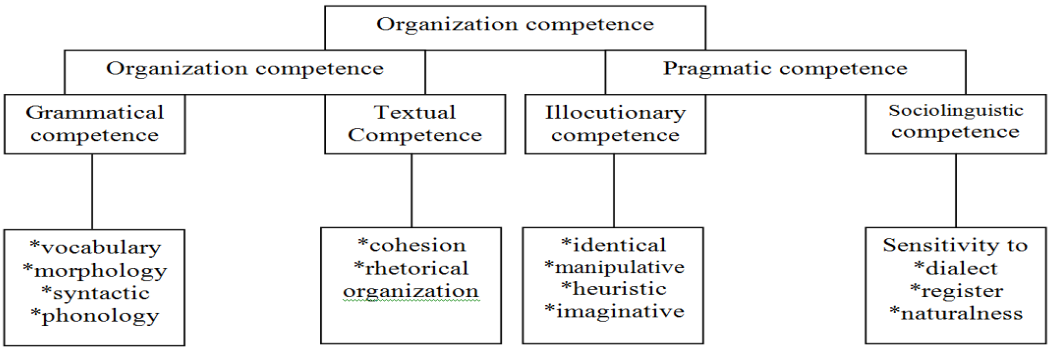

Figure 1. A model of language competence (Bachman 1990)

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The treatment of learners' errors with such issues as whether, when, what and how to correct will be as a crisis point for teachers, one aspect of which is to compare experienced and inexperienced teachers' approaches. This research area, and other issues relating to error, will be reviewed more fully in chapter 2, but briefly, the evidence so far suggests that experienced teachers deal more leniently with error, and that the two groups have differing perceptions of error gravity with respect to error categories. Thus, while the present study is not breaking new ground, it is hoped that it will prove useful in providing additional data in this area and extending any understanding already achieved.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of the present study is to investigate the error treatment by experienced and inexperienced Iranian EFL teachers of writing. In this connection the following research questions have been posited:

1. Is there any difference between experienced and inexperienced teachers in terms of their attitudes toward errors?
2. Do the experienced and inexperienced teachers treat the learners, errors in the same way?
3. Based on these research questions the following null hypotheses can be made: A. There is no difference between experienced and inexperienced teachers in terms of their attitudes toward errors. B. There is no difference between experienced and inexperienced teachers in terms of their treatment of learner errors.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Although several studies have been conducted in recent years on learners, errors, very few, if any, have specifically focused on exploring error treatment by experienced and inexperienced EFL teachers of writing. The main focus of this study is to examine error treatment between these two groups. This study is significant in that, it provides valuable data to those who serve on the front line of teaching. The research results may serve as a guide for EFL teachers in terms of helping them to increase their views to the attitude toward error and treat them more tolerantly. In addition, the study can also provide insights into how experienced teachers are different from their inexperienced counterparts concerning error treatment. Comparing the teachers' tolerance, and their error treatment will be beneficial to all stakeholders, prove useful in providing additional information in this area, and extending any understanding already achieved.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In review of literature, the terminology necessary to the discussion of errors and error treatment will be defined and clarified. Furthermore, some of the principal issues influencing pedagogy in this area will be reviewed and in order to contextualize this current study, previous research into experienced and inexperienced teacher reactions to learners' error will be reported.

Error /Error Treatment Terms

Corder (1973) distinguishes between 'errors', 'lapses' and 'mistakes'. Errors, as Corder argues, are not recognizable to the learner and so are not amenable to self-correction, but lapses are recognizable, being those slips of the tongue or pen, false starts, and confusions of the

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structure or, syntactic blends'. Such lapses are not failing in competence and so are sometimes referred to as 'performance errors' (Allwright & Bailey, l99l, p.88).

Mistakes in Corder's scheme are what he calls 'inappropriate utterances', where there is a failure to match the language to the situation. A further useful distinction is offered by Edge (1989), who subdivides Corder's error category into two. He retains the term 'error' for items which the learners cannot self-correct but to which they have been exposed, offering the term, attempts, for deviations in areas of language still untaught.

These distinctions are extremely valuable for the teacher at classroom level in determining when and how to treat a deviation, but identifying the category of a deviation is problematic, and only the most thorough analysis, based on detailed knowledge of the situation and the learner, will allow us to distinguish one type of failing from another with any certainty (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982, p.139). Given this difficulty, and given that the distinction is not important for the purpose of the study, a broad view of error will be taken as:

Any deviation from a selected norm of language performance, no matter what the characteristics or causes of the deviation might be (Duray, Burt & Krashen, 1982, p.139).

While this definition raises the question of what norm we select, it has the advantage of including all the categories mentioned above, including, mistakes' Corder's term for essentially pragmatic errors.

The term 'correction' also requires clarification, for as Chaudron (1988) has noted, it tends to be used in a variety of ways, most often to refer to:

Any teacher behavior following an error that minimally attempts to inform the learner of the fact of error - the treatment may not pursue correction further (Chaudron, 1988, p.150).

But for Chaudron, Allwright and Bailey, 'true correction, implies a cure for error, modifying the learner's interlanguage rule and eliminating the error from further production (Chaudron, 1988, pp.150-1). Correction in this sense is one aspect of the broader term 'error treatment' preferred by Allwright & Bailey. (1991).

