

THE EFFECT OF CORRECTIVE FEEDBACKS ON L2 STUDENTS' WRITING PERFORMANCE

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Received: 2022/03/09

Accepted: 2022/03/22

Published: 2022/05/30

Abstract

In the past years, teachers have been made to assume that corrective feedback benefits students' writing improvement. Corrective feedback as "any information provides information on the result of behaviour. However, a growing body of research has been reinvestigating the effectiveness of corrective feedback as a result of John Truscott's claim of its inefficiency. This paper aims to expand the related study on written corrective feedback to find corrective feedback with a significant positive effect on students' writing performance. This experimental study obtained the data from sixty-six homogeneous L2 students which were equally divided into three groups. The first group was given explicit correction feedback, the second group was given metalinguistic clue feedback, and the last group was the control group. The result showed that the explicit correction was more effective compared to metalinguistic but the fact that the participants tend to perform better even without receiving any correction made the small effect of explicit correction to be questioned.

Keywords: corrective feedback, explicit correction, metalinguistic clue, writing performance

1. Introduction

This paper focuses on the effect of two corrective feedbacks, explicit correction and metalinguistic clues on L2 student's writing performance. It aims at answering the question of which corrective feedback has a stronger positive effect on students' writing performance. The importance of corrective feedback is shown in Van Beuningen, De Jong, and Kuiken (2012, p.2), in which they state, "error correction or corrective feedback (CF) is probably the most widely used feedback form in present-day second language (L2) classrooms." However, although, as Ellis et al. (2008, p.97) put, "how teachers correct second language (L2) students' writing is a topic that has attracted enormous interest from researchers and teachers alike," and many questions of this area remain uncertain and even the stakeholders—teachers cannot make use of different types of feedbacks' full potential (Hyland & Hyland 2006, p.83). Hence, we would like to investigate and compare the effects of explicit correction and metalinguistic clues on L2 students' writing.

2. Literature Review

Corrective feedback has been regarded as having a positive effect on L2 learners' writing accuracy (Sameera, Amin & Siddiqui 2016). Richards and Schmidt (2013, p.217) define corrective feedback as "any information that provides information on the result of behaviour." In teaching a second language, feedback "refers to the comments or other information that learners receive concerning their success on learning tasks or tests" (Richards & Schmidt, as cited in Ghariblaki & Poorahmadi 2017, p. 87).

Although Truscott (1996, p.327) argues, "the grammar correction in L2 should be abandoned" because it is ineffective and even harmful, yet this claim is rebutted by many scholars such as Ferris (1999), Hyland & Hyland (2006), Sheen, Wright & Moldawa (2009), Van Beuningen, De Jong and Kuiken (2012) and Lee (2008). For example, Ferris (1999, p.4) argues that Truscott "overstates negative evidence while disregarding research results that contradict his thesis."

Scholars (Bates, Lane, & Lange 1993; Ferris, 1995; Ellis, 2009) suggest that direct corrective feedback and indirect corrective feedback are the two main kinds of corrective feedback. Ferris (2006, p.83) defines direct feedback "as the provision of the correct linguistic form by the teacher to the student"; whereas "indirect feedback occurs when the teacher indicates in some way that an error has been made—by means of an underline, circle, code, or other mark—but this does not provide the correct form, leaving the student to solve the problem that has been called to his or her attention." The former is argued by many researchers (e.g. Ko & Hirvela 2010) as "one of the least effective method of giving feedback to students" (Seiffedin & El-Sakka 2017, p.168). Indirect feedback, on the other hand, is said to be more effective than direct feedback because by using indirect feedback, "students are cognitively challenged to correct the error based on their informed knowledge" (Seiffedin & El-Sakka 2017, p.168)

Regarding our study, explicit correction is a type of direct feedback, in which, as the name suggests, "the teacher provides the student with the correct form" (Ellis 2008, p.98). Related case studies include Lalande (1982) in which Lalande examines the effect of explicit correction on students' essay writing in US. In metalinguistic clues, on the other hand, the teacher does not provide the correct form directly, but some metalinguistic clues about the error. Ellis (2008, p.98) suggests two sub-types of metalinguistic clues, namely "use of error code" and "brief grammatical description". When the teacher uses the former, he or she will write codes, such as *ww=wrong word* or *art=article*, in the margin of student's assignment. For "brief grammatical descriptions", the teacher will number errors in student's assignment and group those errors together in several categories and write grammatical description for each group at the bottom of the assignment.

