

**THE EFFECT OF ELICITATION VS. METALINGUISTIC
FEEDBACK ON GRAMMATICAL ACCURACY OF
BEGINNING EFL LEARNERS AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS**

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Abstract

One of the main areas of research in First Language (L1) and Second Language (L2) studies which has recently attracted a lot of attention is the significance of error analysis/correction and its subsequent effects on language learning. There is a vast amount of research concerning errors and corrective feedback in language learning. What had not yet been studied widely enough and was the focus of this study, however, was what kinds of corrective feedback are more effective with regard to grammatical errors in writings of elementary EFL students. The type of feedback under the investigation was implicit corrective feedback and the two of its sub categories, metalinguistic feedback and elicitation feedback. This quasi-experimental study sought to investigate the relationship between noticing of implicit corrective feedback (CF) and L2 development in relation to learning *past tense* in grammar and writing. To this end, 32 second language learners from Jihad English Institute of Neyshabour participated in this study. To determine which form of corrective feedbacks had been more effective, the researcher first

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conducted a pretest to assess the students' level of accuracy in using simple past tense in their writings. Then, the researcher gave two types of treatments i.e. metalinguistic and elicitation to the students. The results showed that students in elicitation feedback class performed better than the students in metalinguistic feedback class. Therefore, it can be claimed that elicitation feedback improved the grammar of EFL learners more and had a greater positive impact on the students' writing accuracy than metalinguistic feedback.

Key words: Corrective feedback, Elicitation feedback, Metalinguistic feedback, Learner's Perception

Introduction

The importance of error treatment and correction has led many researchers to study the influence of different types of corrective feedbacks recently. Despite the providing of various types of corrective feedback that attempt to guide learners to the target language, learners can be dissatisfied with a language class because of mismatches between students' and teachers' expectations. Learners' beliefs and perceptions may be essential to effective L2 acquisition (Brown, 2009). Schulz's (1996, 2001) studies also found that learners' perceptions and interpretations towards teaching methods have the greatest influence on their achievement. Understanding students' perceptions can be the first step toward leading them to acquire correct forms. As Brown (2009) points out, "L2 teachers and their students may have similar or dissimilar notions of effective teaching" (p. 46). Therefore, it is important for teachers to know their learners' preferences for corrective feedback in order to maximize its potential positive effect on language development.

Error correction, especially in grammar instruction, is an area which has been always under investigation due to its importance in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Following the paradigm shift from traditional toward communicative approaches of Second Language Teaching (SLA), dealing with learner's errors and the role of error correction have evolved dramatically. During the days of Audiolingualism from the 1950s to the 1960s, error correction was promised at all costs. Then, in the late 1960s, error correction was condemned due to its harmful effects (Krashen 1981 a & b, Terrell 1982 , Truscott 1996) and in the 1970s ,with the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which focused on meaning over form , the correction of grammatical errors became less prominent , and in some cases, was abandoned (Harmer, 2001;Richards & Rodgers, 2001) .

Grounded within the realm of corrective feedback, the present study aims at bridging the gap in studies in corrective feedback in Iranian context by investigating the role of implicit corrective feedback on the written work of Iranian adult beginner EFL learners. It mainly concerns teaching and learning a grammatical item, the *past tense*, the errors committed by the learners doing tasks related to the *past tense* and the implicit form of corrective feedback by the teacher, and the learners' uptake of this kind of feedback. Since the learners' beliefs are of high importance, their attitude towards this kind of feedback will be investigated. Moreover, it will be examined whether they prefer direct form of correction or the indirect form and to what extent they find the implicit form of feedback effective in improving their grammatical knowledge.

Therefore, the goals of this study are threefold: (1) to compare the noticeability and effectiveness of implicit corrective feedback, (2) to identify a possible relationship between noticing of CF and language learning, and (3) to determine whether learner beliefs about CF mediate what is noticed and learned in the language classroom.

Review of literature

Error Correction Studies

Pedagogically speaking, CF is a significant phenomenon of form focused instruction which is known as influential for L2 teaching (Long & Robinson, 1998). Further, CF which is immediately provided in reaction to errors during communicative interactions presents a time for learners for paying attention to form as it relates to their intended meaning (Long, 1996; Gass, 1997; Doughty, 2001).

Recently, researchers' attention has been directed at theorizing and investigating the relative effectiveness of different types of oral corrective feedback (i.e. explicit versus implicit, input- providing versus prompts) (Ellis, 2006). Since Lyster and Ranta's (1997) effective work about corrective feedback and their category of different types of corrective feedback, experts have investigated the relationship between interactional feedback and (1) learner uptake (Sheen, 2004); (2) noticing (Mackey, Gass, & McDonough, 2000); and (3) L2 learning (Lyster, 2004).