Error Treatment: Trends and Issues

Classroom practice in this area has tended to fluctuate with the dominant pedagogical approaches of the time (Stern, 1992, p.151). Audio ligualism, for example, influenced by behavioral psychology, favored meticulous and detailed correction, based on the view that language learning was largely a matter of habit formation and that good habits are formed by giving correct responses rather than by making mistakes (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p.51). More recently, developments in second language acquisition research, and certain changes in priorities encouraged by communicative and humanistic approaches to language teaching, have prompted teachers to intervene less.

'Krashen's Monitor Theory', for example (Krashen, 1985), emphasizing unconscious acquisition over conscious learning, challenged the whole purpose of classroom activity, and' such features of it as formal grammatical instruction and the systematic error treatment often accompanying it. The influence of error analysis (Richards,1974), and of conception of distinction between 'global' errors (those affecting overall sentence organization and significantly hindering communication, like wrong order of major constituents, missing, wrong or misplaced sentence connectors, etc.) and 'local' errors (errors in noun/verb, inflections, articles, auxiliaries etc., which affect single elements in a sentence and affect communication far less) seems useful in this respect (Burt & Kiparsky, 1972).

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To conclude this discussion of changed emphases in error treatment and the issues that have given rise to them, two other points are worth mentioning. The humanistic influence, mentioned at the start of this section, has particularly meant that the danger of discouraging learners through insensitive correction tends to be emphasized more, recognizing the key role that affective factors can play in language learning. The second point is that there is now perhaps faith in the certainty of traditional language norms) accompanied by greater tolerance towards the growing variety of norms that char characterize, World Englishes' Kachru: 1984)'To categorize an utterance as erroneous is often highly subjective Day, et. al., 1984). Our selected norm may be only vaguely defined and may be in conflict with other equally legitimate norms from the treasure trove of, World Englishes'. The elusiveness of rules for language in use, or at the level of discourse and pragmatics, is widely recognized, but, even at sentence level, grammatical rules can often be indeterminate (Close, l992), and learners and teachers are often urged to be cautious and even skeptical in their attitude towards so-called language regularities (Westney, in Odrin, 1994). This necessarily brief and selective sketch of the background to error treatment pedagogy has attempted to give some idea of the issues which have enriched the debate about approaches to error treatment; and perhaps made it even more of a key and controversial area for teachers than before. In such a context, the suggestion that experienced and inexperienced teachers may react differently to error becomes a matter of both considerable interest and concern. It is to research background on experienced and inexperienced teacher error treatment that will be taken into consideration.

Experienced / Inexperienced Teacher Attitudes and Reactions to Learner Error: A Review of the Research

A study in this area is complicated by the fact that there are potentially a range variety of factors which can influence the extent to which a teacher reacts to a learner error. The level, needs and purposes of the learner, the aims of the course, attitudes to language regularity, its perceptions of the roles and status of teachers and students are among the factors which can operate here. There is consequently a danger of confounding the effect of different variables (Chaudron, 1988, P.185) and research needs to be interpreted with this caution in mind. This research review is based on three main studies, which now will be dealt in turn.

The Sheorey Study

Sheorey (1986) constructed twenty sentences, each containing one error, designed to represent a range of typical errors in the written English of ESL students of various nationalities, enrolled on university programs in the USA. The judges were sixty-two native speaker teachers from the USA, and thirty- four non-native speaker teachers from India, described as having had minimal degrees of exposure to native speakers. They were asked to assess the gravity of the errors on a scare of 0-5, the upper limit representing very serious error.

The results (see Table 1) revealed statistically significant differences between the groups. When responses were analyzed, according to category of error, statistically significant differences were also found to apply to five of the eight categories of error. The same breakdown also revealed different views as to the relative gravity of different categories of error. This was most striking with regard to lexical errors, glossed by Sheorey as the failure to choose appropriate words, ranked fourth in seriousness by native speakers and last by non-native speakers' This was the only category where native speakers were less tolerant, though the difference was not rated as significant. Sheorey explains this as probably being due to native speakers having a better grasp of lexical nuances of the language. Interestingly, later, Hughes & Lascaratou's (l992) findings on spelling coming below were not confirmed, both groups giving the errors little importance' and the native speakers ranking this as the least

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important category. Neither of the spelling errors represented affected intelligibility, so, perhaps, confirming Hughes & Lascaratou's interpretation of their results.

Table 1. Error gravity scares and scores (Sheoreoy, 1986)

Average points deducted	*Native scale*		*Non-native scale*	
	50.19		*59.82**	
Mean of total points deducted	*2.50*		*2.99**	
Category	Native Rank	Mean	Non-native Rank	Mean
Question formation	2.92	1	3.23	4
Agreement	2.91	2	3.57*	2
Tense	2.89	3	3.26*	1
Lexis	2.75	4	2.19	8
Indirect question	2.37	5	3.30*	3
Article	2.29	6	2.41	7
Preposition	2.01	7	2.80*	5
Spelling	1.86	8	2.50*	6

*Significant difference ($p<.01$)

Sheoreo see these results as instructive for non-native speaker teachers. Based on the premise that it is important for inexperienced teachers to acquire experienced sensitivity to error and, echoing Magnan (1982) to direct student learning in terms of native sensitivity to error', he urges non-native speaker teachers to move into line with native speakers, adopting a more lenient approach and adjusting their perceptions of the relative gravity of different error categories.

