DIFFERENTIAL EFFECTS OF CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK ON THE ESL LEARNERS' ACCURACY OF LINGUISTIC FORMS

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ABSTRACT

This mixed-method study investigated the extent of focused and unfocused indirect corrective feedback efficacy in improving learners' linguistic accuracy in written work over a period of time. The quantitative inquiry that involved two treatment groups ($n = 30$ for focused indirect corrections and $n = 30$ for unfocused indirect corrections) and a control group ($n = 30$), compared the differential effects of focused indirect with the unfocused indirect corrective feedback on the uptake and retention of the accurate use of subject-verb agreement, prepositions and articles as measured from the pretest, immediate and delayed posttests. The participants in the treatment groups were required to complete two writing tasks of which they received either focused or unfocused corrective feedback, and were required to complete two sessions of collaborative dialogue for the purpose of revising the written work based on the corrective feedback provided. The qualitative inquiry attempted to identify factors relating to the Language-Related Episodes (LREs) that influenced uptake and retention of the corrective feedback on subject-verb agreement, prepositions and articles in the learners' written work. These LREs were derived from the collaborative dialogue that the participants were required to complete for revision sessions. Selected participants were interviewed one week after the delayed posttest to further explore the factors that may have influenced corrective feedback efficacy on the uptake and retention of the targeted linguistic forms. Guided by Swain's (2005) Output Hypothesis, the LREs and interviews were analysed to identify prevailing influencing factors. The statistical findings revealed that both treatment groups outperformed the control group in the immediate and delayed posttests. However, there was no significant difference between the unfocused and focused corrective feedback groups indicating that both correction types were equally facilitative in increasing accuracy of the three targeted structures over a period of

time. The qualitative results revealed six main factors that may have greatly influenced the uptake and retention of the corrective feedback on those targeted forms, which are: learners' subsequent response to the corrective feedback; focus on ungrammatical uses; hypothesising of correct forms uses; post-response reflections; linguistic features and task-related factors. Overall, results suggest that while both focused and unfocused corrective feedback may be facilitative in improving language accuracy, based on the influencing factors identified, learners may benefit more from the unfocused corrective feedback. This implication was proposed with the condition that the feedback provided for the written work can retain learners' interest and focus towards task completion.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini dijalankan untuk menyelidik takat keberkesanan kaedah maklumbalas pembaikan tertumpu dan komprehensif ke atas hasil kerja penulisan bagi satu tempoh. Inkuiri kuantitatif yang melibatkan dua kelompok rawatan ($n = 30$ bagi maklumbalas pembaikan tertumpu dan $n = 30$ bagi maklumbalas pembaikan komprehensif) dan satu kelompok kawalan juga membandingkan bezaan kesan oleh dua jenis kaedah maklumbalas pembaikan tersebut ke atas ambilan dan pengekalan penggunaan kata kerja tertakluk, preposisi dan artikel yang tepat. Pembandingan ini dilakukan dengan mengukur min skor yang didapati dari praujian, pascaujian terdekat dan pascaujian tertangguh. Peserta kelompok rawatan dikehendaki menyempurnakan dua tugasan penulisan yang kemudiannya diberi samaada maklumbalas pembaikan tertumpu atau maklumbalas pembaikan komprehensif. Mereka juga dijehendaki melalui dua sesi dialog kolaboratif untuk tujuan penyemakan dan pembetulan penulisan berdasarkan maklumbalas pembaikan yang diterima. Inkuiri kualitatif pula adalah untuk mengenalpasti faktor-faktor berkaitan dengan *Language-Related Episodes (LREs)* yang mempengaruhi ambilan dan pengekalan maklumbalas pembaikan yang diberi ke atas kata kerja tertakluk, preposisi dan artikel yang disebut. Analisa *LREs* dan temu bual dengan peserta yang terpilih dibuat untuk mengenalpasti faktor-faktor tersebut dengan berpandukan *Output Hypothesis* oleh Swain (2005). Dapatan statistik menunjukkan kedua-dua kelompok rawatan mengatasi kelompok kawalan dalam pascaujian terdekat dan juga dalam pascaujian tertangguh. Walaubagaimanapun, tiada perbezaan signifikan diantara kelompok maklumbalas pembaikan tertumpu dan kelompok maklumbalas pembaikan komprehensif. Ini bermakna tahap keberkesanan kedua-dua jenis maklumbalas pembaikan adalah sama dalam membantu peserta meningkat penggunaan yang tepat bagi tiga fokus tatabahasa yang disebut untuk sesuatu tempoh jangka masa. Hasil kajian kualitatif mengenalpasti enam faktor utama