Implicit and Explicit Corrective Feedback

As for implicit feedback, there is no overt indicator that an error has been made, while in explicit feedback there is. Implicit feedback often takes the form of *recasts*. Explicit feedback can take several forms: it may draw attention to the *source of problem indicated* (for example, 'Not goed') , where just negative evidence is presented; it may present *explicit correction* (for example, 'No, not goed- went. '), where the feedback obviously shows that what the learner has stated is erroneous and supplies the correct form, so presenting both positive and negative evidence; or it may recommend *metalinguistic feedback* (for example, ' You need past tense.')

,defined by Lyster and Ranta (1997) as ‘ comments, information or questions related to the well-formedness of the learner’s utterance’ (ibid), which again just presents negative evidence .

Different Types of Spoken Corrective Feedback

Before any elaboration on different types of CF, it should be mentioned that generally corrective feedback differs in terms of how much implicit or explicit it is. “In the case of implicit feedback, there is no overt indicator that an error has been committed, whereas in explicit feedback types, there is.” (Ellis, Leowen, and Erlam, 2006, pp. 340-341).

According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), there are six different types of feedback, namely, *explicit correction, clarification requests, metalinguistic information, elicitation, repetition, and recast*. Metalinguistic and elicitation feedback types which are the subject of current study are described below.

Metalinguistic Feedback

Despite its name, Lyster and Ranta (1997) explain that the inclusion of metalanguage is not the defining characteristic of metalinguistic feedback, but it is encoding of evaluations or commentary regarding the non-target-like nature of the learner's utterance. By encoding direct reference to the existence of an error or to the nature of the error, metalinguistic feedback supplies the language learner with negative evidence regarding the target form. Furthermore, they categorize metalinguistic feedback as “either comments/information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the student's utterance, without explicitly providing the correct form” (Lyster and Ranta, 1997, p. 47).

Metalinguistic comments, the most minimally informative of the three, simply indicate the occurrence of an error. Such metalinguistic feedback may include a general statement that an error has occurred (e.g., 'Can you find your error') or may directly pinpoint the error (e.g., 'Not X').

Elicitation Feedback

Lyster and Ranta (1997, p. 48) identify three ways of eliciting the correct form from the students. First, teachers elicit completion of their own utterance by strategically pausing to allow students to 'fill in the blank' as it were. Second, using questions to elicit the forms. Third, teachers occasionally ask students to reformulate their utterance

Methodology

Participants

Participants of the current study included 32 EFL students of Jihad English language institute. The students all were males and aged between 13-18 years old. They were divided into two groups and each group received treatment either in the form of elicitation or metalinguistic feedback for seven sessions.

Research Design

Since the major focus of the present study was to examine the association between students' grammatical errors in writings and the application of two implicit corrective feedback methods, the investigation had to be quantitatively testified. This is a quasi-experimental research since subjects were not randomly assigned to the treatment groups.

Instrument

For the present study three instruments have been employed. First, a pre-test and a post-test that examined student' knowledge of the past tense was devised, and the materials were extracted from various English grammar books. Second, *key English test* (KET) was applied to reassure the homogeneity of the participants. Ultimately, a questionnaire was developed to investigate students' perceptions regarding corrective feedback.

Procedure

In the treatment phase of the study, the two groups were given a test prior to the treatment. In elicitation feedback class, students were given 10 minutes to do the test and then they were supposed to read out their answers in the class .If they had any mistakes, the researcher indirectly tried to direct the student to the correct answer by giving some clues orally. In the metalinguistic feedback group, 10 minutes of the class was allocated to the test. Afterwards, the researcher gathered the papers and after correcting them if there were any mistakes the researcher tried to lead the student to the correct answer by writing some hints next to the mistake, and they were asked to read those hints at home to learn the grammatical point. After seven sessions of treatment, students were given a post-test to check their improvement in using simple past tense as a result of the treatment. At the last stage, the researcher gave the students a questionnaire which was about students' opinion about the kind of feedback they were given in the process of the study, and the researcher examined the correlation between pre-test, post-test, and students' viewpoints.

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the efficacy of elicitation and metalinguistic CF types in improving the grammatical accuracy of beginning EFL learners. To this end, a proficiency test was initially given to students in order to ensure their homogeneity. The total number of scores obtained by a test taker on this test was calculated out of 50, one score for each item. The obtained mean was 27 and the standard deviation was 7. Therefore participants whose scores were between 20 and 34, i.e. one standard deviation above and below the mean, were included in the study. Altogether, the researcher was left with 32 students who were roughly at the same level of proficiency. In fact, out of 45 students, the scores of 13 students were not within the range (that is, between 24 and 34).