The Hughes & Lascaratou Study

Hughes & Lascaratou (1982) compared the reactions of ten non-native speaker teachers, ten native speaker teachers, ten university-level, and non-teacher native speakers. These judges had to consider thirty-six sentences, identified as having been taken from compositions about a car accident, written by Cypriot students of English in their penultimate year of high school.

The sentences contained one error each and provided four examples for each of the eight error categories (see Table 2). Four of the sentences were in fact composed by the researchers and contained no error at all. The judges had to identify the errors, correct them, assess their seriousness by deducting up to five points on a gravity scale, and explain the rationale for their assessments.

Results, summarized in Table 2, show the native speakers, particularly the non-teachers, judging errors much more leniently than the non-native speakers. No statistically significant difference emerged between the two native speaker groups, but the difference between the non-native speakers and both native speaker groups was rated significant. Group differences were consistent across all error categories to varying degrees, except spelling, where the positions were reversed. Analyzing this anomaly, Hughes & Lascaratou argue that it may have been because the particular spelling errors involved were such as to create lexical confusion and to affect intelligibility. This conclusion is based on their analysis of the rationales given for error gravity counts, where again there was a clear distinction between

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native speaker and non native speaker groups. For the former the intelligibility was indeed the main criterion for determining gravity, while the latter were more concerned with the extent to which an error infringed a basic rule that they felt these students should already have mastered.

Table 2. Points deducted for error categories and rank order of categories (Hughes & Lascaratou, 1982)

Error category	*Greek teachers*		*English teachers*		*Non-teachers*	
	Total points deducted	Rank order of gravity	Total points deducted	Rank order of gravity	Total points deducted	Rank order of gravity
Verb forms	167	1	105	3	88	5
concord	149	2	88	7	86	6
Plural	143	3	99	4	66	8
Pronouns	119	4	113	1	103	3
Vocabulary	112	5	111	2	115	2
Word order	98	6	90	6	89	4
Preposition	95	7	75	8	72	7
Spelling	75	8	99	4	120	1
Total	958		780		730	

The James Study

James (1977) compared the responses of seventeen experienced teachers and seventeen inexperienced teachers to fifty sentences demonstrating a range of syntactic and lexical errors, and concluded that the inexperienced tended to mark more severely. Teachers had to give each error a gravity rating of up to five points, the more points the more serious the error. Experienced rating varied from 9l-l7l points, with a mean of 123; inexperienced speaker ratings varied from 93 197 points, with a mean of 138. However, James observed that the inexperienced tended to fall into two groups; one, relatively tolerant of error in line with the experienced, the other, intolerant. He wondered if the same picture would be repeated with inexperienced teachers of other nationalities (the nationality of James' group is not specified), and speculated on the relationship between the differing inexperienced teachers tendencies and levels of language proficiency and teacher training. As regards category analysis of errors, James found the groups broadly similar in the way they ranked different categories of error, and noted that both groups rated lexical error low in significance. It is not clear whether the overall differences observed more statistically significant, and James himself urges that his results be interpreted cautiously, given the small size of the groups and the limitations of his sentence sample. Nevertheless, the results were suggestive to this research that shall be reviewed.

Those supporting teaching models less influenced by native speaker norms and values would perhaps quibble with Sheorey's premise that experienced teacher sensitivity to and perceptions of error should be a guiding principle for teachers. Moreover, even was the premise uncontroversial, we would need much more information on what experienced teacher perceptions are before reliable guidelines could be drawn up, and given that there is some

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variability in experienced teacher judgments of grammaticality and acceptability, such guidelines may be elusive. Nevertheless, experienced teacher norms do retain a large measure of significance and validity for many students, and to this extent, Sheorey's conclusion seems justified, assuming that the need to establish more reliable guidelines is fully addressed.

A note of caution also seems to be appropriate regarding the significance of the results. While the overall picture may be fairly clear, the analysis at error category level is perhaps less firmly based. In this studies it will be described the error categories differed, the examples for each category were sufficient to warrant only the most tentative conclusions, and where the categories do appear to be similar the results are in one instance at least, that of spelling, contradictory. As Hughes & Lascaratou themselves stress, there is a need for a range of studies based on clearly defined and consistent categories, for only then will any point to the need to pursue more precisely the relationship between types of error and levels of intelligibility (Hughes & Lascaratou, 1982, p.180) on the lines of Burt & Kiparsky (1972).

