

The Benefit

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The Benefit of Indirect Comprehensive Error Corrections in Improving Advanced EFL Learners' Writing Accuracy

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Abstract

A language pedagogical goal is developing pupils' language proficiency. In learning an L2, a learner develops an interlanguage not free from errors which need corrections to avoid fossilization. This experimental study explored the ways direct and indirect comprehensive corrective feedbacks affect students' ability to produce target-like writing. Twenty advanced level students participated in this study. They were divided into direct comprehensive feedback group (DCFG) and indirect comprehensive feedback group (ICFG). The DCFG received a teacher's DCF, while the ICFG received a teacher's ICF. The research results indicate that ICF has more benefit to improve advanced EFL learners' writing accuracy. Its implication is ICF should dominate the written products of higher proficient learners because self editing enhances the greater understanding of the target language accuracy.

Key words: comprehensive feedback, interlanguage, writing accuracy

Introduction

A language pedagogical goal is developing pupils' language skills. In output production in speaking and writing, learners need to process language more deeply with more mental effort. Writing a good and coherent text, even in one's native language is a demanding task because one has to simultaneously pay attention to the text's content, organization, linguistic adequacy, etc. Writing in the target language is of course more demanding. And one of the tasks of the teachers is to guide their students to become competent writers.

In learning a second or foreign language, a learner develops interlanguage through their learning experience with L2 comprehensible input (Krashen, (1981). Selinker (1972) states " A learner's interlanguage is viewed to be independent of both his L1 as well as the target language system, with its own grammar, lexicon, etc."

Learners' interlanguage errors need correction to avoid fossilization which is most probably occurs in foreign language learning. Huiying Sun (2013) states " lacking large amount of input and output, adult L2 learners rely more on explicit knowledge and corrective feedback to monitor and improve their accuracy in production." Thus, corrective feedback is needed to achieve accuracy and to avoid fossilization.

Corrective feedback is indication to the learner that his use of the target language is incorrect (Lightbown and Spada, 2006). It aims at indicating that some usage in the writing does not conform to the norms of the target language. This study is concerned with the benefit of comprehensive error correction in improving advanced EFL learners' writing.

Ellis (2009) explains that in giving direct corrective feedback the teacher provides both an indication of the errors as well as the corresponding target forms. In giving indirect corrective feedback, on the other hand, the teacher provides some indication of the errors, but it is left to the learners to derive the target forms. In focused or selective corrective feedback method, EFL teachers select type(s) of errors to correct, while

errors outside the chosen focus are left uncorrected. On the other hand, in the unfocused or comprehensive feedback method, the teachers correct all the errors.

Studies on direct, indirect, selective, comprehensive error correction have been done by applied linguistic researchers. Some previous studies are as follows. Ferris (2006) reported the more effectiveness of indirect correction in improving 86 ESL students' accuracy of newly written texts overtime, while students who received direct correction made the more accurate revision. Bitchener and Knoch (2010) reported the more effectiveness of direct correction than indirect correction.

Mirzaii and Aliabadi (2013) investigated the impact of written corrective feedback in the context of genre-based instruction on job application letters to Iranian advanced-level EFL learners. The results show that direct corrective feedback is more effective than indirect corrective feedback. Van Beuningen (2011) reported the effectiveness of comprehensive corrective feedback in promoting both grammatical and non grammatical accuracy during revision as well as in new pieces of writing.

Rustipa (2014) reported the more effectiveness of direct comprehensive feedback than indirect comprehensive feedback in improving the students' capability in composing a text. However, the difference of the effect of the direct and indirect comprehensive feedback is statistically not significant. The more effectiveness of direct comprehensive feedback than the indirect comprehensive feedback is more likely because the participants of the study are of low proficient learners who might be unable to correct their own errors based on indirect corrective feedback. This current study is actually a follow up of her previous study. The difference of this current study and the previous study is on the research subjects who are more advanced or more proficient student writers.