Based on the aim of this study stated above, we propose these three overarching research questions:

1. Is there any improvement in post-test score of students' writings?
2. Is corrective feedback effective as a strategy to improve students' writing ability?
3. Is explicit correction more effective than metalinguistic clues?

3. Research Method

In total, sixty-six homogeneous participants were involved in this study. They were chosen based on the same level of competence in writing (intermediate English learners). All of them speak the same L1 and were in grade nine at the time this study was carried out. To conduct this experimental research, the participants were equally

divided into three groups. The first group consisted of 10 females and 12 males, the second group consisted of 13 females and 9 males, and the last group had equal number of male and female students. The groups were classified as Explicit Correction (EC: group 1), Metalinguistic Clues (MC: group 2), and No Correction (NC: control group).

The instruments used in this study was picture composition task in which the students had to write 100-150 words of procedural text. Each participant needed to put the pictures in correct order and write two different texts (one for pre-test and one for post-test) about the procedure on how to make gingerbread men and fruit jelly.

In the first meeting, all participants from each group needed to do pre-test to judge their general writing ability as well as to ensure their homogeneity in writing performance. The teacher gave back the results with feedbacks to the experimental groups (i.e. EC and MC) regarding their grammatical errors the week after. EC group received their pre-test with explicit correction feedback on their grammatical errors.

Explicit correction is a type of feedback where the grammatical errors are directly marked and the correct form is given which was put around the errors to indicate the correct grammatical term for the errors. In the next meeting, they were asked to look at the grammatical errors and discussed them with the teacher in the class. Unlike EC group, MC group did not get any direct correction on the errors in their writing compositions. Instead, the teacher numbered and grouped the errors and then gave the students a brief metalinguistic explanation of each group (Shintani & Ellis 2013, p.290). In the next meeting, the teacher explained about the general grammatical errors and the participants were asked to analyse their own writing compositions and correct their own writing errors by themselves according to clues provided by the teacher. As a control group, no correction group only received the pre-test score without any feedback on their writing. They just received the final score of the pre-test without any clue and their writing was incorrect and the teacher did not make any comment on their writing performance. This type of treatment was given to the students in the course of a semester. At the final meeting, all groups (both experimental and control group) had to do post-test. It was the same test that they had on the pre-test. It was done to enable us to judge how they improved from receiving different types of feedbacks.

This study is a quasi-experimental study that compares the control and experimental groups. A one-way ANOVA and two-way mixed ANOVA are used to compute the result using SPSS. These two statistical procedures were chosen to make sure that the data were valid and to be able to answer the research questions. One-way ANOVA was used to compare the pre-test result of each group to see whether they are different in their means. It was needed to make sure that all students are equal in terms of writing proficiency so that the result of this study would be more valid. Two-way mixed design ANOVA was chosen to answer the research questions because there were three groups with different treatments in this study and each of them had to do two different tests (pre-test and post-test). Besides, we needed to compare the scores of pre-test and post-test of each group.

4. Result and Discussion

The statistical output of the corrective feedbacks (explicit correction and metalinguistic clues) answers the research questions of this paper. To begin with, descriptive analysis is provided to give general description on how the result of the statistical computation contributes to the inferential analysis (in this case One-Way ANOVA) to see whether all the students have the same level of proficiency on the pre-

test. Different levels of proficiency between the participants will lead to different result. Next, Mixed (One-Way and Repeated-Measure) ANOVA is computed to compare within-subject factors (groups of participants: explicit correction group, metalinguistic clues, and control group) and between-subject factors (pre-test and post-test). The result will give us a clear understanding on which group performs better in writing.