Another vexed question here is why inexperienced teachers appear to be less tolerant to error. Hughes & Lascaratou attribute it to differential language proficiency between experienced teachers and inexperienced, experienced teacher tolerance being based on 'better knowledge of the language, particularly of the wide variety of acceptable structures' (Hughes & Lascaratou, 1982, p.180). This view seems to be widely held, as a survey of over two hundred teachers, the majority of whom were inexperienced teachers, confirms (Medgyes, 1994). Commenting on his survey, Medgyes says that the picture of inexperienced teachers which emerges is one where they are usually preoccupied with accuracy, the formal features of English, the nuts and bolts of grammar, the printed word and formal registers. Many lack fluency, have a limited insight into the intricacies of meaning, are often in doubt about appropriate language use, have poor listening and speaking skills, and are not familiar with colloquial English. It is only logical to deduce that they place the emphasis on those aspects of the language they have better grasp of. (Medgyes, 1994, p.59)

He sees this as explaining the results of error treatment studies where inexperienced teachers lay great stress on grammatical errors and priorities accuracy over intelligibility. He touches on other possible factors, suggesting that while experienced teachers generally regard language as a means of achieving a communicative goal, inexperienced teachers regard English primarily as a school subject to be learnt and only secondarily as a communicative medium to be used. Nevertheless, he insists the 'deficient knowledge of English' is the main factor in determining error treatment practice (Medgyes, 1994, p.63). While this connection is hardly proven in any scientific sense, and seems hard to satisfactorily establish, it is here that is hoped to chase a little further in this study.

Finally, in this discussion of the research, it is important to stress, in the light of Sheorey's assumption that experienced teacher practice should act as a model, that we do not really know which of the contrasting error treatment style is actually more effective as regards language learning, and indeed the effectiveness or not of error treatment in general is very hard to demonstrate (Chaudron, 1988, pp.l33-136). In fact, Sheorey himself ponders in his conclusion whether perhaps learners are 'short-changed' by experienced teacher tolerance of error, and failure to alert students to some of their language deficiencies (Sheorey, 1986, p.311).

METHODOLOGY

The present part attempts to provide the following information. First, the subjects of the study are introduced. Next, the instruments which have been used in this study are elaborated. Furthermore, data collection and analysis procedures are presented.

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Participants

The sample consists of twenty EFL instructors, ten experienced and ten inexperienced. While there is no clear answer to the question 'how many is enough? and while sound sampling procedure can compensate for restricted sample size, this is clearly a small sample size necessitating a cautious interpretation of the results. The accessible instructors were chosen through personal contact. The distinction is sometimes blurred with some people not falling clearly into either category. Therefore, the sample was confined to less controversial cases. The average length of teaching experience for the experienced instructors was five years involving work with most age groups and levels at Kazeroon Azad University. All were currently employed at this university. The average length of teaching experience for the inexperienced instructors was one year involving work with the fresh students (the first, second or the third semester). They all are university graduates holding an M.A.(either from State or Azad Universities), and they have learnt English through formal instruction and try to teach it formally, too. Provided that gender won't have significant factor in error treatment, the groups are less balanced in terms of this factor. The profiles of both groups are as shown in Table 3a and Table 3b:

Table 3a. Profile of experienced teachers

Experienced Teachers	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*
Male/female	M	M	M	F	F	M	M	M	M	F
Age range: 40-50	42	41	48	45	46	50	43	41	46	40
Age when began to teach English	29	28	30	31	30	28	28	29	28	30
Year of graduation	1994	1994	1989	1993	1991	1985	1992	1995	1989	1997

Table 3b: profile of inexperienced teachers

Inexperienced Teachers	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*
Male/female	F	F	M	F	F	M	M	M	F	M
Age range: 40-50	29	31	30	28	30	29	32	33	31	35
Age when began to teach English	28	28	29	26	28	28	29	30	29	34
Year of graduation	2006	2004	2006	2005	2005	2006	2004	2004	2005	2004

Research Instruments

Two instruments were used in this study: first, a questionnaire which was utilized to measure the teachers' attitudes to error treatment to see how far experienced teachers and inexperienced teachers differed and second, the correction task which was given to both experienced and inexperienced teachers to correct. Next, according to their corrections the errors were classified to global and local regarding grammar, vocabulary and writing mechanics to see whether experienced and inexperienced teachers handle this instrument the same or differently.

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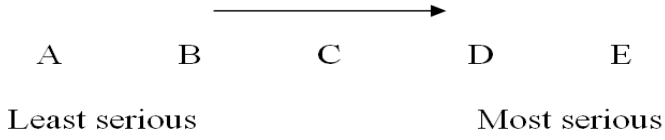
Component A: Attitude Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study was developed by Brown (1988). It is a questionnaire survey consisting of 20 statements, where respondents indicate the presence of error treatment on a 5-point Likert scale. A five-point attitude scale allocated 1-5 points for each response, so the sum of the whole attitude score ranged between 20-100. Those who strongly agreed (SA) scored five points, respectively four points for those who just agreed (A), three points for uncertain (U) indication, two points for disagree (D) and one for strongly disagreed (SD) indication. The higher the score the more sympathetic the respondent seems to be to tolerating error, emphasizing fluency more than accuracy, communicative effectiveness rather than linguistic precision, and to self-correction and peer correction rather than teacher correction. Thus, those most tolerant of error would score highest.

