Examining the influence of frequent appearance of unknown words and critical thinking on inferencing their meaning

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Abstract

The influence of repetition of an unknown word on incidental vocabulary learning has always been one of the areas that have attracted the attention of researchers in the vocabulary domain. Although different aspects of inferencing have been studied, the relationship between the repetition of an unknown word in the context and the inferencing of its meaning from the context has not been fully studied by researchers. Another point is that inference is one of the sub-skills of critical thinking, and there may be some relationship between critical thinking and lexical inferencing, but no study on this issue has been undertaken. Therefore, the present study was designed to investigate these two relationships. To this end, 68 intermediate learners of English as a Foreign Language participated in this study. They took three inferencing tests which were constructed by the authors of this study. In these tests, the unknown words were repeated once, and three and five times respectively. In order to measure critical thinking ability of the participants, the Persian version of Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (WGCTA) Form A was utilized. The results of repeated-measures ANOVA indicated that the repetition of the unknown words had significant effects on the lexical inferencing. This implies that, as the number of times an unknown word is repeated increases, the probability of the learners' ability to infer its meaning properly increases. It was also found that there is a significant relationship between critical thinking and lexical inferencing.

Keywords: lexical inferencing; critical thinking; repetition; Watson-Glaser critical thinking appraisal; EFL learners; frequency

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1. Introduction

Researchers have always been interested in how learners learn new words. This interest has opened up two broad lines of research, namely intentional and incidental vocabulary learning. Intentional vocabulary learning involves explicit teaching of vocabulary in the classroom through the use of dictionaries, flash cards, and some other intentional techniques of vocabulary learning (Grabe & Stoller, 2001). Nation (2001) argues that the first two or three thousand top frequent words of a language should be taught explicitly and beyond this level, words will be learnt incidentally without the need for explicit instruction. It is believed that a great portion of lexical items in L1 and L2 is learnt incidentally (e. g. De Bot, Paribakht, & Wesche, 1997; Hulstijn, 2003; Nagy & Anderson, 1984; Paribakht & Wesche, 1999). Decarrico (2001) describes incidental vocabulary learning as

> *Learning that occurs when the mind is focused elsewhere, such as on understanding a text or using language for communicative purposes* (p. 289).

Paribakht (2005) argues that the first step in incidental vocabulary learning is inferencing; in other words, when learners come across an unknown word, the most commonly used strategy is guessing the meaning of unknown words from the context, which is called lexical inferencing (LI) (De Bot et al., 1997; Paribakht, 2004; Paribakht & Wesche, 1999). Although different aspects of inferencing have been investigated, it is still open to research.

According to Pearson, Hiebert, and Kamil (2007), what needs further research in the domain of vocabulary is the influence of the number of times an unknown word is repeated (heterogeneity) on the inferencing of its meaning. This is the first concern of the present study. The second concern of this study is the influence of critical thinking (CT) on LI. The rationale behind raising this question has to do with the Delphi study (Faciano, 1990) which was an attempt to define the concept of CT by a panel of experts in different fields of study. They have broken down CT into different skills. One of these skills is inferencing, i.e., to identify elements needed to draw reasonable conclusions, to form conjectures and hypotheses, to consider relevant information, and to draw the consequences flowing from the data, statement, principles, evidence, judgments, beliefs, opinions, concepts, descriptions, questions, or other forms of representations (Facione, 1990), all of which seem to be part of lexical inferencing as well.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 Lexical inferencing

Paribakht (2005) argues that the first step in incidental vocabulary acquisition is inferencing. Learners are required to infer the meaning of a word correctly in order to be able to comprehend and produce the word appropriately in the future. If learners associate a word with a wrong inference, not only is there no use in its retention but also it may have some negative consequences. Therefore, inferencing is one of the most important steps in incidental vocabulary learning. Inferencing means to guess the meaning of the unknown word from the context (Haastrup, 1991). Nation (2001) notes that "*incidental learning via guessing from context is the most important of all sources of vocabulary learning* (p.232)." Some studies (e.g., De Bot et al., 1997; Paribakht, 2004; Paribakht & Wesche, 1999, Nation 2001) show that when learners come across an unknown word, the most commonly used strategy is guessing the meaning of the unknown word from the context in order to make up for the lack of comprehension. Haastrup (1991) argues

> *[LI] involves making informed guesses as to the meaning of a word in light of all available linguistic cues in combinations with the learner's general knowledge of the world, her awareness of context and her relevant linguistic knowledge* (p. 40).

If inferencing is made successfully, as Paribakht and Wesche (1999) argue, it can serve the following purposes: immediate comprehension in reading, listening, interaction or retention.

Various researches have been done to delve into the role of different variables on lexical inferencing. The studies have been done on how much learners are successful in inferring meaning from context (Nist & Olejnik, 1995; Schatz & Baldwin, 1986), on the role of proficiency levels (Fraser, 1999; Bengeleil & Paribakht, 2004), on the role of the clues utilized (Paribakht & Wesche 2006; Wesche & Paribakht, 2010), or on the processes of lexical inferencing (Fukkink, 2005). However, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no study has been conducted to investigate the role of the repetition of the words in the context on the lexical inferencing.