yang mempengaruhi ambilan dan pengekalan penggunaan tepat tiga fokus tatabahasa yang disebut. Pertama, respons pelajar terhadap maklumbalas pembaikan; kedua, fokus kepada penggunaan tatabahasa yang tidak tepat; ketiga, hipotesis penggunaan tatabahasa yang betul; keempat, pengamatan pasca-respons; kelima, ciri-ciri tatabahasa; dan keenam, faktor berkaitan tugasan. Secara keseluruhannya, walaupun keberkesanan kedua-dua maklumbalas pembaikan adalah sama, berdasarkan faktor-faktor yang dikenalpasti dari inkuiri kualitatif, keputusan kajian menyarankan pelajar boleh mendapat manfaat yang lebih dari maklumbalas komprehensif. Saranan ini diutarakan dengan syarat maklumbalas mestilah diberi untuk jenis penulisan yang boleh mengekalkan minat dan tumpuan pelajar dalam menyempurnakan tugasan.

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ESL	English as a second language
L1	First language/ Native language
L2	Second language
SLA	Second language acquisition
CF	Corrective feedback
WCF	Written corrective feedback
FCF	Focused corrective feedback – Feedback provided for one error type or category
UFCF	Unfocused corrective feedback – Comprehensive feedback provided for all errors or a wider range of error category
Indirect CF	Corrective feedback that informs the learners that errors have been committed by indicating with symbols or underlining the error. However, the correct form is not provided
Direct CF	Corrective feedback that informs the learners of the errors as well as the correct forms
Language-Related Episodes (LREs)	Segments in the pair talk during which learners focused explicitly on language items
Uptake	A process of which learners take up or use the accurate form of the targetted linguistic forms as provided through the corrective feedback
Retention	A process of which learners managed to retain the accurate use of the targetted linguistic forms as provided through the corrective feedback over a period of time
Collaborative Dialogue	The activity of which learners deliberate collaboratively over the CF that they received during the pair talk

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

Providing feedback to learners' written work has always been an arduous task and it can be an even more challenging endeavour to realize that the feedback given does not have much effect on the learners' language development. This is a common enough situation especially in second language writing and on the teachers' part, the energy and time spent on trying to provide feedback to the students, in particularly on grammar errors, do not seem to benefit the learners and this predicament is shared by some of the educators and researchers in this field (Ferris, 1999; 2004; Lee, 2009; 2013). A very tempting notion put forward by Truscott (1996) in his case against grammar correction can be a great welcome in approaching this whole issue. Based on his extensively researched argument, he believes that teachers should abandon grammar correction because not only that it does not help learners, but it may also be detrimental on the learners' second language acquisition. However appealing Truscott's view may be, other researchers profess that there should be more room for corrective feedback to effectively function in helping learners' language development (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 2004; 2010; Van Beuningen, De Jong & Kuiken, 2012; among others). Ferris (2004) believes that finding ways to identifying effective feedback is of importance in the effort to keep on searching for the most appropriate feedback types. This inspires the quest for the attempt to prove that feedback does have positive influence on linguistic accuracy and more importantly to identify what type of feedback is most effective for classroom use.

The research reported in this dissertation is carried out to investigate the efficacy of two feedback types in enhancing the accurate use of subject-verb agreement, prepositions and articles in written work. Qualitative interview is employed to

determine aspects of these corrective feedback types in influencing uptake and retention of the accurate use of the targeted linguistic forms by second language learners. Fundamentally, this study is motivated by the needs of the learners of effective feedback that can actually help them improve linguistic accuracy regardless of the pedagogical approaches, be they communicative or problem-based, any higher institutions decide to apply in the process of teaching and learning a second language. What lies firmly within is the fact that for any written tasks learners complete, feedback is still the core of the process (Ferris, 2004; Hyland & Hyland, 2006c). Although the role of feedback is incessantly debated these last decades, scholars in this field have pointed out that there is still room for further studies and the types of feedback as well as the types of learners are the factors that influence effectiveness of improving language accuracy in written work (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 2004; 2010; Van Beuningen, De Jong & Kuiken, 2012; among others).