Component B: Correction Task

After the issue of attitudes was investigated, it was necessary to see how far they coincided with what teachers actually do, if not in their everyday practice, at least in an experimental correction task. For practical reasons to do with the scale of this research and difficulties with access to classrooms for observation the oral interaction is ignored in this research and the issue was concentrated on written error. Therefore, this component asks teachers to respond to three pieces of students' writings. The context and purpose of the writing, level of the students are indicated, and the teachers are asked to identify what they felt were significant errors, namely those they thought it important to bring to the students' attention, and to assess the errors. Respondents had to consider errors of all kinds, not merely syntax and lexis, but also questions of coherence and appropriacy, etc.

After reading the text, the teachers were asked to identify what they felt were significant errors, namely those they thought it important to bring to the students' attention, and to assess the gravity of those errors on a five-point scale (A-E). Where E indicates an error of greatest seriousness:



Previous research in this area has tended to concentrate on how teachers assess at sentence level. While this is not without its value, it seems more useful, given the emphases of communicative language teaching and models of communicative language ability, to go beyond the sentence and ask teachers to respond to an extended piece of writing and so bring in issues relative to discourse and pragmatics. This makes for a somewhat less manageable piece of research but does seem to be a more valid type of investigation.

RESULTS

The results and findings of the study and the statistical procedures along with their interpretation are presented as under:

Component A: Attitudes Questionnaire

The scoring system applied here (see Appendix l) implied an attitude between 20-100 (mid-point: 60) for each respondent, and between 10-50 (midpoint: 30) for each item. The higher the score the more sympathetic the respondent seems to be to tolerating error, emphasizing

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fluency more than accuracy, communicative effectiveness rather than linguistic precision, and to self-correction and peer correction rather than teacher correction.

A statistical analysis of Component A is provided in Tables 4a and 4b, revealing attitudes scores of 630 for the experienced teachers and 706 for the inexperienced teachers. This shows both groups were broadly in favor of tolerance of error, with the tendency surprisingly more pronounced in the case of the inexperienced teachers.

Table 4a. Attitude scores by item/respondent (Experienced teachers)

Mean: 63, Model: 66, Range: 57-74, S.D: 4.732

Item	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*	*Total*
1	2	4	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	19
2	2	4	4	3	4	4	4	2	4	4	35
3	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	17
4	3	4	2	3	4	4	2	3	4	4	33
5	3	3	1	1	2	1	4	2	3	2	22
6	2	4	2	2	2	2	4	2	4	4	28
7	4	5	4	4	4	2	1	4	4	4	36
8	4	4	4	2	3	4	4	4	4	4	37
9	2	5	4	2	4	4	2	2	4	5	34
10	2	4	1	3	4	1	3	2	1	2	23
11	4	4	4	4	4	2	4	4	4	4	38
12	3	4	4	2	2	5	4	4	4	4	36
13	4	4	3	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	41
14	5	5	4	2	3	4	4	5	2	4	38
15	2	4	1	3	4	1	2	2	3	1	23
16	2	4	3	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	25
17	4	2	4	4	4	2	4	4	3	2	33
18	2	2	4	5	5	4	4	2	4	3	35
19	2	2	4	4	2	4	4	4	4	4	34
20	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	43
Total	58	74	60	57	65	59	64	61	66	66	630

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Table 4b. Attitude scores by item/respondent (inexperienced teachers)

Mean: 70.6, Model: 75, Range: 56-85, S.D: 8.077

Item	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*	*Total*
1	2	4	2	2	4	1	3	4	4	3	39
2	1	4	2	4	4	5	1	4	4	4	33
3	2	4	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	20
4	3	4	3	4	4	3	3	4	3	3	34
5	5	2	2	4	5	2	4	2	4	2	32
6	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	3	47
7	2	4	4	5	5	5	2	3	4	2	36
8	3	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	39
9	4	3	2	4	4	5	4	4	3	4	37
10	2	4	1	1	4	2	4	4	4	3	29
11	5	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	44
12	4	2	2	4	2	5	2	4	4	4	33
13	5	4	4	5	5	4	5	5	4	4	45
14	2	5	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	40
15	4	4	1	5	4	2	1	4	2	2	29
16	1	2	2	3	4	2	1	4	4	3	26
17	4	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	42
18	2	4	2	4	5	2	4	4	4	4	35
19	2	2	2	3	5	5	4	4	2	4	33
20	4	5	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	43
Total	62	75	56	75	85	70	65	78	74	66	706

To assess the significance of this difference, the percentage means were compared by a t-test, widely used in language studies because it can be applied even with small samples (Brown; 1988).

The t-test calculations can be seen later. They involve determining a significance level (alpha level), which in language studies is normally between .01 (indicating an acceptance of lo/o probability of error in the results) and .05 (5% probability of error). Previous research having

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suggested directionality in the results, a one-tailed test was applied (Brown, 1988:159). The test revealed a significant difference between the two groups both at the .05 alpha level (*tobs: 2.57 /tcrit*: 1.734) and at more stringent .01 level (*tcrit*: 2.552).

That there is a statistically significant difference between the groups, particularly in a direction which previous research would not have led us to expect, is clearly the main feature to report for this component (component A).