2.2 Critical thinking

This study also focused on the relationship between CT (critical thinking) and LI (lexical inferencing). CT is the key principle of Critical Pedagogy (CP) which is related to the concept of power and whose ultimate goal is to empower learners to have a fair community in which learners can achieve their full potential (Kincheloe, 2005). Many scholars (Brown & Freeman, 2000; Duron, Limbach, & Waugh, 2006; Hale, 2008; Liaw, 2007; Paul & Elder, 2005) highlight the significant role of CT in learning process and its inseparable relationship with education. As Paul and Elder (2005) assert, "*Accelerating change, intensifying complexity, escalating interdependence, and increasing danger*" (p. 12) are the reasons of its burgeoning significance. However, CT has always been one of the thorny issues in the literature to grasp. Freely and Steinberg (2000) define critical thinking as

> *the ability to analyze, criticize, and advocate ideas; to reason inductively and deductively; and to reach factual or judgmental conclusions based on sound inferences drawn from unambiguous statements of knowledge or belief* (p. 2).

Atkinson (1997) enumerated the characteristics of critical thinkers as follows: truth-seeking, open-mindedness, analytical, systematic, self-confidence, inquisitive, maturity. Nasirahmadi (2014) justifies the relationship between CT and metacognition, creativity, and motivation.

One of the most comprehensive and dependable definitions is provided in the Delphi-study (Facione, 1999). In the Delphi study, 46 experts from different fields come together to define CT. This study used the qualitative research methodology known as the Delphi method which requires the formation of an interactive panel of experts. These experts proposed six cognitive skills and their sub-skills for CT as follows: interpretation (categorization, decoding significance, clarifying meaning), analysis (examining ideas, identifying arguments, analyzing arguments), evaluation (assessing claims, assessing arguments), inference (querying evidence, conjecturing alternatives, drawing conclusions), explanation (stating results, justifying procedures, presenting arguments), self-regulation (self-examination, self-correction).

One of the skills is *inference* which revolves around identifying and securing elements needed to draw reasonable conclusions; to form conjectures and hypotheses; to consider relevant information and to deduce the consequences flowing from the data, statement, principles, evidence, judgments, beliefs, opinions, concepts, descriptions, questions, or other forms of representations. The first sub-skill is *querying evidence* which addresses the ability to recognize premises of the argument which are in need of support and gather information. A more general aspect of this sub-skill has to do with judging if more information is needed to support the premises of the argument, and if it is found out that more information is required, some strategies must be determined and employed in order to acquire such information. The next sub-skill is *conjecturing alternatives* which is the ability to consider the alternatives to solve a problem and to recognize the possible consequences of

those alternatives. The last sub-skill of inference is *drawing conclusions* which is self-revealing. These stages can also be involved in lexical inferencing and if some relationship is found between them, by promoting this part of their CT, learners can improve their LI, and consequently, their incidental vocabulary learning.

Some studies have been conducted to detect the role of CT in various areas of language. Lun, Fischer, and Word (2010) observed European students indicated better CT than Asian ones. Myers and Dyer (2006) found no difference in CT of the males and females. Kamali and Fahim (2011), Sheikhi (2009), Boloori (2010), and Nasirahmadi (2014), investigating the role of CT in reading comprehension with unknown words, reported a significant positive relationship between CT and reading comprehension. Zarei and Haghgoo (2011) found no relationship between CT and lexical knowledge. All these studies focused on the reading comprehension in general, and none of them exclusively examined the role of CT in lexical inferencing.

2.3 The novelty of this study

Most studies undertaken on LI in the realm of second language learning have focused on the ability of the learners in inferencing or the relationship between LI and reading comprehension and, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no study has conducted on the role of frequency of the unknown word on LI. The present study went beyond this and concentrated on the effect of the degree of critical thinking on lexical inferencing, in other words, the purpose was to see whether high critical thinkers show more success in lexical inferencing.

2.4 Research Questions

The abovementioned brief review of LI and CT and the pertinent gaps in the literature sets the ground for raising the following two questions.

- Does the repetition of an unknown word (heterogeneity) influence the inference of its meaning by the learners?

- Does the level of critical thinking influence the inference of the unknown words' meanings?

3. Method

3.1 Subjects

Ninety (41 male and 49 female) Iranian EFL learners comprised the main participants of the study. They were ranged in age from 20 to 31. During data collection, the participants were studied English at an English Institution in Zanjan, Iran. The proficiency level of the participants was intermediate which was also checked by a TOEFL test.

3.2 Materials

A TOEFL-PBT test was used in order to make sure that the participants were at the same level of proficiency. The test consisted of 40 grammar items, 30 vocabulary items, and 30 reading comprehension questions and no listening questions.

Three inferencing tests were administered. The number of items in each test was 20. Test1 (Appendix A) included an unknown word in one sentence. In test2 (Appendix B), one new sentence was added to the first sentence, and the same unknown word was repeated twice in it. In Test 3 (Appendix C), another new sentence was added to the sentences of test 2, and the same unknown word was repeated twice in it. To put it in other terms, in test1, the unknown word was presented once, in test2, it was repeated three times, and in test3, it was repeated five times. An example of these tests for the unknown word "*accomplice*" is provided below to clarify this explanation:

> ➢ Test 1: A. Because he had provided the thief with the weapon, he was arrested as an <u>accomplice</u> in the murder.

> ➢ Test 2: A. Because he had provided the thief with the weapon, he was arrested as an <u>accomplice</u> in the murder.
> B. Ali could not have done the robbery without an <u>accomplice</u>. After the robbery, he escaped in a stolen car driven by his <u>accomplice</u>.

> ➢ Test 3: A. Because he had provided the thief with the weapon, he was arrested as an <u>accomplice</u> in the murder.
> B. Ali could not have done the robbery without an <u>accomplice</u>. After the robbery, he escaped in a stolen car driven by his <u>accomplice</u>.
> C. One man held a gun on the bank clerk while his <u>accomplice</u> took the money. When his <u>accomplice</u> put the money in the bags they escaped by a fast car.