4.1. Result

The result of comparison on the pre-test scores for each group is shown in Table 1. At the beginning of the study, it is important to make sure that all the participants have the same level of proficiency. This is very important because different level of proficiency at the beginning would affect the effectiveness of the treatment; in this case the corrective feedbacks. To make sure that all three participants groups had the same writing ability, a One-Way ANOVA was conducted. Descriptive statistics reveals that there is not much difference in the means between the explicit correction, metalinguistic clues group and the control group. All of them have similar mean around 64 - 66 and the difference in standard deviation is not very big. The result ($F_{(2,63)}=.542$, $p = .584$) shows that there is no statistically significant difference between all the three groups pre-test. This result can be seen by looking at the p value that is above 0.05. It means that all students are homogeneously chosen from the same level of proficiency that is proven by no difference between them. Since the ANOVA result showed insignificant result, there was no post-hoc test taken.

Groups	n	Mean	SD
Explicit correction	22	64.1364	7.809
Metalinguistic clues	22	65.5455	7.048
Control group	22	66.3182	6.190
Total	66	65.3333	6.997

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for pre-test

Table 2 shows the inferential statistics result of the corrective feedbacks. It shows that the three groups seemed to have the same type of improvement in post-test. There was no any group performed significantly better than the other. The two-way mixed ANOVA was conducted to see the writing performances regarding the feedbacks given for the pre-test. The types of feedback were considered as within-subject factors and the tests (pre-test and post-test) were the between-subject factor. ANOVA test resulted in there was no significant effect of the treatments (explicit correction, metalinguistic clue and no correction) on the student writing performance $F_{(2,84)} = .175$, $p = .840$. It can be seen by the p value which is higher than 0.05. It also affected the effect size that was very small (less than .1) around 0.4% ($\eta^2 = .004$). The significance level standard is 0.05, which is lower than the result ($p = .840$). As mentioned before, this happened because all the students perform equally well in the test. The post-hoc pairwise comparison for corrective feedbacks (within-subject factors) using Bonferroni reveals that there is no group significantly better than the others. All the three groups had exactly the same performance proven by the p value is higher than 0.05 (in this case $p = 1$).

Source	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Square
Group	2	8.394	.175	.840	.004

Group*Test	2	40.394	.843	.434	.20
Error (group)	84	47.894			

Table 2: Within-subject effect

Table 3 shows the descriptive comparison of pre-test and post-test based on the treatment given and Figure 1 shows the result of between-subject effect on estimate means in student pre-test and post-test. The comparison of students test and type of feedbacks is shown in Table 2. From the Univariate ANOVA test, it was shown that both pre-test and post-test have significant main effect, $F_{(1,42)} = 85.95, p < .001$ with large effect size 67% ($\eta^2 = .672$). This means that the students performed significantly better in one of the test regardless of the corrective feedback given by the teacher. The post-hoc test using Bonferroni shows there are significant differences of the tests (pre-test and post-test) in student performances. It shows that the students perform significantly better in one type of test compared to the other with a significant p value ($p < .001$). From the descriptive statistics, it is apparent that the students perform better in post-test with the mean of 77.18 while the pre-test only 65.33.

Corrective feedbacks	Test	Mean	SD	N
Explicit correction	Pre-test	64.13	7.80	22
	Post-test	77.59	7.81	22
Metalinguistic clues	Pre-test	65.54	7.04	22
	Post-test	77.90	6.81	22
No correction	Pre-test	66.31	6.19	22
	Post-test	76.18	6.54	22