However, statistically significant results are not necessarily 'meaningful' (Brown, 1988: 122), and it seems important to note that the experienced teachers, as a group, are more in agreement with one another than the inexperienced teachers are among themselves. The range in the experienced group is narrower and the standard deviation (SD) smaller. Half of the inexperienced teachers fall within the same range as the experienced teachers, and indeed one of the inexperienced teachers has a lower score than any of the experienced teachers. One might question how stable and reliable some of the inexperienced teachers' scores at the edges of the range are. Meaningfulness is more a matter of judgments than statistics, and this aspect will be considered later in conclusion in Chapter 5.

As regards particular items from the questionnaire, taking 40 as a rough indicator of strong support, it can be observed that both groups favored prioritizing global over local errors (Item 13) and preferred peer correction to teacher correction (Item 20). Inexperienced teachers were particularly supportive of the need to encourage risk-taking in the learner (Item 11) and stressed the importance of not interrupting or correcting learners during fluency activities (Item 6). This item registered the greatest difference between the groups (19 points). Experienced teachers responses to this item, and to the related Item 8, seem to suggest that, while respecting the principle of not interrupting fluency activities, and of deferring error treatment, they are more flexible in their attitude to the principle and recognize that there may be occasions when it can reasonably be reached.

One of the problems with scales such as the one adopted here is establishing a neutral point:

"The neutral point is not necessarily the mid-point between the extreme scores ... because a respondent can obtain a middle-of-the-range score by either being uncertain about many items, or by holding inconsistent attitudes."(Karavas-Doukas, 1996)

Nevertheless, Karavas-Doukas (1996) goes on to treat the neutral point and the mid-point as the same, for purposes of presentation, as it has been done here.

Interference from 'uncertain' scores (scoring 3 points) does fortunately seem minimal. The experienced registered only nineteen such scores (9.5o/o of their responses) and inexperienced teachers totaled eighteen (9%). That the numbers are almost identical for each group is also helpful in avoiding any distorting effect on the final figures. As regards inconsistent responses, while these have occurred, they are not necessarily a sign of weakness in the survey or of failure on the part of the respondents:

"Agreement with two apparently opposing statements ... does not necessarily imply a lack of understanding, or an inconsistent attitude on the part of the respondent. A teacher may well respond to both statements having in mind teaching contexts in which both ... practice have an important role to play." (Karavas-Doukas; 1996)

Such apparent inconsistency does, of course, make scores hard to interpret, and ideally clarification needs to be sought, based on extended discussion with subjects, for a questionnaire is, even at best, a somewhat blunt instrument for the rather delicate probing necessary in an extremely complex area. However, the time that the respondents were able to

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give me was limited and the extended discussion option was not really available, though clearly it would have added much to the analysis of this and the other components.

Component B: Correction Task

This was perhaps the most crucial component of the study, investigating what teachers actually do when confronted with a piece of student writing .The picture which emerged was, as in Component A, again contrary to what might have been anticipated from previous research. Tables 4c and 4d show experienced attended to more errors than inexperienced and produced a higher total gravity rating. Though inexperienced teachers gave a higher gravity rating per error than the experienced teachers, the difference of 0.08 is infinitesimal.

The range of scores and standard deviation figures for both groups were identified and gravity ratings showed substantial variation in both (see Tables 4a and 4b), which was also a feature of other studies like Hughes & Lascaratou (1982). and Sheorey (1986). This seems to give support to those who stress how difficult it is to achieve satisfactory levels of inter-rater reliability in the assessment of writing (Wood, l99, p. 57-58).

Table 4c. Experienced Teachers

A: Range: 16-30, Mean: 23.3, Mode: 25, SD: 3.90

B: Range: 55-ll4, Mean: 75.1, Mode: 73, SD: 17.39

Average points attributed per error: 75.1/23.3=3.22

Teachers	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*
Number of error (A)	25	27	16	30	18	22	22	23	25	25
Gravity rating (B)	96	73	58	114	73	65	55	62	84	71

Table 4d. Inexperienced Teachers

A: Range: 13-28 Mean: 19.7, Mode: 22/24, SD: 4.75,

B: Range: 52-99, Mean: 65.1, Mode: 60, SD: 13.08,

Average points attributed per error: 65.1/19.7=3.30

Teachers	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*
Number of error (A)	28	24	22	15	24	18	13	22	17	14
Gravity rating (B)	99	68	64	54	70	60	52	71	53	60

Again, to assess the significance of group differences, t-tests were performed on the means of total errors identified and gravity scores. A one-tailed analysis with alpha level at .05 showed that there was a significant difference in terms of the number of errors identified (*tobs;1.85 /tcrit ;1.734* , but this was not the case at a more conservative alpha level of .025 (*tcrit ;2. l0l*).

Gravity score differences were not significant even at the .05 alpha level (*tobs:1.45 /tcrit :1.734*). All this seems to be both a striking challenge to previous research findings. Of course, more and wider surveys are required before one would want to reject the established view in this area, but these are the results which at the very least offer food for thought and a caution against premature assumptions of any sort.

