

Consciousness-raising Error Treatment Strategy in L2 Writing: Second Coded Corrective Feedback and Purposeful Application of Corrected Forms

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Abstract: The present study was based on consciousness-raising error treatment strategy in L2 writing. More specifically, it investigated the second coded corrective feedback and purposeful application of corrected forms. To this end, the effects of providing three different kinds of feedback on 30 advanced EFL students' writing performance of 30 advanced were investigated in the context of Iran. Apart from investigating the effectiveness of three corrective techniques; direct feedback, error feedback and second code feedback, the purposeful application of corrected forms in the following writing papers was investigated as well. To do this, the participants were divided into three experimental groups, each group 10 students, in which the focus of instruction and feedback was on three main writing features of agreement, tense, and sentence structure. The study lasted 8 weeks in the course of which the participant had to write on IELTS task 2 topics. Their writing papers were all corrected by the instructor providing three modes of feedback. Regarding the first research question addressing the efficacy of the issue, the results of descriptive statistics of analyzing the mistakes made in post-test revealed effectiveness of feedback treatment, especially second corrective feedback. Considering purposeful application of correct versions, the one-way ANOVA indicated greater success in writing achievement for the third group participants who were asked to apply correct forms in their prospective compositions. In the end of the study, it was concluded that error feedback is of great help in improving writing performance of Iranian EFL learners and that second corrective feedback, compared with direct feedback and error feedback, seems to be a better and more efficient strategy.

Key Words: Agreement, Direct corrective feedback, Error feedback, Second coded feedback, Writing features

1. Introduction

One of the areas which has received considerable amount of research in both first and second language context is writing. There are many papers on different aspects of writing in almost any issue of applied linguistics or educational journals. While writing, writers bring and make use of various sources of information. They resort to knowledge of the process of writing and the strategies in composing. They also pay attention to the subject matter and determine the way it can be ordered and structured for presentation (Bereiter&Scardamalia 1987; Faigley& Witte 1981; Flower & Hayes 1981; Hayes 1996). Moreover, knowledge of the product of writing, of the formal structure of language and of discourse structure and the construction of texts are brought to the task by writers (Connor & Johns 1990; De Beaugrande 1980, 1984). In addition, they must know the situation of writing and its social and professional context. They should bring their experience of the expectations of the reader and be familiar with the forms, social context, genres, and expectations of readers' back-

ground culture (Bruffee, 1986; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Fairclough, 2001; Ivanic & Camps 2001; Johns 1997).

Since the 1970s, this multiplicity of perspectives in writing has been reflected as research in the area of teaching this skill. Raimes (1991) summarized four main approaches in the teaching of writing at different times. These approaches have concerned with a focus on form, on content, on the writer, and on the reader. Later on, approaches that have focused on more social issues like genres and critical approaches to writing pedagogy have been added to the literature by the survey of Raimes (1998). One of the major areas that has caused the growth of teaching writing over the past 20 years is English for Academic Purposes. The number of people applying to higher education from countries without strong background in English has been sharply increased and this has called for more specialized support (Björk, Bräuer, Rienecker, & Jørgensen 2003; Jordan, 1997).

Perhaps the most common ways to assess students' writing are the assessments of the quality of the text as a product. This is done by using a number of holistic and/or multiple trait scales. Such scales are often linked with and easily applied to the situations in which large numbers of students are to be assessed at the same time.

One of the most common forms of assessment especially for shorter pieces of writing is holistic assessment which became popular in the mid-1970s. In this type of assessment, the rater or raters quickly read the text and give an impressionistic score on the basis of guidelines. This holistic mark can be a fair reflection of the writer's performance if the text is consistent regarding writer's proficiency in language use, skills in producing text, and knowledge of the genres. But the writing of second language learners frequently show substantial differences of proficiency in different aspects of writing making holistic marking in these cases difficult and questionable. The problems are due to both the adequacy of the scheme to show the writers efforts (Connor-Linton, 1995, Hamp-Lyons, 1995;) and rater reliability (Vaughan 1991).