Before running the t-test, the researcher checked the normality of the distribution and the distribution of scores on continuous variables (skewness and kurtosis). The skewness value provides an indication of the symmetry of the distribution. Kurtosis, on the other hand, provides information about the ‘peakedness’ of the distribution.

Table 1
Test of normality for each group

types of feedback	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pre-test s metalinguistic feedback	.129	16	.200	.942	16	.370
elicitation feedback	.163	16	.200	.958	16	.628

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 2
Test of normality for both groups

Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.

pre-test .137 32 .134 .958 32 .238

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Tables 1 and 2 display the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic which assess the normality of the distribution of scores. A non-significant result (Sig value of more than .05) indicates normality. Since in table 2 the Sig is .200 which is more than .05, the data are normally distributed. The same is true for table 3 since the Sig. value is .134 which is more than .05.

A variable is reasonably close to normal if its skewness and kurtosis have values between -1.0 and +1.0. In this study, the skewness and kurtosis for both groups are between 1.0 and +1.0 (Table 4), indicating that there is no violation of the normality of data.

Table 3

Overall descriptive results.

Type of feedback	Mean	variance	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Skewness Statistic	Std. Error	Kurtosis Statistic	Std. Error
Pre-test metalinguistic feedback	14.69	4.496	2.12	12	19	0.51	0.56	-0.385	1.091
Pre-test elicitation feedback	15.88	7.18	2.68	11	20	-0.25	0.56	-0.96	1.09

The mean and standard deviation for metalinguistic feedback group was $M=14.69$, $SD=2.12$ and for elicitation feedback group was $M=15.88$, $SD=2.68$. The total number of students who

participated in the study was $N=32$. The mean difference between groups before treatment seems small but to test it statistically, an independent-samples t-test is run.

Table 4

Independent samples T-test for the two groups in pre-test before treatment

		Levene's Test for							
		Equality		of					
		Variances							
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	
Equal variances assumed		1.689	.204	-1.390	30	.175	-1.188	.854	
Equal variances not assumed				-1.390	28.4	.175	-1.188	.854	

Independent sample T-test produces two lines, as displayed by Table 4, the Sig. value is larger than .05, therefore, the first line should be followed which refers to Equal variances assumed. To figure out if there is a significant difference between the two experimental groups, having checked the column labeled Sig. (2-tailed), the researcher discovered that there is no significant difference in the mean scores on the dependent variable for each of the two groups. Because the value in the Sig. (2-tailed) column is *above* .05 (which is .17), there is *no* significant difference between the two groups before the treatment phase. It means that the difference between students' scores in meta-linguistic group was not statistically significant from the mean score in the elicitation group and the two groups were homogeneous before the treatment.

After the treatment phase, the subjects in both groups were given a grammatical accuracy test and the mean and standard deviation for each of the groups was found to differ from those of

pre-test. The results obtained showed that students in elicitation feedback class ($M=18.75$) performed better than the students in metalinguistic feedback class ($M=16.88$).

To examine the statistical significance of the difference between the two groups the obtained score were subjected to an independent sample t-test since there were two distinct groups and the independent variable (i.e., feedback) had two levels in this study.

Table 5

Independent samples T-test of the two groups after treatment

		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	Error
Equal variances assumed		6.110	.019	-3.856	30	.001	-1.875	.486	
Equal variances not assumed				-3.856	23.1	.001	-1.875	.486	

Since the Sig. value in Table 5 is less than .05, the second line is used to report the data, which refers to equal variances not assumed. To discover if there is a significant difference between the two groups, we refer to the column labeled Sig. (2-tailed). Since the Sig. (2-tailed) value is less than .05 which is .001, there is a significant difference in the mean scores on the dependent variable for each of the two groups.

Thus, the first null hypothesis of the study was rejected, that is to say, the difference between elicitation group and metalinguistic group was significant and the elicitation group had a better performance. This type of feedback proved to be more effective.

The second research hypothesis concerns the relationship between students' grammatical accuracy and their perceptions with respect to metalinguistic feedback and in so doing, he used Pearson Correlation Coefficient formula.