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for corrective feedbacks

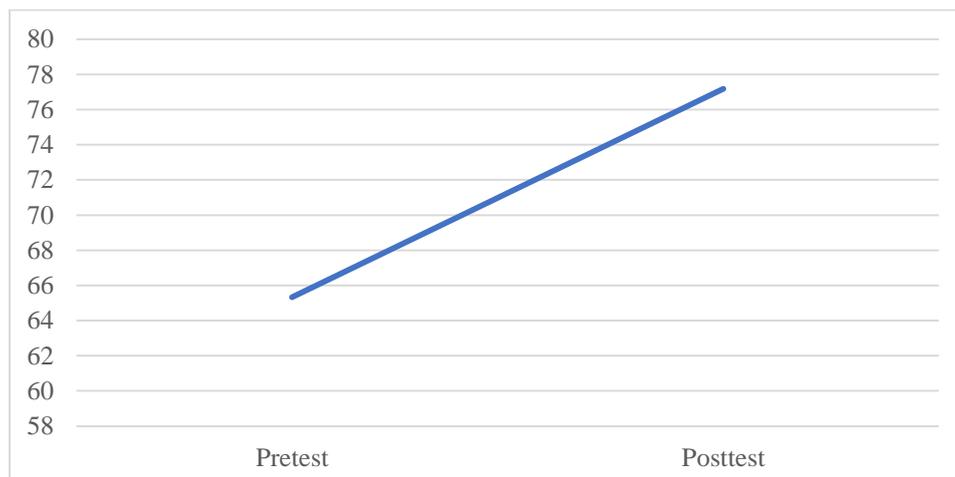


Figure 1: Pre-test and Post-test Comparison

Figure 2 provides the result of analysis of the variance test between corrective feedbacks and tests. The analysis of variance test showed that there was no significant interaction effect of corrective feedbacks and tests scores (pre-test and post-test),

$F(2,84) = .843$, $p = .434$ with small effect size, $\eta^2 = .02$ (2%). The result told us that the tests results were not significantly differed in corrective feedbacks. However, if we look at the descriptive statistics, the group which received metalinguistic clues feedback tend to perform better than the explicit correction in the post-test, although the difference of the mean is only .40. If we take closer look at the pre-test score as well, it is shown that basically explicit correction group perform better than the metalinguistic clues, so the difference of the means for post-test score is obvious from the beginning. However, the difference between the means in pre-test and post-test scores show that explicit correction performs better than the others because it has a higher improvement in scores compared to the others (it can be seen by subtracting the pre-test and post-test scores from each group).

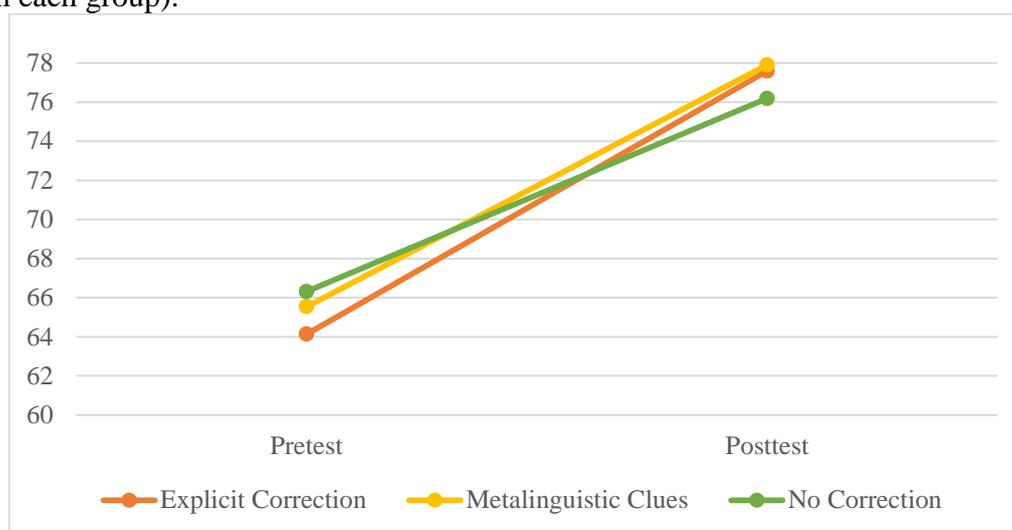


Figure 2: Student performance in both test based on feedback given

4.2. Discussion

As mentioned at the beginning of the paper, this paper's aim is to compare the effect of explicit correction and metalinguistic clues on L2 students writing task because there are debates related to corrective feedbacks given to the students. Some studies have shown that explicit correction has a positive effect in improving students' writing ability (e.g., Ellis et al., 2008; Krashen, 1981; Erel & Bulut, 2007; Lu, 2010), on the other hand, our study argues against the results of the previous studies.