1.1 Background of the Study

The attempt to improve students' language accuracy in writing tasks relates to the effort of teachers in providing corrective feedback (CF) for the written work. It is always discouraging to find out that certain efforts made do not really make much difference on improving students' performance regardless of the numerous feedbacks provided for each writing piece (Ferris, 1999; Lee, 2009; Truscott, 1996). Researchers like Truscott (1996, 2007) has even put forward the notion that not just corrective feedback is an ineffective way to help learners improve their language accuracy, but it can also pose harmful effects on the learning process. To date, many researchers have tried to negate his claim by providing empirical evidence on the benefits of corrective feedback on the learners' language development. Nevertheless, studies carried out vary in results as to whether the claims can be contrary to or in agreement with that of Truscott's. (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008a; 2009b; 2010; Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005; Ellis,

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Sheen, Murakami & Takashima, 2008; Ferris, 2006; Sheen, Wright & Moldawa, 2009; Van Beuningen, De Jong & Kuiken, 2012).

The question of whether feedback can help learners improve accuracy may relate to the types of feedback employed to tackle certain linguistic features. It may also relate to the approach integrated with certain feedback type in providing corrections to the learners. Hyland & Hyland (2006c) mention about delivering feedback in a variety of "mode" to ensure effectiveness and that these approaches should provide opportunities for learners to interact and revise their work more clearly based on the written corrections given to them. This calls for teachers to be more resourceful in dealing with these feedback issues. Claimed to be the most commonly used corrective feedback in language classrooms, comprehensive or unfocused corrective feedback tackles a wide range of language features in students' written work (Ellis, 2009; Lee, 2008a). On the other hand, there are also studies that demonstrate effectiveness of selective or focused corrective feedback, since learners only need to focus their attention to a limited number or just one type of language feature (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008a; 2009a; 2010). There are also studies involving peer feedback (Lim & Jacobs, 2001; Sato & Lyster, 2012) and other modes such computer-mediated feedback (Burstein, 2003; Liu & Sadler, 2003; Stapleton & Radia, 2009; Warschauer, 2002) have demonstrated that these approaches to providing feedback can be some of the resources that teachers can make use of in providing effective feedback.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Hyland & Hyland (2006c) claims that corrective feedback provided for the learners' written work is an important source for language development due "its potential for learning and for student motivation" (Hyland & Hyland, 2006c, p. 83). Thus, as cited by Peterson & McClay (2010), it is the belief of most teachers that corrective feedback is imperative so that students will know what is wrong and what is right with their work.

However, the extent to which feedback plays a role in improving or hampering students' linguistic accuracy is still unresolved. Generally, teachers will try to provide as much feedback as possible to students thinking that the more feedback given, the more students will improve in the next writing assignment. The question is, how true is this assumption when it comes to correcting linguistic errors in students writing? Findings from various studies suggest that it may be the type of feedback used that influences effectiveness in increasing linguistic accuracy in students' writing (Bitchener, 2012; Ellis, 2009; Ferris, 2004). Determining the type of corrective feedback that is effective in helping the learners to enhance second language acquisition is essential. Thus, it is the primary aim of the present study to be able to provide some insights on this matter that may afford some guidelines on selecting effective corrective feedback. To further elaborate on the significance of the study, the next section on research gap will describe the importance and the substance this research may contribute to the issues of corrective feedback.

1.3 Research Gap

Unfocused feedback is an error correction that tackles all or a wide range of linguistic error categories in a written assignment. On the other hand, focused feedback is provided for only one or a few error categories in students' written work. Generally, unfocused corrective feedback is the most practised approach in providing error corrections for students' written work. Studies carried out by Lee (2008a; 2009) point out that teachers are usually expected to provide feedback for all or a range of grammatical features, apart from other components in students writing including mechanics, content and vocabulary. However, recent findings indicate that focused feedback can be effective in helping students improve selected linguistic accuracy (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008a; 2010; Sheen et al., 2009). Nevertheless, the number of studies to compare the extent of influence these two types of feedback

have on improving linguistic accuracy has been limited and these studies have produced different findings (Sheen et al., 2009; Elis et al., 2008).