Finally, the Persian version of version of Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (WGCTA) Form A was used to measure the critical thinking ability of the learners. This CT test was adopted since CT researchers prevailingly utilize it (e.g., Fahim, Bagherkazemi, & Alemi, 2010; Nasirahmadi, 2014). This 80-item test can be used for the learners in the 9th grade and above. Faravani (2006) states that this translated version is culturally adapted to be used in the Iranian context. The reliability of the test was proved by the test manual (α=0.81). The reliability of the Persian version of this test, translated by Faravani (2006), was estimated to be 0.85 (Nasirahmadi, 2014). The validity of this test (criterion-related, content, and Convergent and Discriminant validities) was also meticulously substantiated by Watson and Glaser (2008).

3.3 Data collection procedures

At first, 150 participants were given a test of TOEFL to ensure the homogeneity of the participants. Those who gained the scores in the range of 450-550 were considered to be the intermediate level and served as the participant of this study (*n*=130).

Afterwards, although WGCTA was proved to be highly reliable and valid (Watson & Glaser, 2008), in two pilot studies, its reliability and validity were checked. In the first pilot study, it was given to 100 EFL Iranian learners, and the obtained reliability was .87, which met the satisfactory level. Its criterion-validity was also checked during the second pilot study with 15 participants, which turned out to be .42. This amount, according to Watson and Glaser (2008), is a satisfactory estimation since it should be above .3. Then, the main participants were given the Persian version of WGCTA to perform in 45 minutes. This determined time is deemed as the standard time required for this test (Nasirahmadi, 2014). Since WGCTA was a multiple choice test, learners had either chosen the right or wrong choice and received 1 or 0 respectively which resulted in a range of scores varying from 0 to 80. Following its scoring guidelines, those whose percentile rank of total scores were below 40 and above 60 were considered as the learners with Low CT (LCT) (*n*=45) and the learners with high CT (HCT) (*n*=45) respectively. Then, the participants in each CT level were randomly assigned to three groups. In other words, each group consisted of 15 low CT and 15 high CT learners. It was done to control the CT variable on LI in each group.

Then, the three inferencing tests were devised. In the selection of words, some points were taken into account. Following Haastrup (1991), all of the words were chosen from the open class only and were unfamiliar to all the pilot-study and main-study participants. In order to ensure that the participants had not known the meaning of the selected words, initially, 25 rather infrequent words of English were chosen. In the third pilot study, the list of words was given to a group of intermediate learners (n=15), similar to the participants of the main study regarding their proficiency level, and they were asked to write their meanings. None of the words were familiar to them.

Then, the contexts for unknown words were developed. At first, the extra-dictionary-examples part of the Longman dictionary of contemporary English, which comprises several examples from books and newspapers, was used. The examples chosen from this part were modified in order to meet the criterion put forth by Liu and Nation (1985), i.e., the proportion of known to unknown words was about 95 to 5. In other words, for nineteen known words there was one unknown word. The comprehensibility of the contexts devised for the unknown words were judged by two experts. In cases of disagreement, another context was developed which later on went through the same process.

When the first version of the instrument was ready, the fourth pilot study was carried out. The learners were asked to underline all the words with which they were not familiar, and to try to guess their meaning. Based on the results of this pilot study, two of the items were deleted because they seemed to be easy, and with the help of the context, all of the participants in the pilot study could infer their meanings in test1, and three items were put aside since nobody could guess their meanings even after test3. Finally, 20 items comprised the last version of each inferencing test. 20 unknown words appeared once in the first test, 3 times in the second test, and 5 times in the third test. Test1, test2, and test3 were administered to group1, group2, and group3 respectively.

4. Results

After data collection, the participants' answers to each item was considered as acceptable which received the complete score (=1), partially acceptable (=5.0), or wrong (=0), therefore, their scores varied from 0 to 20. In order to enhance the interrater reliability, three teachers were asked to score the responses separately, and then in a meeting, they reached a consensus on the scores that were not matched. The first research question addressed the impact of the repetition of unknown words on the lexical inferencing. The descriptive statistics of each inferencing test are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Inferencing Tests

Group	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Test1[*]	30	2.00	10.50	7.45	2.56754
Test2	30	7.50	14.50	11.03	2.12916
Test3	30	10.00	18.00	14.26	2.45558
Total		2.00	18.00	10.91	3.66447

As seen in Table 1, the highest mean belongs to Test3 (14.26) and the lowest to Test1 (7.45), and the mean of Test2 was 11.03; in other terms, $\text{mean}_{Test3} > \text{mean}_{Test2} > \text{mean}_{Test1}$. In order to see whether these differences in the means were statistically significant or not, a one-way independent-measures ANOVA was conducted. First of all, in order to check the equal variance of the groups on the dependent variable, the homogeneity of the variance was estimated through Levene's test of Homogeneity of Variances. Table 2 presents the results of Levene's test.

Table 2

Test of Homogeneity of Variances among Groups

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.252	2	87	.291

Since the level of significance was more than 0.05, as shown in Table 2, the assumption was not violated. Table 3 indicated the results of the one-way ANOVA.

Table 3 indicates that the differences in the means reported in Table 2 were statistically significant, i.e., $F_{(2, 87)} = 60.997$, $p < 0.05$. To put it in better terms, the repetition factor had a significant effect on the inferencing ability of participants. So as to see where this difference lied, the pair wise multiple comparisons of the tests were run (Table 4).