Table 6

Correlations between grammatical accuracy and perceptions with respect to metalinguistic feedback

		metalinguistic class	students' perception
metalinguistic class	Pearson Correlation	1	.371
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.041
	N	16	16
students' perceptions	Pearson Correlation	.371	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.041	
	N	16	16

The results obtained from Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient showed the relationship between scores of metalinguistic class and scores of students' perceptions (See Table 6). There was a *medium, positive correlation* between learners' grammatical accuracy and their perceptions with respect to metalinguistic feedback ($r=.37, n=32, p<.05$), based on the guideline proposed by Cohen (1992). Thus, the second research hypothesis was also rejected. The third research question concerns the relationship between students' grammatical accuracy and their perceptions with respect to elicitation feedback. To answer this questions, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient formula was run.

Table 7

Correlations between grammatical accuracy and perceptions with respect to elicitation feedback

	Elicitation class	Students' perceptions
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Elicitation class	Pearson Correlation	1	.747**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	16	16
Students' perceptions	Pearson Correlation	.747**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	16	16

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient indicated that there was a *large, positive correlation* between learners' grammatical accuracy and their perceptions with respect to elicitation feedback ($r=.74, n=32, p<.05$) according to the guideline proposed by Cohen (1992). Therefore, the third research hypothesis was also rejected.

The minimum and maximum scores of perception in metalinguistic class obtained by the students are 1 and 5 respectively. The mean score varies between 2 and 4, with items 21, 22 and 8 obtaining the higher mean scores (including 4.31, 4.19 and 4.06) and items 14, 6 and 24 obtaining the lower mean scores (including 2.62, 2.69, and 2.88). Moreover, the lowest standard deviation of scores was 0.50 referring to items 14, and the highest standard deviation of scores was 1.20 referring to items 31 and 34.

The minimum and maximum scores obtained by the students in elicitation class are 1 and 5 respectively. The mean score varies between 3 and 4, with items 3, 29 and 5 obtaining the higher mean scores (including 4.41, 4.31 and 4.26) and items 25, 36 and 9 obtaining the lower mean scores (including 3.06, 3.25, and 3.50). As the results of mean scores show, students' scores in elicitation class were higher than that of metalinguistic class. Moreover, the lowest standard deviation of scores was 0.44 referring to item 14, and the highest standard deviation of scores was 1.39 referring to item 36.

Discussion and Conclusion

The first goal of this study was to analyze the difference between two types of feedback including meta-linguistic and elicitation on learners' grammatical accuracy. First, the researcher conducted a pretest to assess the students' level of accuracy in using simple past tense in their writings. The results showed that students in elicitation feedback class performed better than the students in metalinguistic feedback class.

According to Farrokhi (2012, p.54), concerning the general effects of CF on written work of students apart from its specific type, the results of this study corroborate those of recent studies on grammatical accuracy with lower proficiency writers like the participants of this study (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener&Knoch, 2008a, 2008b, 2010; Sheen, 2007; Sheen et al., 2009).

In each of these studies, the effectiveness of CF was evident immediately after it had been provided in the post-test pieces of writing. As the study reveals, elicitation class outperformed the metalinguistic class. Therefore, concerning the accurate use of simple past tense by L2 writers, the results of this study are in line with the study of Bitchener and Knoch (2010) who found that L2 writers were able to make further gains in accuracy as a result of targeted CF.

According to this research, there was a medium, positive correlation between learners' grammatical accuracy and their perceptions with respect to metalinguistic feedback. The result of this research question is in accordance with a previous study by Ellis, Sheen, Takashima and Murakami (2008) who investigated the effect of unfocused and focused meta-linguistic feedback on learners' acquisition of English grammatical forms.

This paper tried to shed light on the relationship between meta-linguistic and elicitation feedback on the beginner learners' grammatical accuracy. Other types of feedback such as repetition,

explicit correction and clarification request, etc., also, can be studied further by other interested researchers.

The participants in this study were all beginner learners, therefore, other studies can be conducted to see the association between meta-linguistic and elicitation feedback and the intermediate and advanced learners' grammatical accuracy.

The focus of this study as mentioned earlier was on grammatical accuracy, and in this respect, simple past tense was chosen to see the effect of feedback on it, further, the relationship between feedback and other dimensions of grammatical aspects such as prepositions, articles, relative clauses, etc. can be studied in other studies.

Another perspective altogether would be to investigate what happens inside the learner's head, namely how the feedback is perceived by learners (e.g. attitudes, noticing). Recasts especially are widely used but since they rarely provoke any reaction from the students' part, it would be worthwhile exploring whether the corrective function was noticed. In addition, due to the descriptive nature of the study no certain conclusions can be made of the effectiveness of different kinds of feedback to L2 acquisition.

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