

Writing Accuracy and Written Corrective Feedback

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Abstract

This study provided an overview of research that has investigated the role of (direct vs. indirect) written corrective feedback (WCF) in enhancing writing accuracy of Intermediate learners of Navid English Institute in Shiraz. This study is quantitative and experimental survey and then accuracy in the used two functions of English article system (referential indefinite 'a', 'an' and referential definite 'the') was measured during eight weeks by means of pre-test and post-test sixty students that include (20 control group, 20 experimental group) participated in the study which sought to investigate whether what kind of teacher written corrective feedback will be the most effective in writing accuracy then participants received teacher WCF on ten essay under three treatment conditions: Group (1) control group did not receive WCF on specific grammar errors; group (2) received direct WCF; group (3) received indirect WCF. Then at the end of the term, it investigated which type of written corrective feedback will be the most effective in writing accuracy of definite and indefinite article and does accuracy of two functions of the English article vary during eight weeks as results of WCF or not.

Introduction

Error treatment is one of the key issues in the second language writing which was faced by both teachers and researchers. There has been controversy as to whether error feedback helps L2 students to improve the accuracy and overall quality of their writing. (Kepner, 1991; Truscott, 1999; Ferris, 1999). Truscott (1996, 1999, and 2007) held a strong view against error correction. He argued that all forms of error correction of L2 student writing are not only ineffective but also harmful and should be abandoned. He further emphasized that although most L2 students clearly desire grammar correction, teacher should not give it to them. Ferris (1999) rebutted this claim by arguing that Truscott and overlooked some

positive research evidence on the effects of grammar correction. With the existing data (Kepner, 1991; Chandler; Hyland, 2003; Bitchener, 2008), it is still too early to have a conclusive answer to the question of whether error correction is effective in improving the accuracy of L2 writing in the long term for learners of all levels. In this research we will discuss three different types of written corrective feedback and at last understood which type of written corrective feedback are most effective in enhancing writing accuracy.

Types of WCF

The ensuing sections review a number of studies that deal with different types of WCF. The terms for various WCF methods have not always been used consistently in the literature, but they can be broadly classified as direct and indirect (Bitchener, 2008).

Direct WCF

In the direct method, WCF involves supplying learners with the target language form at near the error: “It may include the crossing out of an unnecessary word/ phrase/ morpheme, the insertion of a missing word/phrase/morpheme, or the provision of the correct form or structure” (Bitchener, 2008, p. 105). Reformulation of the whole sentence written by L2 learners with errors corrected to conform to the target language norms but preserving the original meaning is referred to as written recast (Ayoum, 2001). Bitchener (2008) also included metalinguistic explanation of grammar rules and examples in the category of direct WCF.

Indirect WCF

With indirect feedback, an error is called to the student’s attention using various strategies such as underlining or circling errors, recording in the margin the number of errors in a given line, confirmation checks and request for clarification (Bitchener, 2008). An alternative for the above-mentioned indirect WCF method is metalinguistic feedback that identifies the nature of an error. This method of WCF combines elements of both direct and indirect CF with the purpose of saving students’ time and frustration while still

pushing them to take initiative to reflect and to draw on their own resources, which might lead to student-generated repair (Huiying Sun, 2013). One common method of providing metalinguistic feedback is through the use of editing codes or editing symbols. Another type of metalinguistic WCF is to provide student writers with a set of criteria in the form of a help sheet (e.g., the so-called error awareness sheet in Lalande, 1980).

A common feature for indirect WCF methods is that they all withhold correct forms in hope of eliciting the correct form from the student (Carroll&Swain,1993).In Bitchener and Knoch's (2010) study ,one group received WCF in the form of written metalinguistic explanation along with an example of the targeted grammar feature. They described this as a form of direct WCF. However, since direct error corrections were not provided, the author of this dissertation would classify it as indirect WCF because students could not simply copy the correction, rather they still had to infer from the examples and expectations. The present study hence, aims to examine and compares ESL learners' and teachers' opinions and preferences for different types and amounts of WCF, and also explores the reason why they prefer particular types and amount of WCF.