Table 3

The Results of the One-Way ANOVA regarding the Effect of Repetition on Inferencing

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	697.617	2	348.808	60.997	.000
Within Groups	497.508	87	5.718		
Total	1195.125	89			

Table 4

Pair Wise Multiple Comparisons of Scores in Test1, Test2, and Test3

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
T1	T2	-3.58333*	.61744	.000	-5.0556	-2.1111
	T3	-6.81667*	.61744	.000	-8.2889	-5.3444
T2	T1	3.58333*	.61744	.000	2.1111	5.0556
	T3	-3.23333*	.61744	.000	-4.7056	-1.7611

Note. *. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

As seen in Table 4, the improvement of inferencing from test1 to test2 and from test2 to test3 and test1 to test3 were all statically significant, which illustrates that the more times the unknown words were repeated, the more successful the participants were in lexical inferencing. The second question concerns the effect of CT on the inferencing ability. As mentioned before, each group consisted of 15 high CT and 15 low CT learners. Therefore, regarding CT, there were two groups, namely, low CT (*n*=45) and high CT (*n*=45). Table 5 reports the descriptive statistics of HCT and LCT Groups' performance in the tests.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics of the High and Low CT Groups' Performance in the Inferencing Tests

CT	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
LCT	45	2.00	15.00	9.07	3.29248
HCT	45	7.50	18.00	12.75	3.06672
Total		2.00	18.00	10.91	3.66447

As indicated in Table 5, the mean and SD of the HCT group were 9.07 and 3.29 respectively, while the LCT group's mean and SD were 12.75 and 3.06. The mean of the HCT group apparently is greater than mean of the LCT group. In order to see whether this difference was significant or not, one independent samples t-test was run. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Results of One Independent Samples T-Test for the High and Low CT Groups' Performance in Inferencing Tests

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.001	.974	-5.48	88	.000	-3.677	.6707	-5.010	-2.344
Equal variances not assumed			-5.48	87.5	.000	-3.677	.6707	-5.010	-2.344

As Table 6 demonstrates Levene's Test for Equality of Variances is insignificant; therefore, the variances between groups is marginal and equal. The results of t-test verify that the difference between the mean of the LCT group and that of the HCT group is significant, i.e., t (88) = -5.48, *p* < .05. This implies that the HCT group

with its higher CT ability could significantly perform better in the inferencing tests in comparison with the LCT group.

5. Discussion

5.1 Repetition and lexical inferencing

The first research question concerned the effect of repeating unknown words in the context on the lexical inferencing. The obtained results suggest that the repetition of unknown words has a significant effect on lexical inferencing, and the more frequently they are repeated in the context, the more successful the learners can be in inferencing. These findings are in line with different studies in the literature such as Webb (2007), Laufer and Yano (2001), Paribakht and Wesche (1999), and Rott (1999).

Ellis (2002) asserts that frequency can propel the activation of the schema in the mind. When coming across some new entity for the first time, learners make an attempt to retrieve the related knowledge sources based on the available cues in the context, such as linguistic source (intra-lingual ones at word, sentence, and discourse levels, and inter-lingual ones) and non-linguistic sources, according to Paribakht and Wesche's (2006) classification of knowledge sources, assess the similarity of the new entity to the exited items in the category in their mind, and establish a weak connection between them. Ellis also asserts "each repetition increases the strength of the connections between the relevant feature units and the category unit" (2002, p. 147), of course, if in each repetition, the learners find evidence of the accuracy of their inference; however, if in the subsequent exposures, they come to the conclusion that their guess has been wrong based on the new available cues, they have another opportunity to infer the meaning of the unknown word and make use of all the cues, i.e., the previous and present ones, which may eventually lead to more successful performance. This process of hypothesis testing can be continued until the most accurate meaning can be derived. Therefore, the repetition of the unknown words can assist the learners to put their guesses into test by being provided with more contextual cues and derive the best meaning.

The positive frequency effect can also be substantiated based on the connectionist theory and competition model. Based on the connectionist theory, each repetition can increase the strength of the existing interconnected nodes, establish new interconnected nodes, or modify the existing ones; in other terms, "the network can change as a result of input frequency" (Ellis, 2008, p. 958). Moreover, competition model concerns "discovering the particular form-function mappings that characterize the target language" (Ellis, 2008, p. 957) and its focus is on the frequency and its positive effects on the establishment of some specific form-function mappings. In the case of lexical inferencing, seeing the unknown words, based on the knowledge sources activated, the learners initially predict some form-function mapping, which may or may not be accurate (a weak interconnected node). If there is no other opportunity for checking the accuracy of their guesses, as was the case with test1 in this study, the learner would cling to that mapping. However, if more *cue availability* (repetition) and *cue reliability* (the constant mapping of one form into its function) are provided, the learners can map the form into more accurate functions and strengthen or modify the established interconnected nodes.

In the present study, test2 and test3, in which the unknown word was repeated for three and five times respectively, provided enough cue availability and cue reliability for the learners to establish more accurate form-function mappings and interconnected nodes, in comparison with test1 in which the unknown word was mentioned only once. Another finding was that the more frequent the unknown word was occurred, the more successful they were in LI. This also corroborates that repetition and frequent occurrence of the words can be deemed as one of the determinant factor in the accurate LI, since it provides opportunities for more and more cue availability and cue reliability, which leads to better form-function mappings. Frequency is also claimed to be a crucial aspect of *acquisition*, but it was not the concern of this study, and can be a good trigger for future research.

The significant improvement brought about by the repetition is also explicable via Levelt's model as discussed in De Bot et al. (1997). Three distinct levels in Levelt's production model are identified, namely, conceptual level (conceptualization), lexeme level (semantic and syntactic information), and lemma level (morphological information). Coming across an unknown word, first of all, the learners, via the initial attention to the form of an unknown word, establish an empty slot for the new lemma in their mental lexicon. According to this view, "the process of inferring meanings of unknown words can be viewed …… as an attempt to fill in an empty lemma structure" (De Bot et al., 1997, p. 317).