This study is significant in providing evidences of the comprehensive corrective feedback benefit. Hopefully, it can inspire the EFL teachers in doing the students' writing error correction.

Research Methods

This study is quantitative research investigating a teacher's direct and indirect comprehensive feedback. It comprises three parts: investigating the effectiveness of direct comprehensive feedback, investigating the effectiveness indirect comprehensive feedback, comparing the effectiveness of direct and indirect comprehensive feedback towards the accuracy of the students' writing. The main aim of the study is searching the effects of direct and indirect comprehensive feedback on both students' revised and newly written texts.

Twenty English Department students of UNISBANK participated in this study. They were divided into direct comprehensive feedback group (DCFG) and indirect comprehensive feedback group (ICFG). The DCFG received a teacher's direct comprehensive feedback, while the ICFG received a teacher's indirect comprehensive feedback. In order to get participants of the similar writing competence, of advanced level, the participants of this study were selected, i.e. only the students getting grade A for Paragraph-Based Writing and Genre-Based Writing subjects.

The data were collected by asking the students to do pretest, to write 4 essays, to do two post tests. The participants received a teacher's written comprehensive corrective feedback on the four essays under two treatment conditions: group 1 (DCFG) received a teacher's direct comprehensive feedback, and group 2 (ICFG) received a teacher's indirect comprehensive feedback. The feedback was given by one researcher, i.e. their teacher. Having one person to provide the feedback enabled consistency in the treatment .

After the treatment, the students were asked to rewrite and revise their texts based on the corrective feedback given by the researcher. And then posttests were administered. The students were assigned to write five-paragraph texts with the provided topics.

Discussion

The measurement of the students' revision accuracy based on the teacher's feedback showed that the direct comprehensive corrective feedback group, at average, could revise 91.75% of the teacher's error corrections, while the indirect comprehensive corrective feedback group, could only revise 76.53% of the teacher's error corrections. It means that the students who got direct comprehensive corrective feedback made more accurate revisions than those who got indirect comprehensive corrective feedback did. This research result confirms the hypothesis "Direct comprehensive corrective feedback helps the students improve the revision accuracy of an initial piece of writing more effectively than indirect comprehensive corrective feedback does."

DCFG and ICFG performed almost equally well on the pretest, i.e. DCFG gained a mean score of 80.7 while ICFG gained a mean score of 81.1. After getting the treatment, i.e. writing 2 X 2 essays and revising 2 X 2 essays based on the teacher's feedback, all of the students experienced improvement in their writing. DCFG's mean score raised from 80.7 to 82.5, while ICFG's mean score raised from 81.1 to 84.1. This finding strengthens hypothesis "Comprehensive corrective feedback helps the students improve their subsequent new writing."

The two groups DCFG and ICFG got the same treatment, i.e. writing 2 X 2 essays with the same topics and revising 2 X 2 essays based on the teacher's feedback. The time interval given by the two groups in the treatment was also the same, i.e. 2 X 80 minutes for writing 4 new texts, and 2 X 80 minutes for revising 4 texts based on the teacher's feedback. The difference was only in the ways the teacher corrected the errors to the students' written products. The DCFG's written products were given direct comprehensive corrective feedback while ICFG's written products were given indirect comprehensive corrective feedback. Thus, the mean gain difference between the DCFG and ICFG are caused by the type of corrective feedback received by the two groups on their written products.

In giving direct comprehensive feedback, the researcher underlined the errors and gave the correct form or order, and also provided the missing words/ sentences as Ellis (2009) explains "In giving direct corrective feedback the teacher provides both an indication of the errors as well as the corresponding target forms." In giving indirect comprehensive feedback, the researcher underlined the errors and inserted the codes of the errors such as the absent and/ or the mistaken words, asked for clarification, asked for completion, asked for confirmation as Bitchener (2008) explains "With indirect feedback, an error is called to the students' attention using various strategies such as underlining or circling errors, recording in the margin the number of errors in a given line, confirmation checks, and request for clarification." In giving direct and indirect comprehensive corrective feedback, the researcher also indicated the errors of content, organization, mechanics.