Review of Literature

The L2 Writing Process

Research on the L2 writing process has started to thrive since the early 1980s.L2 writing is a complex process of discovery which involves brainstorming, multiple drafting, feedback practices, revision, and final editing .It is difficult from L1 writing, because L2 writers have more than one language at their disposal (Wang&Wen, 2002).

L2 Writing Feedback

Feedback on students' writings is integral to L2 instruction .Writing feedback would help writing teachers to know how well their students have done in the writing assignments, which is considered one of the most important responsibilities of writing teachers. For

students, they also expect feedback in order to know how well they have succeeded in their writing tasks and what they should improve in their future writings.

Teacher Written Feedback

Research in the 1980s and the early 1990s, however, began to question the effectiveness of teacher feedback as a way of improving students' writing. Early research on native English speakers (L1) suggested that much written feedback was of poor quality and was frequently misunderstood by students, being vague, inconsistent and authoritarian, overly concerned with error and often functioning to appropriate, or take over, student texts by being too directive (e.g. Knoblauch & Brannon 1981; Connors & Lunsford 1993; see also Ferris (2003: chapter 1 for a review). While Zamel (1985) painted a similarly bleak picture in L2 contexts, it is important to note that feedback research was in its infancy at that time and ideas of best practice in both giving feedback and designing studies to describe it were fairly rudimentary. More recent empirical research suggests that feedback does lead to writing improvements and this section highlights this research.

Despite increasing emphasis on oral response and the use of peers as source of feedback, teacher written response continues to play a central role in most L2 and foreign language (FL) writing classes. Many teachers feel they must write substantial comments on papers to provide a reader reaction to students' efforts, to help them improve as writers and to justify the grade they have been given (K. Hyland 2003).

Students views on teacher feedback

Attempts have been made to find out more about students' perspectives on teacher response, mainly through questionnaire research. Surveys of students' feedback preferences generally indicate that ESL students greatly value teacher written feedback and consistently rate it more highly than alternative forms such as peer and oral feedback (Radecki & Swales 1988; Leki 1991; Enginarlar 1993; Saito 1994; Ferris 1995; Zhang 1995). Although most surveys show that students want teacher feedback to highlight their grammatical errors, some indicate that they also want teachers to give them feedback on

the content and ideas in their writing. (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz 1994, 1996). Studies also suggest that students like to receive written feedback in combination with other sources, including conferences (Arndt 1993; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz 1994) and are positive about receiving indirect feedback on error, giving them clues rather than corrections since they recognize that it encourages them to be more active in their use of feedback (Arndt 1993; Saito 1994; F.Hyland 2001 a). Riazi's (1997) study of four Iranian graduate students in education showed that students viewed feedback as important for improving their understanding of their discipline, but also saw form-based comments as a way of developing their L2. It may be, however, that students receive fewer form-focused comments than they wish. Zhu's (2004) survey, for example suggests that faculty saw themselves primarily as providers of content-based summative feedback and regarded formative feedback on writing as the job of writing instructors. Leki (2006) has looked at feedback given by faculty to L2 graduate students in a US university, analyzing written comments made by disciplinary faculty on student assignments and interviewing students to investigate their opinions about the value of written feedback in their development of disciplinary literacy.

Direct Written CF VS. Indirect Written CF

From a theoretical point of view, some researches (e.g., Lalande, 1982; Ferris, 2003) had suggested that indirect CF has the greatest potential to facilitate learning because it engages learners in deeper cognitive processing and "promotes the type of reflection on existing knowledge or partially internalized knowledge that is more likely to foster long-term acquisition and written accuracy" (Bitchener & Ferris, 2011, p.65). Chandler (2003), however, argued that the benefit created by indirect CF may be cancelled by delayed access to the correct form. Direct CF, on the other hand, allows learners prompt access to the target form, enabling them to confirm or abandon their hypotheses about the language soon after they write, and thereby helps them to internalize the corrections better. Other benefits of direct CF may include reducing confusion resulted from ambiguous indirect CF and providing learners with information to solve complex errors involving syntactic structure or idiomatic expressions (Bitchener & Ferris, 2011).