Hamp-Lyons (1995) suggested that a multiple trait scheme is more beneficial than holistic marking. In the multiple trait method, a number of different aspects or traits are scored in students' writing. This type of assessment highlights differences in proficiency in a student's writing instead of covering them. According to her, multiple trait scheme has greater reliability than holistic approaches. They give the student and the teacher more diagnostic information. They show prominent features of the text and they are more valid than holistic methods (Hamp-Lyons, 1991). Multiple trait scoring seems attractive since it specifies that student writing in second language often shows different and changeable levels of proficiency in different areas. But regarding this approach as limiting writing to a set of separate skill areas that can be quantified and assessed discretely from one another may be dangerous. Traits should not be seen as discrete or separable features of a text. In fact, they are inter-related and inter-woven. Analyzing these traits gives one different perspectives on the piece of writing. An important question is whether the perspectives chosen in a particular scheme are really different enough from one another to warrant being scored separately. In view of this, the present study is an investigation of consciousness-raising error treatment through purposefully second coded corrective feedback.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does the application of three writing corrective feedback techniques (direct, error, and second corrective feedbacks) affect Iranian ESL written skills?
2. To what extent does the purposeful application of corrected forms influence Iranian ESL writing achievement?

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1 Theoretical background

In order to provide the kind of individualized attention that is otherwise seldom possible under normal classroom conditions, teachers can give feedback to students. This feedback can be in the form of error correction, written commentary, and teacher-student tasks (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

Corrective Feedback

An important practice in second language classrooms is corrective feedback. It refers to the responses a teacher provides when a learner produces non target like L2 utterances in L2 acquisition. Recasts and elicitations are two major types of interactional feedback. They have been regarded as pedagogically effective strategies in communicative language classrooms (Doughty, 2001, 2003; Doughty & Varela, 1998; Gass, 2003). Recasts, according to Nicholas, Lightbown, & Spada, (2001), refer to the kind of feedback that reformulates a student's non-target like utterance into a target like one. They were considered indirect. As Long, Inagaki, & Ortega (1998) stated when a participant in the communication reformulates a learner's error, this reformulation may draw the learner's attention to the target form. It shows the learner that his or her utterance is wrong in some way. Recasts may give L2 learners the opportunities for the output that has been modified. This modified output has been suggested to be extremely important for L2 development (Doughty, 2001; Swain, 1995; Nassaji, 2009). On the other hand, elicitations are the kind of feedback that does not reformulate the learner's wrong utterance correctly and make the learner to formulate it again (Loewen & Philp, 2006; Lyster, 2004; Nassaji, 2007). According to Lyster (2004) and Lyster & Ranta (1997), some elicitation strategies include self-repair, encouraging and providing learners with opportunities to test their hypotheses about the target language and revise them. Elicitations also give learners the opportunities to negotiate the form. This can be achieved through different forms of requesting for clarification and correction (Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Lyster, 1998).

A different classification for corrective feedback has been suggested by Rod Ellis and Sheen (2008). It includes focused and unfocused CF. Focused CF refers to the normal practice in writing classrooms (although it not necessarily what L2 writing researchers advocate); teachers read and correct all or some of learners' errors. This type of corrective feedback can be considered as 'extensive' because it deals with many errors. On the other hand, focused CF chooses specific errors to be corrected and ignores other errors. Less focused CF will correct more than one error type but will still limit correction to a restricted number of types which are selected in advance (e.g. articles; simple past tense; prepositions). Here are theoretical reasons for regarding focused CF as more effective than unfocused CF. It is more likely that learners pay much more attention to corrections directed at one (or a limited number of) error type(s). This helps learners to develop a clearer understanding of the nature of the error and the correction required. Since attention and understanding, as cognitive theories of L2 acquisition have maintained (e.g. Schmidt, 1994; Ellis, 2005), are necessary for acquisition, focused CF produce better and more positive results.

2.2 Related Studies

During the past two decades, many research studies have been carried out to evaluate the results of different types of FC in different areas of pedagogy. In 1996, Truscott claimed that written corrective feedback on ESL student writing was not effective and should be avoided because it can have harmful consequences. He declared that there was empirical evidence (for example: Semke, 1984; Robb, Ross, and Shortreed, 1986; Kepner 1991) to reflect that the practice was not worth continuing. Ferris (1999) responded Truscott and stated the research base he was using was too limited and had conflicting findings and restraint should be exercised while further investigations were done. And that the range of studies that had tried to address the question of efficacy and the quality of the research designs were limited. Because most studies that have been carried out until recently had some problems regarding their design, execution, and analysis, (see Guenette, 2007; Bitchener, 2008 for a review of these issues) solid conclusions about the efficacy of written corrective feedback are not yet available.