Then, by activating all the cues and knowledge sources available, they activate the lemma in their minds. If the activation of the lemma is a successful one, it can associate the comprehended syntactic information with the conceptual information which, in its own turn, connects the lemma with one or more concepts. So, "the process of inferring the meaning of unknown words is actually one of gathering more information to go from one level to the next" (De Bo et al., 1997, p. 316). It can be stated that in test1, the learners, although maybe activating more than one concept for the unknown words, they had no other evidence for checking their accuracy, so they stick to one of them in random (one-way from the lemma to conceptual levels). However, in test2, they might keep a broader concept of the unknown word in their first exposure, and in the second and third exposure, they put those concepts into test again and again. If their guess was wrong, they again moved from the lemma to conceptual levels and vice versa (a two-way path). The more they go through these paths, the better form-function relationship they could establish, and the more accurate guesses they had. This is evident in test3, in which more exposure to the unknown word was available. Of course, this interpretation requires a thicker descriptive analysis of the strategies used by the learners while doing the tasks through think-aloud procedures, which can be another topic for further research.

5.2 Critical thinking and lexical inferencing

The second concern of the present study was the relationship between CT and inferencing. The results of the independent samples t-test indicated that the level of CT affected the inferencing ability, meaning that, those who had higher CT ability were significantly better at LI. As inferencing dimension was deemed as one of the sub-categories of CT (Facione, 1990), it was not surprising to obtain such results. A comparison of the CT definition derived in a Delphi-study definition and LI shows that the two of them have some features in common. Just like the inferencing dimension of CT, LI deals with conjectures and hypotheses (as explicated above) and considers relevant information in its context in order to solve the problem of not knowing a word, and the guess made in LI can be considered as a kind of reasonable conclusion and solution to the problem. But inference is not the only skill in Facione (1990) which pertains to LI, other skills, such as interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and self-regulation are also involved in LI. When a reader wants to guess the meaning of an unknown word, s/he interprets and analyses the immediate context, and makes a guess, then he may evaluate his/her own guess via hypothesis testing, and, if not satisfied, self-corrects which is a sub-skill in self-regulation. Therefore, it can be stated that there is a close connection between the dimensions of CT and the strategies used by the learners in lexical inferencing; so, high CT would result in greater LI. Or maybe similar cognitive abilities are required for both, as Kamali and Fahim (2011) concluded "critical thinking and reading are both cognitive abilities which have some identifiable cognitive skills in common" (p. 110), and one aspect of successful reading is to have the good ability to guess unknown words' meaning correctly (Wesche & Paribakht, 2010).

This finding is in consonant with Kamali and Fahim (2011), Koupaee Dar, Rahimi, and Shams (2010), Boloori (2010), Mirzai (2008), and Nasirahmadi (2014), all of whom found the significant effect of CT on L2 performance. Frisby (1992) and Jacobs (1995) found a strong relationship between CT and the US school achievement test (SAT). In the same line of research, Yeh and Wu (1992) reported a high correlation coefficient of about 0.46 and effect sizes larger than 1 between CT and mathematics. Giancarlo and Facione (2001) found a significant correlation between students' GPA and their CT level. Since inferencing results in incidental vocabulary learning, and incidental vocabulary learning contributes to school achievement, it is possible to claim that the results of present study are in line with Frisby (1992), Jacobs (1995), Yeh and Wu (1992), Giancarlo and

Facione (2001) as well. In the same vein, Jamshidian Ghaje Sefidi (2010) found a strong relationship between CT and detecting ambiguities in ambiguous sentences.

It is worth noting that most of the researchers (such as Alagozlu, 2007; Lun et al., 2010; Zarei & Haghgoo, 2012) declare that the Asian students, including Iranian students, have significantly different critical abilities in comparison with Western students due to the cultural differences. These learners are considered not to grow up in a way to be strong enough to activate the satisfactory levels of CT and are required to be supported and taught in this regard. Zarei and Haghgoo (2012), specifically mentioning the Iranian context, detect its root in the traditional educational system which is more teacher-fronted and conformity-oriented, and call for some modification in the system. The results of this study also pinpoint the importance of critical thinking and its effect on one aspect of second language learning (lexical inferencing) and the need for improving CT of the leaners in Iran in order to enhance their capability of learning.

6. Conclusion and practical implications

This study was undertaken to delve into the role of repetition on LI. The second concern of the study was the impact of CT on LI. It was found that the number of the repetition of unknown words had a significant effect on the success in LI. This significant effect was explained through various EFL models, i.e., competition model, connectionist theory, and Levelt's lexical hypothesis. Therefore, it can be concluded that the more the learners are exposed to the unknown words, the more accurate the inferencing is. Regarding CT and LI, it was concluded that in both, learners go through more or less the same set of cognitive skills and strategies and the improvement in CT can bring about more successful LI, which in turn can enhance the reading skill (Kamali & Fahim, 2011) as one of the most important skills, especially in academic settings.

These results are of value due to its practical implications. As results indicated, frequency and repetition are of paramount importance in the process of lexical inferencing, so it is up to the teachers to provide such opportunities in the class via repeating the new words in different context, even in their own speech during the class and assist the learners in the game of guessing the meaning. The significance of such repetition and frequency augments in the foreign language context, such as Iran, in which such exposure confides to the classroom, and therefore, is very limited.

The importance of CT and its effect on cognitive ability, in general, and its relation to LI in particular were highlighted in this study. Consequently, it is essential for the L2 teachers to include CT in their teaching plans for the purpose of enhancing the students' "inquiry, problem solving, critical and creative thinking, and reflection which can contribute to their progress in language learning" (Kamali & Fahim, 2011, p.110). Some suggestions have been provided for CT teaching. Teachers can use the four-part model of Helpern (1998) which is

> *a) a dispositional or attitudinal component, b) instruction in and practice with CT skills, c) structure-training activities designed to facilitate transfer across contexts, and d) a metacognitive component used to direct and assess thinking* (p. 451).