Since unfocused feedback is what is commonly expected in error correction, as mentioned by Lee (2008a; 2008b; 2009) in her studies on teachers' feedback practices in classrooms and students' expectations of corrective feedback, it is helpful if ways can be found to ensure effectiveness of this approach as compared to focused feedback. Ellis (2009) also asserts that there is a need to compare the extent of the effectiveness between focused and unfocused CF. However, the varied findings from these studies suggest that it is still not substantial to make an affirmative claim as to the extent of the effectiveness of the two types of CF. Furthermore, Ellis et al. and Sheen et al.'s studies employ direct feedback to provide error corrections for both focused and unfocused feedback. In an attempt to further develop a more sound assumption on this issue, the present study will investigate the use of the indirect focused corrective feedback and indirect unfocused corrective feedback in enhancing the accurate use of linguistic forms by ESL learners in writing tasks over a period of 12 weeks.

Direct feedback which is a form of correction where teachers provide learners with the correct form does not leave much space for the learners to extensively reflect on the errors committed, as Ferris and Roberts (2001) suggest, this type of feedback is more suitable for low proficiency learners. Indirect corrective feedback as used in the present study, on the other hand, will provide learners opportunity to engage in a more reflective processing of the feedback given, thus the possibility of contributing to long-term learning (Ellis, 2009; Ferris, 2006). The greater opportunity for the learners to reflect and process, the more extensive their engagement will be, in trying to correct the errors that they commit. Since Storch & Wigglesworth (2010) have proven that the extent of engagement in language-related episodes (LREs) influences the uptake and retention of CF by the learners, both types of CF will be treated by providing written

feedback and engagement in LREs where learners discuss with their peers on the indirect feedback provided for their writing tasks. To better clarify some of the operationalised terminology used in this study, definitions are provided in the next section.

1.4 Definition and Terminology

The study operationalised feedback types as focused indirect and unfocused indirect corrections of which negative evidence is provided to learners to facilitate noticing of errors, acquiring the correct form, thus eventually increasing linguistic accuracy. Ellis's (2009) and Bitchener & Ferris' (2012) typology of corrective feedback is mainly used as the ground to define this nomenclature. Additionally, the qualitative domain of this research focuses' on the factors that influence uptake and retention of linguistic accuracy resulting from these two feedback types by ESL learners in written work. This section will describe the key terms used in the study by explaining the focused and unfocused corrective feedback, as well as the explanation on the indirect feedback as used in the context of the present study.

1.4.1 Focused Corrective Feedback

Focused CF can be categorised as an intensive type of correction. Highly selective focused CF concentrates correction on only one error type. Ellis et al. (2008) for example, focuses on articles as one error type in their study. Less intensive focused CF may tackle more than one error type, but still limiting concentration to linguistic features. One such study is by Bitchener et al. (2005) where the focus is on three linguistic features which are prepositions, past simple tense and definite articles. The following example illustrates this corrective feedback type:

SVA   P
The graph illustrate the number of students that satisfy with service offer in the clinic.
Note: SVA = Subject-verb Agreement, P = Prepositions

Feedback using a form of a coding system given in the example is focused on only subject-verb agreement and prepositions. Although there are other errors in the sentence, they are not purposely highlighted to the learners. Since this type of CF is concentrated and thorough, Ellis (2009) points out that learners may be able to process the feedback provided reflectively, thus enabling them to notice the errors committed in their written work. However, studies like Van Beuningen et al. (2012) and Ferris (2006) have also proven that unfocused corrective feedback can help learners improve their linguistic accuracy in written work.

1.4.2 Unfocused Corrective Feedback

While focused CF is selective, unfocused feedback tries to tackle a broader range or all of error categories. In other words, unfocused feedback is extensive and comprehensive where learners will get corrections on many aspects of writing tasks, usually on content, grammar, word choice and mechanics. Providing unfocused CF for learners' written work is the common practice in most ESL classrooms (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ferris, 2006; Lee 2008a; 2009; 2013). The use of coding system is selected as being more practical in this case due to a broader range of error categories to be addressed. The following example shows how unfocused CF is provided for written work:

SVA   ∧ VF   A   VF   P   SP
The graph show the number of students that satisfy with service offer in the clinnic.
Note: SVA = Subject-verb Agreement, ∧ = missing word, VF = Verb Form,
P = Prepositions, SP = Spelling Error

The coding system used to indicate errors in the sentence above covers a wide range of linguistic errors. In the example, all types of errors committed are addressed. Since learners are expected to attend to various error types, Ellis (2009) states that they may not be able to acquire specific linguistic form. However, he mentions that unfocused feedback may have a long term effect where it can help students' language acquisition better. The Storch & Wigglesworth (2010) study demonstrated the more extensive the engagement of learners in the LREs is, the greater uptake and retention are achieved. Assuming that retention would eventually lead to acquisition, to provide space for extensive LREs engagement, indirect feedback is chosen for both focused and unfocused CF types in the present study.