Bitchener (2008) summarized the research conducted in this area by different scholars and reported the relative results of each. He also argued about the flaws of each. Among these investigators, Fathman and Whalley (1990) have concluded that WFC was effective. But the result gained by Kepner (1991) was the opposite. Polio and his colleagues (1998) also reached the same result as Kepner.

On the other hand, the studies of Ashwell (2000) and Ferris and Roberts (2001) showed that WFC was so effective. Different forms of WFC have also been compared in some research studies. Among them we can state Lalande (1982), Fer-

ris (1995), Ferris (1997), Ferris et al. (2000) and Chandler (2000). Almost all of them found it effective in pedagogy.

Bitchener and Knoch (2008) investigated the value of a focused approach to written corrective feedback. They found it was so effective and that those who received this kind of feedback on the two functions outperformed the control group on all four post-tests. Sheen (2007) conducted a study with the same title as the current study. The results showed that written CF targeting one linguistic feature improved learners' accuracy. This occurred especially when metalinguistic feedback was given and the learners had high language analytic ability.

3. Methodology

The present study explored the effects of three different kinds of feedback on Iranian foreign language Learners' writing ability. More specifically, it aimed to investigate the effectiveness of three different kinds of feedback; namely, direct corrective feedback, error code corrective feedback and second code corrective feedback in order to measure accurate application of three grammatical features of agreement, sentence structure and tense. In this section four parts will be depicted which are carried out under researchers' investigations. To start with participants, their personal characteristics are discussed, and then information about procedures, design, and data analysis are considered respectively and separately.

3.1 Participants

A total number of 30 male and female IELTS candidates, enrolled and being prepared for IELTS exam at Niyayesh Language Institute in Shiraz were selected. They were randomly divided into three groups. Each group was randomly assigned into a different treatment type with regard to the given feedback. They were all native speakers of Persian aged between 18 to 35. They were mostly upper-intermediate English learners already familiar with writing skill who aimed at taking IELTS examination in a period of two months. In order to provide evidence for the effectiveness of using the direct feedback strategy, error code correction feedback and second code correction feedback, the participants fell into three treatment categories each receiving a specific type of the mentioned feedbacks.

3.2 Instruments

In order to carry out this research, the researchers gave a pre-test and a post-test. To this end, two standard IELTS task 2 topics were applied among upper-intermediate English IELTS candidates aimed to reach advanced level of proficiency in writing attending the course. The researchers investigated the three aforementioned features of advanced writing on both pre and post-tests taken by candidates and scored them. Both tests were taken within the standard time of 40 minutes.

3.3 Procedure

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of three types of feedback on the advanced Iranian EFL learners writing ability. Accordingly, three categories were used, each of which was exposed to one specific sort of feedback strategy. Below, a thorough explanation of the way participants were chosen and how the study was conducted is given. At the first stage of this research, an IELTS homogeneity test was taken to see whether they were qualified enough to attend IELTS preparation course and to homogenize the participants regarding their proficiency in writing. Those who ranked above 4.5 overall band score with regard to IELTS writing scoring system were allowed to take part in the course. Then, they were categorized into three groups from each 10 students ranking within 5 to 6 overall band score were chosen for the purpose of this study. In each group, those with IELTS band score of 5-6 took an IELTS task 2 pre-test in a 40 minute time limitation and they were scored afterwards according to accurate implementation of tense, agreement and sentence structure which are all fundamental aspects to IELTS essay writing. After pretests, during the semester, learners in all three experimental groups received different types of error feedback treatment but the same writing instructions, especially various choices of writing sentence structures so as to follow the same techniques to apply correct tense and agreement. The study lasted 8 weeks in the course of which the participants had to write IELTS task 2 essays on the topics assigned by the instructor. A post-test on the same task with a different topic was taken from the participants and consequently scored by the researchers according to same criteria implemented on the pre-test. It is worth mentioning that all the three treatment groups enjoyed the same instructor and no participant attrition was observed during the process of research.