Another model useful for teaching CT is the five-step model proposed by Duron et al., (2006) through which teachers can lead students toward CT. The steps are in the following order: a) determining learning objectives, b) teaching through questioning, c) practicing before assessing, d) reviewing, refining, and improving, e) providing feedback and assessing learning. In the same respect, they claim that questioning has a vital role in their model since learners learn by questioning and this questioning should be guided by teachers, although, "this is understandably difficult and takes commitment" (Duron et al., 2006, p. 162).

Teacher trainers should also direct more attention to CT teaching, and try to improve prospective teachers' critical thinking first, and then teach them how to promote it in their students. The results also inform syllabus designers and material developers who are responsible for the incorporation of the activities and tasks which provoke the greater use of CT and develop this significant ability, especially in learning contexts in which such

opportunity is not available due to cultural and educational constraints.

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Appendices

Appendix A: The first inferencing test (Test1)

Name …………..…….. Level ……………… Age………………Gender………….
Please read the sentences carefully and try to guess the Farsi meaning of bold words.

1. Because he had provided the thief with the weapon, he was arrested as an accomplice in the murder.
Accomplice …………..…….

2. Two of her toes were amputated because of being frozen in the North Pole
Amputate …………..…….

3. How can you be so apathetic about the world and its problems? Don't you have emotion?
Apathetic …………..…….

4. His explanations about the problematic situation resulted only in befuddling her more.
Befuddling …………..…….

5. He would brook no criticism, even from his beloved daughter.
Brook …………..…….

6. In the capacious areas of the railroad terminal, thousands of travelers were waiting for their trains.
Capacious …………..…….

7. Ali was fired from work and was very despondent.
Despondent …………..…….

8. He is very good at playing roles; he can feign any feeling like sadness, happiness, and surprise.
Feign …………..…….

9. It is a very onerous job to work from 8 in the morning till 10 in the evening.
Onerous …………..…….

10. After an argument the upshot was that they all agreed to help her pay back her debt.
Upshot …………..…….

11. The ultimate champion of the boxing competition will be clear tonight, because tonight is the final match.
Champion …………..…….

12. He is really voluble. He can talk for hours without stopping.
Voluble …………

13. She was absolutely livid that he had lied to her.
Livid …………

14. Many people loathe the smell of fish and cannot tolerate it.
Loathe …………..…….

15. What vexed him most was that nobody had apologized to him, although he was right and others had made a mistake.
Vex …………..…….

16. Hossein is a very tenacious person; he tries his best to achieve what he wants, even if it is so difficult.
Tenacious …………..…….

17. In the war between Iran and Iraq a lot of houses were obliterated in the south west of Iran.
Obliterate …………..…….

18. She's too parsimonious to give money to charity.
Parsimonious …………..…….

19. As I drove home, I tried to think how I was going to pacify my wife, who was angry with my decision about not going to her parents' home for dinner.
Pacify …………..…….

20. The president is chosen by people from among Contenders.
Contender …………..…….

Appendix B: The second inferencing test (Test2)

Name ………….. Level …………… Age……………..Gender………..
Please read the sentences carefully and try to guess the Farsi meaning of bold words.

1. A. Because he had provided the thief with the weapon, he was arrested as an accomplice in the murder.
B. Ali could not have done the robbery without an accomplice. After the robbery, he escaped in a stolen car driven by his accomplice.
Accomplice ……………..…….

2. A. Two of her toes were amputated because of being frozen in the North Pole.
B. He damaged his leg so badly that it had to be amputated after the accident. Having a leg amputated, he was really depressed for months.
Amputate ……………..…….

3. A. How can you be so apathetic about the world and its problems? Don't you have emotion?
B. Some people are so apathetic that they do not pay attention to things which happen in the society. Maybe they think that when they are apathetic, they can live more happily.
Apathetic ……………..…….

4. A. His explanations about the problematic situation resulted only in befuddling her more.
B. I understand the text but the numbers are befuddling me. I think the numbers and the text are explaining different things; that is why the numbers are befuddling.
Befuddling ……………..…….

5. A. He would brook no criticism, even from his beloved daughter.
B. I cannot brook any noise when I am studying. Because I cannot brook any noise while I am studying and get distracted even with a little noise, I usually study at the library which is so quiet.
Brook ……………..…….

6. A. In the capacious areas of the railroad terminal, thousands of travelers were waiting for their trains.
B. It is a capacious theater; hundreds of people can come and watch different plays. The theatre is capacious, so it is never completely filled even on holydays with hundreds of people.
Capacious ……………..…….

7. A. Ali was fired from work and was very despondent. B. Sarah lost her father a year ago in an accident, but she is still despondent. When Sarah lost her father, she was so despondent that she could not eat food for two or three days.
Despondent ……………..…….

8. A. He is very good at playing roles; he can feign any feeling like sadness, happiness, and surprise.
B. She had an exam and was not ready; therefore, she decided to feign illness and stay at home.
The next day that she went to school, she still had to feign that she is sick and had not recovered fully.
Feign ……………..…….

9. A. It is a very onerous job to work from 8 in the morning till 10 in the evening.
B. He always complained that his job was so onerous and he had to do a lot from 8 a. m. to 6 p.m. Last month he asked for an assistant because his work load was too onerous and he could not do it alone, for example he had to answer a lot of phone calls, write many emails and supervise workers in the factory all by himself.
Onerous ……………..…….