The main factor differentiating direct and indirect comprehensive corrective feedback is the explicitness and the students' involvement in the correction process. The direct comprehensive corrective feedback offers explicit information that facilitates the student writers to edit their texts. This is because of the teacher's supplying the students with the target language form at or near the error. It is more likely that in editing their texts, the students just need to rewrite the teacher's corrective feedback. On the other

hand, the indirect comprehensive corrective feedback only offers an indication that an error has been made. In editing their texts with indirect comprehensive corrective feedback, it is more likely that the students are self editing their writing. Thus, it is not surprising that the research finding revealed: “the students who got direct comprehensive corrective feedback made more accurate revisions than those who got indirect comprehensive corrective feedback did, i.e. 91.75% : 76.53%.” This strengthens Ferris’ study (2006) finding out “students who received direct corrective feedback made the most accurate revisions.” To know the students’ opinion concerning the direct comprehensive corrective feedback, the researcher held interview with some research subjects. The researcher’s interview with 6 students (3 from DCFG, 3 from ICFG) revealed that her students preferred direct comprehensive corrective feedback to indirect comprehensive corrective feedback. The reason is that revising a text based on direct comprehensive corrective feedback is more easy and it saves their time besides it also avoids frustration.

The usefulness of students’ revision activity is admitted by the scholars such as Ferris (2010) stating that corrective feedback is valuable from a learning-to-write perspective because it has the ability to help learners develop more effective revision and self-editing skills. In other words, it has short term (revision/ editing accuracy) benefit. One cannot underestimate the short-term benefit because “editing one’s text after receiving error feedback is likely a necessary, or at least helpful, step on the road to longer-term improvement in accuracy. Rehearsing and repeating might play a major role in order for a noticed item to be retained in a long-term memory” (Ferris ,2004, 2010).

Providing corrective feedback is also in line with a key concept of the process approach to writing instruction proposing multi-drafting writing cycle and applying different feedback strategies at different stage. Ferris (2008) explains that the most obvious teacher’s reason to give written corrective feedback is to give the students’ written assignments. The teachers hope it can help students improve their subsequent drafts and future writing.

The results of the study showed that both direct and indirect comprehensive corrective feedbacks were effective in improving the students’ performance in writing new texts. In other words, both direct and indirect comprehensive corrective feedbacks have long-term effect. It is proved with the result of the first post test. All of the students experienced accuracy improvement in writing a new text. The first post test revealed DCFG’s mean score raised from 80.7 (pre test) to 82.5 (1st post test), while ICFG’s mean score raised from 81.1 (pre test) to 84.1 (1st post test). It means that the students who received indirect comprehensive corrective feedback outperformed those who received direct comprehensive corrective feedback who received direct comprehensive corrective feedback.

The result of this current study is similar to those of the Ferris’ study (2006) finding the more effectiveness of indirect correction in improving 86 ESL students’ accuracy of newly written texts overtime, while students who received direct correction made the more accurate revision. This is also similar to Lalande’s longitudinal study (1982) revealing that students who received indirect corrective feedback outperformed students in a direct corrective feedback group. However, the results of this current study is different from those of Rustipa’s study (2014) reporting the more effectiveness of direct comprehensive feedback than indirect comprehensive feedback. However, the difference was statistically not significant. It was predicted that the more effectiveness of direct comprehensive feedback was more likely because the participants of that study were of low proficient learners who might be unable to correct their own errors based on indirect corrective feedback.

In order to know the significance of the mean difference between the DCFG and ICFG, *t*-test was calculated. A *t*-test is a statistical test to compare two means. Based on

the data analysis, the *t*-value is 3.0073. This calculated value is bigger compared with the *t*-value from the *t*-table: at the level of significance .01, i.e. 2.821, and at the level of significance .05, i.e. 1.813. This means that the null hypothesis (Indirect comprehensive corrective feedback does not help the students improve their subsequent new writing more effectively than direct comprehensive corrective feedback does) is rejected. This also means that there is significant difference between the DCFG and ICFG mean scores.

