



دانشگاه مازندران

دانشکده ادبیات و علوم انسانی

پایان نامه دوره کارشناسی ارشد در رشته آموزش زبان انگلیسی

موضوع:

تاثیر رویکردی نوین به بازخورد متمرکز بر سیاق دستوری نوشته های
زبان آموزان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجه

استاد راهنما:

دکتر فاطمه خونمیری

استاد مشاور:

دکتر شیرین آبادی خواه

نام دانشجو:

مژگان جمالی

تیر ماه ۱۳۹۰

In the Name of Allah
The compassionate, the Merciful



Mazandaran University

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of English Language and Literature

MA Thesis in TEFL in English Language Teaching

***The Possible Impact of an Innovative Approach to Focused Feedback on the
Linguistic Accuracy of EFL Learner Writings***

Supervisor: Fatemeh Khonamri, PhD

Advisor: Shirin Abadikhah, PhD

Referees: Mahmood Moradi, PhD

Hasan Talebi, PhD

Student: Mozghan Jamali

Date: July 2011

Acknowledgements

Words are not enough to convey my profound gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Khonamri whose continual inspiration, enlightening instructions, and thoughtful guidance rendered the completion of this thesis possible. Special thanks go to all of the instructors who taught me during the two years of my study in Mazandaran University.

I would like to express my deepest gratefulness and true love to my parents whose unflagging support has sustained me through the years of my graduate study.

To my Dear Parents for All Their Love, Affection, and Support

Abstract

There have been debates about the value of feedback on learner errors the most popular of which is the debate between Truscott (1996) and Ferris (1996). To shed further light over the issue, the present study investigated the differential effects of focused coded feedback and its complementation with edit logs and error tally sheets on the accuracy of capitalization, words, and number agreement in EFL writing. It involved three groups of writers: 1) main experimental group (n=9) who wrote on topics, received focused feedback, revised in response to feedback, and kept edit logs and error tally sheets to help them track their progress; 2) second experimental group (n=7) who only received focused feedback and revised in response to feedback; and 3) control group (n=6) who wrote on the topics, but neither received feedback nor the logs or sheets.

Frequency counts and ratios as well as a series of ANOVAs with post-hoc comparisons were implemented to analyze the data and attain the results. The results indicated that, the focused feedback group complemented with edit logs and error tally sheets gained the best during the course of the treatment; the control group made the next successful gains; and the mere focused feedback group gained the least. The findings are that keeping error tally sheets and edit logs beside focused feedback (main experimental group); mere focused feedback; and mere writing practice are unhelpful to accuracy improvement of the targeted features. However, on the one hand, there was a weak trend for the main experiment to outperform the mere focused feedback, and mere writing practice method, and on the other, for writing practice method to outperform the mere focused feedback method.

Language teachers, are thus, recommended to avoid providing their student writes with mere focused feedback, and as a better alternative, to implement learner-oriented approaches to feedback through requiring learners to keep running logs of their most frequent errors so as to enable them master those problematic areas. Teachers are also advised to stop frustrating learners with assigning them writing tasks they will never be corrected on. The study partially supports Truscott's (1996, 2004, & 2007) claims against the impact of corrective feedback (CF).

Key Words: *Focused written CF, metalinguistic feedback, EFL writing accuracy, edit log, thinking log, error tally sheet.*

Table of Contents

<i>Title</i>	<i>II</i>
<i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</i>	<i>III</i>
<i>ABSTRACT</i>	<i>V</i>
<i>TABLE OF CONTENTS</i>	<i>VI</i>
<i>CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>1.1 Introduction</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>1.2 Statement of Problem</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>1.3 Conceptual Framework</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>1.4 Objective and Significance of the Study</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>1.5 Research Questions</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>1.6 Key Concepts</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>2 CHAPTER TWO REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>2.1 Introduction</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>2.2 Feedback in theories of language learning</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>2.3 Error correction studies</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>2.4 Direct, indirect and metalinguistic feedback studies</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>2.5 Focused and unfocused feedback studies</i>	<i>26</i>

2.6 <i>Learner-oriented feedback studies</i>	28
CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY	30
3-1 <i>Introduction</i>	31
3-2 <i>Participants</i>	31
3.2 <i>Design</i>	33
3-4 <i>Choice of target structures</i>	35
3.3 <i>Data collection tools and Procedures</i>	35
3.4 <i>Data Analysis</i>	37
CHAPTER FOUR RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	40
4.1 <i>Introduction</i>	41
4.2. <i>Restatement of Research Questions</i>	42
4.2.1 <i>Research Hypothesis</i>	43
4.2.2 <i>Research question one</i>	43
4.2.3 <i>Research question two</i>	45
4.2.4 <i>Research question three</i>	47
4.2.5 <i>Research question four</i>	48
4.2.6 <i>Research question five</i>	48
4.3 <i>Summary of major Results</i>	49