10. A. After an argument the upshot was that they all agreed to help her pay back her debt.
B. The upshot of the interview was that he could work in the company for another year.
Another upshot was that if during this year he worked well, he would be an official member of the company; otherwise he had to leave after a year.
Upshot ……………..…….

11. A. The ultimate champion of the boxing competition will be clear tonight, because tonight is the final match.
B. The ultimate failure of the project shocked all the researchers in the company. The researchers concluded that the ultimate outcome of the experiment could not be predicted..……………..…….
12. A. He is really voluble. He can talk for hours without stopping.
B. Some people believe that it is rude to be voluble, because when a person is voluble, other people cannot find time to talk.
Champion ……………..…….

13. A. She was absolutely livid that he had lied to her.
B. He was so livid that he tore the letter and started shouting. Later when I asked him why he got livid, he answered that there was something insulting in the letter that made him lose his control.
Livid …………

14. A. Many people loathe the smell of fish and cannot tolerate it.
B. Some men loathe shopping, because it makes them really tired to walk from one store to another. But most of women are in love with shopping and cannot understand why some men loathe it.
Loathe ……………..…….

15. A. What vexed him most was that nobody had apologized to him, although he was right and others had made a mistake.
B. It vexes me that Kim never returns the books she borrows. And what vexes me more is that I have asked her several times to return the books she has borrowed, and each time she says: "ok", but she does not.
Vex .……….….…….

16. A. Hossein is a very tenacious person; he tries his best to achieve what he wants, even if is so difficult.
B. Right two months before his university entrance exam, his father died, but because he is a tenacious person he did not stop studying and passed the exam successfully. When people asked him how he could pass the exam in such a difficult time, he said the only secret to success is tenacity.
Tenacious .……….….…….

17. A. In the war between Iran and Iraq a lot of houses were obliterated in the south west of Iran.
B. Many Japanese people's houses were obliterated after the latest earthquake and they became homeless. What made it even worse was that their factories and roads were obliterated by tsunami.
Obliterate .……….….…….

18. A. She's too parsimonious to give money to charity.
B. Usually when people get old, they become parsimonious and love money, and some old people become even too parsimonious to spend money for their medicine.
Parsimonious .……….….…….

19. A. As I drove home, I tried to think how I was going to pacify my wife, who was angry with my decision about not going to her parents' for dinner.
B. He had a fight with his boss and was angry. I wanted to talk to him and pacify him, but as I started to talk I understood he was too angry to be pacified by talking, then I left him alone for a while. Sometimes the only thing which is needed to calm down is time.
Pacify .……….….…….

20. A. The president is chosen by people from among Contenders.
B. First some movies are chosen as Contenders for Oscar, and then from among the Contenders, one of them is chosen as the best one to get the Oscar.
Contender.……….….…….

Appendix C: The third inferencing test (Test3)

Name ……….…….. Age ……….… Level ……….…Gender………
Please read the sentences carefully and try to guess the Farsi meaning of bold words.

1. A. Because he had provided the thief with the weapon, he was arrested as an accomplice in the murder.
B. Ali could not have done the robbery without an accomplice. After the robbery, he escaped in a stolen car driven by his accomplice.
C. One man held a gun on the bank clerk while his accomplice took the money. When his accomplice put the money in the bag, they escaped by a fast car.
Accomplice.….……….

2. A. Two of her toes were amputated because of being frozen in the North Pole.
B. He damaged his leg so badly that it had to be amputated after the accident. Having a leg amputated, he was really depressed for months.
C. When the doctors had to amputate his leg, he did not let the loss of his leg keep him from participating in sports. Even with one foot, because his other leg was amputated, he was a very successful sportsman.
Amputate .….……….

3. A. How can you be so apathetic about the world and its problems? Don't you have emotion?
B. Some people are so apathetic that they do not pay attention to things which happen in the society. Maybe they think that when they are apathetic they can live more happily.
C. Parents are becoming apathetic about their children's education and show little interest in it. If parents become so apathetic about their children's education and do not care whether their children study well or not, in the near future we will have universities filled with unqualified students.
Apathetic .….……….

4. A. His explanations about the problematic situation resulted only in befuddling her more.
B. I understand the text but the numbers are befuddling me. I think the numbers and the text are explaining different things; that is why the numbers are befuddling.
C. I don't know why but the explanations about the lesson just befuddled me. As he continued explaining the lesson to me I felt I was getting more and more befuddled and could understand nothing.
Befuddling .….……….

5. A. He would brook no criticism, even from his beloved daughter
B. I cannot brook any noise when I am studying. Because I cannot brook any noise while I am studying and get distracted even with a little noise, I usually study at the library which is so quiet.
C. Sometimes, it is very difficult to brook long hours of work. He used to work from 8 a.m. to 6 p. m. but he could not brook the long hours anymore, and got very tired. Finally he changed his job.
Brook .….……….

6. A. In the capacious areas of the railroad terminal, thousands of travelers were waiting for their trains
B. It is a capacious theater; hundreds of people can come and watch different plays. The theatre is capacious, so it is never completely filled even on holydays with hundreds of people.
C. The party was in a capacious house in the north of Tehran and about 600 people were invited. The house was so capacious that about half of the guests stayed the night there and went back to their homes the next morning.
Capacious ………….

7. A. Ali was fired from work and was very despondent.
B. Sarah lost her father a year ago in an accident, but she is still despondent. When Sarah lost her father, she was so despondent that she could not eat food for two or three days.
C. When Ahmad could not pass the university entrance exam he got very despondent and broke the window of his room. Even one year after the exam he was despondent and could not forget the memory of his failure and decided not to study anymore. He is working in a factory at the moment.
Despondent ………….