As mentioned, the participants were randomly assigned into three treatment groups and each group received a different treatment through different kinds of corrective feedback. The first treatment group received direct corrective feedback only on the draft of their first essay. To elaborate more on the direct feedback strategy, the treatment to this group, one can say providing feedback by writing the correct version of the errors on the first draft. The second treatment group underwent another type of feedback strategy. They were asked to write an essay in class and submit their essays to the teacher to be checked and corrected in the form of error code corrective feedback. The instructor corrected their IELTS task 2 essays according to the feedback type specified for the group and gave them back to participants for the second draft writing. Here, instead of providing participants with the exact correct form of errors, the instructor indicated the wrong implementation of sentence structure, agreement and tense by using a set of symbols. The writings were returned to the students to review the coded corrective feedbacks, find out and correct the errors. The same procedure was followed for the third experimental group in addition to the second draft which the students were supposed to write after analyzing the symbols of corrective feedback given by the instructor. They submitted their second draft writings to the instructor to be checked for the remaining errors. They were asked to apply the corrected version of errors in their following writings purposefully. This type of feedback strategy is called second type corrective feedback.

4. Result

In order to answer the first research question, the descriptive statistics of the participants' three major grammatical writing features: agreement, tense, and sentence structure in post-test were calculated and the mean differences of students' gain scores were compared through Post Hoc analysis respectively. In response to the second research question, the descriptive statistics of the participants' gain scores of the three groups in post-test were calculated and the mean differences of students' gain scores were compared through Post Hoc analysis.

Since the main focus of this study was to reveal how Iranian EFL students noticed three major writing problems through the application of three writing correction feedbacks, two research questions were raised in the introduction section to investigate the role of direct corrective feedback, error code corrective feedback and second code corrective feedback on the learners' awareness of three writing features. The results of all research questions are presented and discussed in this section. The first research question aimed to investigate the application of three writing corrective feedback techniques (direct, error, and second corrective feedbacks) on Iranian ESL written skills. Among several writing features, three main ones; agreement, tense, and sentence structure were explored in this study. In order to investigate the effects of three writing feedback on three major writing skills, the descriptive statistics of each category was calculated. The language areas, frequencies of students' mistakes committed in pre-and post-tests, and the significance of differences are presented in tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6

Table 1

The Frequency and Percentage of Three Major Writing Mistakes in the pre-and post-tests of the First Group

N=10	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Writing features (direct feedback)				
Agreement	28	35%	19	33%
Tense	25	32%	18	31%
Sentence structure	26	33%	21	36%
Total	79	100%	58	100%

Table 2

The Comparison of Three Kinds of Feedback Based on Agreement

Groups	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Second feedback	10	.8000	
Coded	10		1.7000
Direct	10		1.9000
Sig.		1.000	.791

Table 1 indicates the three grammatical mistakes in the pre-and post-tests of the first experimental group applying direct corrective feedback. In general, 35% of students` agreement mistakes (28 mistakes), 32% of tense mistakes (25 mistakes), and 33% of sentence structure mistakes (26 mistakes) occurred in pre-test while there were 33%, 31%, and 36% of the mistakes occurred in post-test respectively. Concerning the writing feature agreement, as the table 2 indicates, the means among three groups were meaningfully different and the mean for second coded corrective feedback (group 3) is 0.8. Since it is located in subset 1 for alpha 0.05, the application of second feedback was the most pragmatic writing corrective techniques.

Table 3

The Frequency and Percentage of Three Major Writing Mistakes in the pre-and post-tests of the Second Group

N=10	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Writing features (coded feedback)				
Agreement	26	36%	17	35%
Tense	22	30%	15	30%
Sentence structure	25	34%	17	35%
Total	73	100%	49	100%

Table 4

The Comparison of Three Kinds of Feedback Based on Tense

Groups	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Second feedback	10	.5000	
Coded	10		1.5000
Direct	10		1.8000
Sig.		1.000	.725

According to Table 3, the three grammatical mistakes of the second experimental group applying coded corrective feedback in the pre-and post-tests are 36% of agreement mistakes (26 mistakes), 30% of tense mistakes (22 mistakes), and 34% of sentence structure mistakes (25 mistakes) occurred in pre-test while there were 35%, 30%, and 35% of the mistakes occurred in post-test respectively. With regard to tense, as the table 4 illustrates the mean for second feedback is 0.5 so the use of second feedback was again the most practical writing corrective techniques.