1.4.3 Indirect Corrective Feedback

Bitchener & Ferris (2012) describe indirect feedback as corrections that only indicate the occurrence of error but do not explicitly provide the correct forms of the errors. Learners will be directed where the errors are by underlining or circling the parts. Another sub-type of this indirect feedback is the indication given in the margin of where the errors have been made. This type of feedback only indicates that an error is committed but the learner is not directed specifically to the location of the error in the written work. For both types, however, the correct form of the error is not provided in the feedback. The present study employs the former by underlining the erroneous parts to direct the learners to the errors and indicating the type of errors using the coding system. Lalande (1982) claims that indirect feedback provides opportunities for learners to be engaged in "guided learning and problem solving". This is in line with the framework grounding the present study where engagement in LREs steers learners to be more reflective in responding to the written feedback provided,

thus leading to a more effective second language acquisition. The key here is to enable learning, in a long run, where one of the primary concerns of providing feedback is to ensure uptake and retention of linguistic forms accuracy in subsequent written work.

1.5 Research Questions and Hypotheses

The purpose of this study is to compare the efficacy of two feedback types on students' written work. It is designed by integrating engagement of learners in LREs of which the feedback types are operationalised as unfocused indirect and focused indirect feedback targeting three linguistic features: subject-verb agreement, prepositions and articles. The study's aims comprise three premises of which it is assumed that corrective feedback provided for the learners' written work will facilitate in the increase of accuracy of these linguistic forms. Secondly, it is hypothesized that these two types of feedback significantly differ in the extent of their influence on the accurate use of these forms. Finally, through analyses of the LREs and interviews, the study also examines the factors that affect the uptake and retention of the accurate use of the targeted linguistic forms resulting from both focused and unfocused feedback. Primarily, this mixed-method study attempts to address the following research questions:

1.5.1 To what extent does the indirect focused corrective feedback (FCF) influence the accurate use of subject-verb agreement (SVA), prepositions and articles in written work over a period of time?

1.5.2 To what extent does the indirect unfocused corrective feedback (UFCF) influence the accurate use of subject-verb agreement (SVA), prepositions and articles in written work over a period of time?

1.5.3 Is there any significant difference in the effect of indirect focused corrective feedback (FCF) and indirect unfocused corrective feedback (UFCF) on the

accurate use of subject-verb agreement (SVA), prepositions and articles in written?

1.5.4 What are the factors related to the Language-Related Episodes (LREs) that influence the uptake and retention in the accurate use of the targeted linguistic forms resulting from indirect focused and indirect unfocused corrective feedback?

The quasi-experimental component of this study comprises two premises. First, the comparison made between the groups that receive indirect FCF, indirect UFCF and the group that does not receive any feedback is to determine the extent of influence corrective feedback has on the extent of accurate use of the targeted linguistic forms. The assumption of this inquiry is that corrective feedback facilitates learners to increase accuracy of linguistic forms in written work. Secondly, another comparison is made between learners that receive indirect FCF and indirect UFCF to investigate if learners provided with indirect UFCF are significantly better in improving the accuracy of linguistics forms in written work over time. This is considering the fact that these learners are engaged in the LREs where the extent of engagement is a factor that leads to greater uptake and retention of the linguistic forms being discussed as proven by Storch and Wigglesworth (2010) in their study. This assumption is grounded on the conceptual framework of Swain's output hypothesis of which learners have the opportunity to notice, test the hypothesis and internalize metalinguistic knowledge into their interlanguage system from the written feedback provided as well as from the engagement in the LREs. Furthermore, the use of indirect feedback in the design of this study supports this framework by providing opportunities for learners to be involved in "guided-learning and problem-solving" processes which eventually lead to greater uptake, retention and long-term acquisition (Ferris, 2006; Lalande, 1982; Storch &