8. A. He is very good at playing roles; he can feign any feeling like sadness, happiness, and surprise.
B. She had an exam and was not ready; therefore, she decided to feign illness and stay at home. The next day that she went to school, she still had to feign that she is sick and had not recovered fully.
C. My parents wanted to throw a surprise birthday party for me but I knew it in advance, so I decided to feign that I did not know. On the birthday when I came back from university I feigned surprise to make my parents happy.
Feign ………….

9. A. It is a very onerous job to work from 8 in the morning till 10 in the evening.
B. He always complained that his job was so onerous and he had to do a lot from 8 a. m. to 6 p.m. Last month he asked for an assistant because his work load was too onerous and he could not do it alone, for example he had to answer a lot of phone calls, write many emails and supervise workers in the factory all by himself.
C. Giving a lot of homework to students will make their task at home too onerous and this, in turn, may result in their losing motivation. Teachers should be very careful not to make students' homework onerous in order to keep them interested.
Onerous ………….

10. A. After an argument, the upshot was that they all agreed to help her pay back her debt.
B. The upshot of the interview was that he could work in the company for another year.
  Another upshot was that if during this year he worked well, he would be an official member of the company; otherwise he had to leave after a year.
C. The upshot of that experience was that I decided to quit university and forget studying medicine, because I saw a lot of blood in the hospital and I did not like blood. Another upshot was that I decided to start working as a businessman, since in this way I can make more money and it is more interesting than studying.
Upshot ………….

11. A. The ultimate champion of the boxing competition will be clear tonight, because tonight is the final match.
B. The ultimate failure of the project shocked all the researchers in the company. The researchers concluded that the ultimate outcome of the experiment could not be predicted.
C. The ultimate goal of the students was to pass university entrance exam and study at university. They also wanted to study until the ultimate degree at university which is Ph.D.
Ultimate ………….

12. A. He is really voluble. He can talk for hours without stopping.
B. Some people believe that it is rude to be voluble, because when a person is voluble, other people cannot find time to talk.
C. One of my friends is vey voluble, when he starts talking, everybody knows that he will continue for a long time. Although he accepts that he is voluble, he cannot do anything about it because he believes that it has become a habit for him.
Voluble ………….

13. A. She was absolutely livid that he had lied to her.
B. He was so livid that he tore the letter and started shouting. Later, when I asked him why he got livid, he answered that there was something insulting in the letter that made him lose his control.
C. When I looked at him, I saw his face was red and I understood that he was livid, but I did not know why. He said that he had a fight with his boss and he might get fired from his job which made him livid.
Livid ………….

14. A. Many people loathe the smell of fish and cannot tolerate it.
B. Some men loathe shopping, because it makes them really tired to walk from one store to another. But most of women are in love with shopping and cannot understand why some men loathe it.
C. I really loathe it when people make promises and don't keep them. I think when somebody makes a promise he has to keep it. I also loathe it when people lie. I think when people lie to you, they are insulting you.
loathe ………….

15. A. What vexed him most was that nobody had apologized to him, although he was right and others had made a mistake.
B. It vexes me that Kim never returns the books she borrows. And what vexes me more is that I have asked her several times to return the books she has borrowed, and each time she says: "ok", but she does not.
C. Ahmad has a very vexing habit of interrupting others while they are talking. Whenever I explain to him that what he does is wrong he stops doing it for some time, but after some days he starts over his vexing habit and starts talking while others are not finished yet.
Vex ………….

16. A. Hossein is a very tenacious person; he tries his best to achieve what he wants, even if is so difficult.
B. Right two months before his university entrance exam, his father died, but because he is a tenacious person he did not stop studying and passed the exam successfully. When people asked him how he could pass the exam in such a difficult time, he said the only secret to success is tenacity.
C. He is a very tenacious doctor and tries his best to do an operation successfully. Once in an operation, things went wrong and all the other doctors were disappointed, but since he was very tenacious he did not give up and saved the patient.
Tenacity …………..

17. A. In the war between Iran and Iraq a lot of houses were obliterated in the south west of Iran.
B. Many Japanese people's houses were obliterated after the latest earthquake and they became homeless. What made it even worse was that their factories and roads were obliterated by tsunami.
C. The killer took the dead body to the garden and wanted to bury it, but he thought the police may find the grave, then he obliterated the body by burning it. Despite his entire attempt to obliterate any evidence of the murder, the killer was caught, because the detective was Sherlock Holmes.
Obliterate …………..

18. A. She's too parsimonious to give money to charity.
B. Usually when people get old, they become parsimonious and love money, and some old people become even too parsimonious to spend money for their medicine.
C. Ali is a very rich person, some people say that it is because he is a parsimonious person and just saves his money. Ali thinks differently and believes that not only is he not parsimonious but also he is a very generous person and spends a lot of money and he is rich because he works a lot.
Parsimonious …………..

19. A. As I drove home, I tried to think how I was going to pacify my wife, who was angry with my decision about not going to her parents' for dinner.
B. He had a fight with his boss and was angry. I wanted to talk to him and pacify him, but as I started to talk I understood he was too angry to be pacified by talking, then I left him alone for a while. Sometimes the only thing which is needed to calm down is time. C. Kamran's wife passed away two months ago, and nothing has pacified his deep sadness since that time. My friends and I have tried to pacify him by taking him out and talking to him but nothing has worked.
Pacify …………..

20. A. The president is chosen by people from among contenders.
B. First some movies are chosen as contenders for Oscar, and then from among the contenders, one of them is chosen as the best one to get the Oscar.
C. Parviz Parastuee was a contender for the best actor. But someone else was chosen as the best actor from among the contenders.
Contender …………