Table 5

The Frequency and Percentage of Three Major Writing Mistakes in the Pre and Post-Tests of the Third Group

N=10	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Writing features (second feedback)				
Agreement	21	32%	8	38%
Tense	22	33%	5	24%
Sentence structure	23	35%	8	38%
Total	66	100%	21	100%

Table 6

The Comparison of Three Kinds of Feedback Based on Tense Sentence Structure

Groups	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Second feedback	10	.8000	
Coded	10		1.7000
Direct	10		2.1000
Sig.		1.000	.454

As Table (3) illustrates, the three grammatical mistakes of the third experimental group applying second coded corrective feedback in the pre-and post-tests are 32% of agreement mistakes (21 mistakes), 33% of tense mistakes (22 mistakes), and 35% of sentence structure mistakes (23 mistakes) occurred in pre-test while there were 38%, 24%, and 38% of the mistakes occurred in post-test respectively. Based on sentence structure, according to table 6, the mean for second feedback is 0.8 so the use of second feedback was again the most practical writing corrective techniques.

In general, the results of the application of three types of feedback on three major grammatical writing features were significantly different and the utilization of second corrective feedback accompanied by purposeful and prospective application of corrected forms was practically significant compared to other writing corrective techniques in this study.

The second research question aimed to investigate the effect of the purposeful application of corrected forms on

Iranian ESL writing achievement. In order to investigate the effect of this technique, the statistical analysis one way ANOVA was applied and the findings are illustrated in tables 7 and 8.

Table 7

One way ANOVA: Results of post-test scores Among Three Groups

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Score-post	Between Groups	5.017	2	2.508	9.091	.001
	Within Groups	7.450	27	.276		
	Total	12.467	29			
Agreement-post	Between Groups	6.867	2	3.433	7.357	.003
	Within Groups	12.600	27	.467		
	Total	19.467	29			
Tense-post	Between Groups	9.267	2	4.633	6.073	.007
	Within Groups	20.600	27	.763		
	Total	29.867	29			
Sentence structure-post	Between Groups	8.867	2	4.433	8.199	.002
	Within Groups	14.600	27	.541		
	Total	23.467	29			

Table 8

One way ANOVA: Results of the Means of Three Groups

Group	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Direct	10	5.7500	
coded	10	5.9500	
second feedback	10		6.7000
Sig.		.675	1.000

As can be seen in table 7, the one way ANOVA revealed that there is a significant difference between groups. In other words, the students in group 3 did significantly better than other groups since the mean of their scores were apparently different from others and the results of one way ANOVA shows that the difference is significant ($0.001 < 0.05$). According to table 8, Since the mean for second feedback technique is located in subset 2 for alpha 0.05, the application of second feedback was the most applicable writing corrective techniques.

5. Conclusion

In general, students writing in a second or foreign language produce texts containing varying degrees of grammatical and lexical errors. In fact, depending on proficiency level, the more content-rich and creative the text, the greater the possibility there is for errors at the morphosyntactic level. These kinds of errors are especially common among L2 writers who have a lot of ideas, but not enough language to express what they want to say in a comprehensible way. In this study, not only did students enjoy the process and product approach to writing, but also a significant development and change was seen in their writing skill; however, to varying degrees among different groups. The participants who received different corrective feedbacks showed different statistics in pre and post-tests which may imply that different kinds of feedback affect students'

writing success in different ways. The findings obtained in this study in general support the idea of positive role of feedback on improvement of Iranian EFL students' writing ability. However, among the three modes of giving feedback aiming at errors in writing features of structure, tense and agreement, the third mode which was received by the participants in the third category seems to be the most useful. The first research question focused on efficacy of three different corrective techniques. The quantitative analysis of the data revealed that the three experimental groups performed differently in the post-tests given to them. As the data reveal, the third group that received second corrective feedback significantly outperformed the other two experimental groups who enjoyed direct feedback and error feedback. With regard to effectiveness of direct corrective feedback, the finding of this study is contradictory with Truscott(1996) that claimed the provision of written corrective feedback on ESL student writing was not only ineffective and possibly harmful, but also it should be abandoned. It also contradicts the findings of Kepner (1991), and Polio and his colleagues (1998) regarding ineffectiveness of WFC. On the other hand, the results of the current research, are in line with claims of studies conducted by Ashwell (2000), Ferris and Roberts (2001), Lalande (1982), Ferris (1995), Ferris (1997), Ferris et al. (2000) and Chandler (2000), that were in favor of the positive impact of WFC and found it so effective.

With regard to the second research question already raised concerning purposeful utilization of corrected version of errors in students following writings and to what extent it affects their writing achievement, the one-way ANNOVA was applied. As presented above, the finding shows the greater success in writing achievement for group 3 participants since there is a purposeful application of learned correct forms subsequently.

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