With respect to the relative effectiveness of direct and indirect CF, four studies that compare the two approaches (Chandler, 2003; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Van Beuningen et al., 2008, 2012) demonstrated that direct CF led to greater accuracy gain than indirect CF. Bitchener and Knoch's (2010) and Van Beuningen et al.'s (2008, 2012) particularly showed that while both direct and indirect CF were effective for the short-term, only direct CF yielded a more significant long-term effect..

Can Written CF Facilitate L2 Development?

Recent studies have focused specifically on whether written CF can be effective in facilitating L2 development. Comparing over time the new texts of learners who receive written CF with those who did not receive written CF, these studies (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008; Sheen, 2007; Sheen, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009; van Beuningen, de Jong, & Kuiken, 2008, 2012) have demonstrated that written CF is able to effect improved control over the targeted structures.

Are Some Types of Feedback More Effective than Others?

A number of researchers have examined whether different types of CF might yield differential effects. Most of the early studies examined whether direct forms (explicit correction) of feedback are more effective than indirect forms (indications only that an error has been made). Lalande (1982), Semke (1984), and Robb, Ross, and Shortreed (1986) found no difference between the two categories, but recent studies (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010b; van Beuningen et al., 2008, 2012) found that direct feedback was the more influential overtime for the acquisition of specifically targeted structures. It may be that indirect feedback is sufficient for advanced learners in both composition and language learning classes, and that direct feedback is more helpful for lower proficiency learners with a more limited linguistic repertoire to draw on.

Methodology

Based on the research questions which deal with the role of written corrective feedback in enhancing writing accuracy this study was quantitative and experimental study and the data were collected through pre-test and post-test and to show homogeneity and language proficiency levels and writing ability of learners use Nelson, English Proficiency test. And the data analyzed by using statistics including mean, and standard deviation as well as ANOVA to determine difference among the three groups and at last Post hoc to show the exact location of difference among groups.

Participants: The participants in this study were 85 Iranian intermediate EFL learners, age 19-32, attending Navid English language institute, Shiraz, Iran. All the participants were female. In order to make sure in objective terms that these learners were truly homogenous with regard to their English proficiency level, a Nelson English Language Proficiency Test (Fowler & Coe, 1976) was administered to them. The Nelson English Language Test is a battery consisting of 40 separate tests for ten levels of language proficiency ranging from beginners to the advanced. The levels are numbered from 050, 100, 150 To 500. Each test consists of 50 items. The tests are designed for a 30 (60%) pass mark. The reliability of the test was calculated through KR-21 in a study ($r=.76\alpha$). Nelson test version 200 A was adopted. The obtained mean and standard deviation were ($M= 29.02$ and $SD= 8.79$). Having obtained the proficiency test results, the researcher decided to select those participants whose scores were one standard deviation below and above the mean ($M=29.02$, $SD=8.79$) to enhance the precision of the results and to control as many as extraneous factors as possible. This being so, 60 intermediate learners out of 85 learners at intermediate level met this homogeneity criterion and were thus qualified to serve as the intermediate participants of this study.

Instruments: A number of testing instruments were utilized in the process of the development of the present research. Proficiency test, pre-test, post-test

Proficiency test: Nelson Battery–Section 200 A (Fowler & Coe, 1976) was applied to determine the homogeneity of the groups regarding their levels of proficiency. Though Fowler and Coe (1976) claim that all their test items have been pretested and so their tests seem to be reliable for the purpose of testing the language proficiency of students, still the reliability of this test was computed through the application of Kuder and Richardson (KR-21) method ($r = .76$). It consisted of three sections: cloze tests, structure, and vocabulary in the form of multiple choice questions. There were, in all, 50 items and the time allotted was 45 minutes.