One factor which may have had some bearing on the results should be mentioned here, namely the possibility that inexperienced teachers simply failed to perceive certain types of

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the errors identified by the experienced teachers. This could not have happened in Sheorey's (1986). study because respondents simply gave a gravity rating to stipulated errors, and while teachers did have to identify errors in James (1977) and Hughes & Lascaratou (1982), this is perhaps an easier task in the separate sentences which they used than in a piece of extended discourse such as the one used here. To minimize this danger, respondents were asked to check their task performance to find errors they might have missed first time, though obviously the omissions were not pointed out because their reactions might have been influenced by this. On the whole this does not seem to have been much of a factor, but three main items will be explained here:

a. Doesn't have to / don't have to (line 6). This maybe an Ll transfer error, corrected to 'shouldn't' by eight experienced teachers (33 gravity points) but only four inexperienced teachers (17 gravity points).
b. Experienced teachers were a little more attentive to lexical error, seven challenging 'deal' (line 3) for 24 gravity points compared to three inexperienced teachers corrections totalling 10 points.
c. Similarly, five experienced teachers rejected (line 18) registering 11 points, while no inexperienced teacher reacted to this feature.

There was no noticeable difference between groups in their attention to the more obvious errors of syntax, morphology and spelling and this, added to the general care with which the task was performed, leads me to believe that interference from unseen errors was insignificant. The lexical items mentioned may simply not have been considered worthy of attention at this level of learning.

While comparisons and conclusions are difficult, given the distinctness of each item and the varying number of reactions, a few observations seem worth making:

a. 'Used to practicing' (line l) was rated most serious by both groups. It emerged clearly during the interviews that teachers saw this as a key criterion in assessing gravity.
b. 'Consists on' (line 2) generally got a mid-range partly reflecting its insignificance in communicative terms, and also a gravity rating, feeling that prepositions are notoriously difficult for learners at any level.
c. 'Get/getting marry' (line 5) was rated rather more seriously by the experienced teachers. Strangely, experienced teachers were less concerned by 'sometimes happens' (line 7) which seems to be an error of similar character as with 'get/getting marry'. Here, inexperienced teachers gave a higher gravity rating.
d. 'Guaranties' (line 11) received a fairly low gravity rating, like the other spelling errors, reflecting a common view that spelling errors in general interfere little with communication and are trivial in comparison with syntactic errors like 'get/getting marry' (line 5), and morphological errors like 'safeness' (line 12).
e. 'Can guaranties' (line 11) was generally rated seriously by those who identified it. It was ignored by others because maybe the spelling error is perhaps more blatant and distracted attention from the syntactic difficulty.
f. 'I'm not agree' (lines 15) got a high gravity rating, perhaps due to it being a transfer error Persian. It seemed to provoke more hostile reactions than its communicative significance warrants due to the frequency with which teachers had encountered it.

As regards other types of error, it was mentioned above that experienced teachers gave more emphasis to lexical difficulties, but such matters as style and cohesion received, on the whole, much less attention from both groups. This perhaps suggests that teachers are still quite

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traditional in their recognition of error, focusing predominantly on syntax. Nevertheless, Some attention' was given to the absence of a discourse marker between paragraphs 2 and 3, and others mentioned stylistic inappropriacies like the use of contractions and direct questions in a piece of formal writing. On the whole, however, teachers seemed to ignore these issues, either not observing them or not feeling them significant enough for attention at this level.

To sum up this discussion, it seems reasonable to conclude that while the experienced concept is an elusive one' it does seem to have sufficient psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic validity to justify my employment of it here' It is, of course, important to be aware of the limitations of the concept and for any selection of groups based on the distinction to be made with care.

CONCLUSIONS

In drawing conclusions and considering the implications of this study, it may be helpful here to restate the aims lay out at the start, namely:

a. To identify experienced i inexperienced teacher attitudes to error treatment.
b. To compare and contrast experienced / inexperienced teacher error treatment practice.

Attitudes to Error Treatment

An attitude questionnaire showed both groups were broadly favorable to a tolerance of error in learners, and to other error treatment practices in line with the emphases of communicative language teaching. While this tendency was only of a limited extent among experienced teachers, thus challenging previous research assumptions. Though the difference between the groups was statistically significant, there must be doubts as to how meaningful the difference is, bearing in mind the inherent limitations of attitude surveys and the mismatch between attitude scores and observed score error treatment practice.

Error Treatment Observed

The tendency of inexperienced teachers to attend to more errors than experienced teachers, and to rate errors more seriously and by different criteria to experienced teachers, was not confirmed in this survey, and in fact the differences that did emerge tended to be the reverse. However, these differences, while significant in terms of total errors treated, were not significant at the level of gravity ratings, and differences within groups were perhaps as notable as differences between groups.

A11 teachers proved quite traditional in the categories of error they respond to, focusing more on sentence level errors than discourse errors. They were also more conservative in practice than in attitude as regards their tolerance of error, though this may reflect the fact that they were dealing with an upper- intermediate student preparing for an international examination. The view was often expressed that teachers have a responsibility to deal thoroughly with errors, that this is one of the teacher's principal duties, and that if learners wanted a more naturalistic approach they would not take language lessons. This, of course, rather assumes that learners have a choice in the matter, which is not always the case.