The results of this current study indicate that indirect comprehensive corrective feedback can enhance the accuracy of EFL writing more effectively than indirect comprehensive corrective feedback. It has great potential to improve EFL writing, specifically it helps the higher level learners improve and acquire the mastery of writing in the target language. This idea emerges because participants of this study were selected, i.e. only the students getting grade A for Paragraph-Based Writing and Genre-Based Writing. Thus, it can be said that they are the students of advanced level.

To gain more insight concerning the durability of the effect of the indirect comprehensive corrective feedback, i.e. to know whether after receiving the feedback the student writers are able to maintain their ability to write a new text, three weeks after the first post test or one month after the last treatment, a second or delayed posttest was administered. In other words, the delayed posttest was used to know whether or not the effect of comprehensive written corrective feedback still prevailed one month after the comprehensive written corrective feedback provision. The result of the delayed or second posttest is that the DCFG and ICFG gained mean scores of 82.5 and 84.95. These mean scores are similar to those of DCFG and ICFG in the first posttest, i.e. 82.5 and 84.6. This finding indicates that direct and indirect comprehensive written corrective feedbacks are durable or has longer effect. This research result means that corrective feedback is necessary for second language acquisition to foster learners' interlanguage development because in order for output production fosters L2 acquisition, it should be accompanied by feedback.

The reason why the students who received indirect comprehensive corrective feedback outperformed those who received direct comprehensive corrective feedback was stated by language scholars based on theoretical foundation. Ferris (2006) states "... indirect corrective feedback is more beneficial to second language development than direct correction because it engages learners in reflective learning processes." Lanlade (1982) predicts that learners benefit more profound form of language processing as they are self editing their output. Sheen (2007) explains that corrective feedback is more effective in promoting noticing and understanding when students expose greater capacity to engage in language analysis. From these statements, it can be summarized that the more benefit of indirect comprehensive corrective feedback is caused by the reflective learning processes, the profound language processing, the language analysis experienced by the student writers during self editing their written outputs. These activities force the student writers to process language more deeply with more mental effort that will result in the increase of their understanding of language accuracy.

The other factors influencing the effectiveness of indirect comprehensive corrective feedback are the learners' motivation and awareness to self edit their written outputs based on the indirect comprehensive corrective feedback given by the teacher. The researcher's interview to 3 students from ICFG revealed that revising a text based on indirect comprehensive corrective feedback was demanding and sometimes frustrating. However, this challenged and encouraged or motivated them to solve the problem. When asked the benefits they got from indirect comprehensive corrective feedback, they answered that they got deeper understanding of the English language knowledge. Thus, the students' personality affects the effectiveness of corrective feedback as also said by

Huiying Sun (2013) that learners' attitude toward written corrective feedback is dependent on learners' attitude toward written corrective feedback such as learners' motivation, aptitude and learning style.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on the discussion, some conclusions can be drawn as follows: comprehensive written corrective feedback, direct or indirect is beneficial to improve EFL students' writing accuracy, both during revision and in new pieces of writing. The research results indicate that direct comprehensive written corrective feedback helps the students improve the revision accuracy of an initial piece of writing more effectively than indirect written comprehensive corrective feedback does. On the other hand, indirect comprehensive written corrective feedback helps the higher level learners improve and acquire the mastery of writing new texts in the target language more effectively. Thus, indirect written comprehensive corrective feedback has more benefit to improve advanced EFL learners' writing.

The implication of the current study is that EFL teachers should use written corrective feedback in writing class since it is a useful instrument to help learners improve their accuracy in writing. In providing corrective feedback, the teacher should consider a learner's educational level since the effectiveness of direct and indirect corrective feedback depends on the learner's competence level. Indirect comprehensive written corrective feedback should dominate the written products of the higher proficient learners because they can self edit their written output. These self editing activities force the student writers to process language more deeply with more mental effort that will result in the increase of their understanding of the target language accuracy.

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