Pretest: The second instrument used in the study was the written English test which served as the pretest in order to determine whether three groups are at the same level of proficiency with regard to their writing skill. In fact, a writing topic assigned to the participants in the three groups. The topic of the pretest, as well as the corresponding instructions, time allocation, number of words, and additional explanations were adopted from Kaplan IELTS 2009-2010 Edition. The students were given 20 minutes to write about 150 words about the topic.

Posttest: When the treatment sessions were over for the experimental groups, another topic was given to the students to write about. Again, the topic of the posttest, as well as the corresponding instructions, time allocation, number of words, and additional explanations were adopted from Kaplan IELTS 2009-2010 Edition. The students were given 20 minutes to write about 150 words about the topic.

Data Analysis: According to Mackey and Gass (2005), descriptive statistics provide a simple overview of data, thus allowing the researcher to expand her/his overall understanding of the data set. The collected data was processed utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0 to analyze the data. The mean and standard deviation for the whole participants were calculated. In addition to descriptive statistics, One-way ANOVA was run in line with the research questions to determine the significant difference among the three groups.

Discussion and Conclusion

With regard to the primary purpose of this study, and as tables and diagrams indicate, the null hypotheses were safely rejected at the 0.05 level of significance. In other words, the analysis of obtained data strongly suggested that using direct written corrective feedback during teaching writing and correcting grammatical errors of the students promoted writing skill. The results of the present study are in accordance with Ellis' (2009) statement that "Direct CF has the advantage that it provides learners with explicit guidance about how to correct their errors" (p.99). The present study also showed that intermediate students profited from direct CF more because they may not know what the correct form is or they may not be able to self-correct themselves.

The finding of the present study generally lent support to the findings of previous studies (Archibald, 2001; Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 1999) that error correction has positive impacts and helps students to improve their writing accuracy.

The current study also agrees with Sheen's (2007) finding that direct CF is better than indirect corrective feedback for learners at elementary or intermediate level because they are not proficient enough to detect the correct form and they may skip the errors at lower level. He also mentioned the disadvantage of direct CF as it requires minimal processing on the part of the learner even though it helps them more. He added when learners received direct feedback were able to correct errors that were indicated and located than errors that were just indicated by a check in the margin. He also added direct CF can be effective in promoting acquisition of specific grammatical features.

The finding of the present study disagrees with Lalande's (1982) study which found no significant difference between direct and indirect corrective feedback. Contrary to the general line of argument by Ferris and Roberts (2001) that claimed indirect feedback where the exact location of errors is not shown might be more effective than direct feedback where the location of the errors is shown. In another study, Robb et al. (1986) investigated four types of feedback including direct feedback and indirect feedback where

the number of errors was given in each line of text. They also reported no significant difference between two types of feedbacks.

The result of current study also was in contrast with Norrozizadeh (2009) study which indicated indirect feedback and error correction induces the learner to become self-activated and responsible for their learning process, thereby it leads to long term learning. Further, Ferris (2004) also confirmed his statement that indirect error correction stimulates learners' responsibility in correction, and improves their writing accuracy in the longer term. Ghandi and Maghsudi (2014) also obtained different result from this study. They found that indirect feedback was more effective than direct feedback in rectifying students' spelling errors.

This study examined the role of two different types of written corrective feedback on the enhancing writing accuracy of Intermediate learners, the results demonstrated that there is significance difference in the enhancing of writing accuracy for the group who received directive written corrective feedback in comparison with the other two groups. This study indicates some supports for using directive written corrective feedback to expand learners' writing accuracy. Thus, it would be reasonable to allocate some time to the training of teachers in this regard and teach them how to use this kind of feedback to improve students' writing performance.

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