Improvement in Post-test

The first research question addresses the idea of improvement in students' post-test score. As Dimitrov and Rumrill, Jr. (2003, p.159) state the purpose of pretest-posttest designs are comparing groups and/or measuring change resulting from experimental treatments, the change of scores of pretest and posttest indicates the effectiveness of the experimental treatments, in our case, the corrective feedback. From the result of the descriptive statistics above, it can be concluded that the three groups tend to have a higher score in post-test than pre-test regardless what kind of treatment was given to them.

Above all, the post-test scores did show improvement in experimental and control groups. The improvement in post-test score could be caused by the awareness of their grammatical errors after receiving pre-test result and they already had basic knowledge of English grammar which helped them identifying the errors.

Effectiveness of Corrective Feedback

The result of this study revealed that the corrective feedbacks given to the students was slightly effective to improve students' writing ability because they tend to perform better in the post-test even without any treatment. The result of the study argued against some previous studies such as Bitchener and Knoch (2010) and Ellis et al. (2008) in which it was shown that there was positive effect of explicit correction to the students' improvement in writing scores. Moreover, metalinguistic clues tend to have small positive effect on the students' score especially in writing. Schmidt (1992) and Krashen (1981) believe that metalinguistic clues is only good in short-term because the students are aware of their grammatical mistakes errors but they have little understanding about its concept so they will easily forget it over time. Our results support the argument of Truscott (1996) which argues that grammar correction is not effective to teach writing skills.

There might be some reasons for the result of this study which shows ineffective treatment of correction feedbacks, one of them may be caused by the students' familiarity with the writing topic and the students' awareness of their grammatical errors since they are intermediate level learners so that they already have knowledge about basic English grammar. Another reason might be because of the limited number of participants. In our study, each group only consisted of 22 students which may be regarded as insufficient. The bigger the sample, the higher the validity of quantitative research will be. Besides, previous studies assessed the writing scores several times (not only pre-test and the post-test) while our study only tested the participants twice. In addition to that, we also assume that the use of auto-correction tool in a word procession software that the students utilized during the pre and post test might affect the result. Thus, the reasons of a different result compared to previous studies are answered.

Explicit Correction Vs Metalinguistic Clues

As mentioned above, there are many previous studies resulted in the positive effect of explicit correction compared to metalinguistic clues. This study, however, shows that there is no positive effect of corrective feedbacks on the writing scores because all the participants tend to perform better in the post-test. However, by looking at the descriptive statistics, we can see that they perform better after receiving explicit corrective feedbacks rather than metalinguistic clues. It is in line with previous studies conducted by Bitchener & Knoch (2010), Ellis (2008), Shintani & Ellis (2013) which resulted in better performance after receiving explicit feedback.

The fact is the explicit correction is more effective than metalinguistic clues based on the descriptive statistics results because all the groups perform equally better in post-test even without any feedback given.

5. Conclusion

As stated in the introduction of this study, this paper aims at answering the question of which corrective feedback has a stronger positive effect on students' writing performance. Some previous studies such as Sameera et al. (2016), Richard and Schmidt (2013), and Van Beuningen et al. (2012) resulted in error correction is an effective way to use in L2 classrooms. However, the results of our study argue that the corrective feedbacks are ineffective because all the participants tend to get higher score even without receiving any feedback from the teacher. The results support Truscott's (1996) opinion that corrective feedback is a harmful way to teach writing skill.

However, if we compare the effectiveness between EC group and MC group, we could still figure out the difference, as shown in the descriptive statistics showing that explicit correction is more effective compared to metalinguistic but the fact is the participants tend to do better even without any correction and this makes the explicit correction abandoned.

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