Conclusion: Implications and Suggestion for Further Research

Regarding the experienced and inexperienced contrast in error treatment, this survey suggests that there may be limits to the extent to which differences previously observed apply in all contexts. With this group of inexperienced teachers at least, the differences postulated by

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other researchers do not hold. It may be that inexperienced should not be treated as an undifferentiated mass, and that a number of other variables, like training and cultural background for example, could be more important than mere inexperienced status, as James (1977) has speculated.

As has already been emphasized, this survey was limited in several respects: the sample was small, the attitude questionnaire was not adequately supported by interview data, and one correction task in B seems insufficient' A larger sample and more data is necessary, if conclusions are to be anything other than tentative. Ideally too, data needs to be collected from what teachers actually do day by day when dealing with student writing. Any experimental task such as that used here is of limited validity.

Other teachers and researchers are recommended to broaden the knowledge of this area through similar surveys around the world. Not only would this help clarify the understanding of experienced/inexperienced differences that may or may not exist, but it would bring the whole issue of error treatment, which is so central to teacher concerns, into the spotlight. The teachers who were interviewed were very positive about the focus of this research .Responding to the survey helped concentrate their minds on issues which they saw as fundamental to their everyday practice, and they were keen to receive feedback on the study. The more teachers have the opportunity to reflect upon the issues involved in treating error, the more experienced and inexperienced can share their attitudes and approaches' their difficulties and doubts, the more consistent they should become in judging and rating error and in matching attitudes to practice, and the more effective will be their teaching and the learning it gives rise to.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX-A

Questionnaire

Consider the statements below on the treatment of learner error, and indicate your attitude to each statement on the following scale:

SA: Strongly agree **A: Agree** **U: Uncertain**

D: Disagree **SD: Strongly Disagree**

		SA	*A*	*U*	*D*	*SD*
		1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
1	Error treatment should be kept to a minimum as it is often very demotivating for learners.					
2	Teachers should deal with as many errors as possible. If errors are ignored this will result in imperfect learning.					
3	Much or our treatment is futile, as the persistence of learners' errors demonstrates.					
4	Learners expect to be corrected , and the more we do so the more secure they feel					
5	Many learners give up trying to speak or write in English because their teachers overcorrect, constantly interrupting and pointing out errors.					
6	Learners should not be interrupted or corrected when involved in fluency activity.					
7	It is the teacher's job to help learners improve their English, and sometimes this is best done by not corrections.					
8	It is always best to deal with an error at once, while it is fresh in the learner's mind.					
9	An error uncorrected is an error reinforced					
10	In the real world we are more concerned with WHAT people say than with HOW they say it.					
11	Good language learners experiment and take risks with language. Excessive and insensitive correction discourages this.					
12	We owe it to our students to correct them as much as possible.					
13	We should focus more on those errors that prevent students getting their message across, and less on often trivial inaccuracies.					
14	The teacher only needs to correct in the last resort. Opportunities for self-correction and peer-correction should always come first.					
15	Much correction has more to do with matters of teacher status and teacher guilt than with good pedagogical practice.					
16	Society requires people who function accurately and efficiently. It serves nobody's interests to draw a veil over learners' errors, or to suppose them so psychologically brittle that any correction will prove devastating to their personality.					

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17	Students are developing their language abilities and we should learn to accept quite a large amount of error. Some teachers have unrealistic expectations of what learners can achieve.	
18	Not all written work should be corrected. The desire to express one, to experiment and to communicate, is more important to language learning than being absolutely correct.	
19	Written errors are much more serious than oral errors and should always be dealt with more thoroughly.	
20	Students aren't used to the idea of correcting each other, so peer correction is an impractical and unsatisfactory target.	

APPENDIX-B

Correction Task

The text which follows was produced by a sophomore student at Islamic Azad University. After input on various marriage customs, students were asked to write an opinion piece, of 120-180 words in length, on any aspect of the input:

Having read the text, indicate the errors you think it is important to bring to the student's attention by assigning a rating of the seriousness of the error gravity scale below:

A B C D E

Least serious ⟶ most serious

You may take into account errors of any kind - Lexis, syntax, spelling, cohesion, coherence, appropriacy, etc. - as you consider necessary. Any comments or indications you wish to make that are not easily made within the confines of the above system can be added at the bottom or other side of this sheet.

The people from South Africa used to practicing a social ritual called lobola. It consists on an arrangement that the bride's parents make with the groom .They deal with money and amount depends on the qualities of the bride or the expectations of her parents. In my opinion this ritual is absolutely wrong for a number of reasons. The first reason is that the idea of getting married to somebody doesn't have to be connected with money. The woman is a person and the man cannot buy her like an object. Sometimes happens that the groom doesn't have the amount of money the bride's parents ask for. What can one do on this situation? He really loves her, so she does .It isn't fair for them not being able to get marry, is it? Feeling so many things for her, he can guaranty her parents their daughter's safeness and happiness. One final point to take into account - and the most important - is that a woman has got the right to marry any man she wants .Her parents and relatives don't have to get involved in her decision. To sum up, this social ritual is a very strange one. Although I'm not agree with it, but I think that to have a good and sensible opinion of it you have to analyze and study very hard the culture involved. As it always happens, these things are right or wrong depending on the point of view.