<i>4.4 Secondary findings</i>	50
CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION	55
<i>5.1 Introduction</i>	56
<i>5.2 Conclusion</i>	56
<i>5.3 Pedagogical Implications</i>	57
<i>5.3 Primary Implications</i>	57
<i>5.3.2 Secondary Implications</i>	58
<i>5.4 Limitations</i>	59
<i>5.5 Suggestions for Further Research</i>	61
LIST OF APPENDICES	63
<i>APPENDIX A Error sheets and logs</i>	63
<i>APPENDIX B topics Questionnaire</i>	67
REFERENCES	69

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 5.1 the Pyramid of motivation

59

LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table 3.1 Composition of groups</i>	32
<i>Table 3.2 Design of the Study</i>	34
<i>Table 3.3 Dependent variables and the relevant methods of measurement</i>	38
<i>Table 4.1 One-way repeated measures ANOVAs across groups</i>	43
<i>Table 4.2 Pre-test Tukey displaying group ranks</i>	44
<i>Table 4.3 Post-test Tukey displaying group ranks</i>	45
<i>Table 4.4 One-way ANOVAs exhibiting group differences</i>	46
<i>Table 4.5 Summary of group differences in test scores</i>	49
<i>Table 4.6 Group means and standard deviations across testing periods</i>	50
<i>Tables 4.7 Error-free-t-unit ratios of groups across testing periods</i>	51
<i>Table 4.7.1 Overall accuracy scores for L1</i>	51
<i>Table 4.7.2 Error-free-t-unit ratios of main experimental group across four writing occasions</i>	51
<i>Table 4.7.3 Error-free-t-unit ratios of second experimental group across testing periods</i>	52
<i>Table 4.7.4 Error-free-t-unit ratios of control group across testing periods</i>	53

Chapter1
Introduction

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the statement of the problem, conceptual framework, the research questions tackled in the present study along with a brief definition of the key terms.

It is Saturday midnight, academia Fantasia has ended, and throughout the block the last lights flick off- all but one that is. A single orange light blooms in the darkness. It is the English teacher, weary- eyed, cramped of leg, hand and brain, sifting listlessly , but doggedly through piles of essays, circling, correcting, marking, grading, commenting, , and worrying about what he has just written. Will my students understand and be able to effectively use my feedback? Will they learn from my feedback for future writing? What if they have difficulty? How will I know? Has my feedback helped them to become better writers? What if my feedback has alienated them from writing? What can I do? How can I finish marking before my students bug me for their essays? The fifth cup of coffee grows cold and bitter. Just one more essay. And then one more. And then...

(Adapted from Goldstein, 2004, p.63)

Though the study of learner errors goes back to 1940s, and the different approaches to learner errors began in 1960s, it was not until 1990s that researchers embarked on the studies on ESL learner errors and in their attempt to discover helpful feedback methods, took different approaches to responding to such errors. Feedback is known as the response to the efforts by the learner to communicate and is perceived to play a major role in helping learners to test the hypothesis they have formed about the system of the target language (Keshavarz, 2008).

There are several ways to think about errors in writing in light of what we know about second language and what we know about the way texts, context and the writing process

interact. Students' writing in ESL generally produces texts that contain various degrees of grammatical and rhetorical errors. This kind of error is especially common among ESL writers who have a lot of ideas, but not enough language to express what they want to say in a comprehensible way. According to Myles (2001, as cited in Naidu, 2007), several social and cognitive factors interfere with learners' meaning communication. Errors are an indispensable part of the learning process (Davies and Pearse, 2002, cited in Keshavarz, 2008), and a sign of learning. As Corder in his influential article (1967, as cited in Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Keshavarz, 2008) remarks, errors are significant in three different ways: 1) they serve pedagogical purposes by showing the teacher if he undertakes a systematic analysis, how far towards the goal the learner has progressed, and what remains for him to learn; 2) they serve research purposes by showing the researcher how languages are actually learned or acquired, and what strategies the learner is employing in his discovery of language; and 3) they serve learning purposes by acting as devices through which the learner can discover the rules of the target language (i.e. by receiving feedback on their errors).

The ability to write well is not naturally acquired. It is learned as a set of practical and learned experience. The introduction of process approach in writing helps the learners to better understand the process of writing and, thus, eventually helps them to build their own strategies in writing. As stated by Flower (1981, as cited in Naidu, 2007), by implementing process approach in writing, learners will have much time in their hands to discover their writing strategies and to consider feedback from teachers. Zamel (1983, as cited in Naidu, 2007) looks at the importance of feedback from a different perspective remarks that by studying what learners do in their writing, teachers can learn what learners know and what they still need to be taught". That is one major reason why the teachers' feedback is crucial in helping to improve learner writings. Ferris (1965) asserts that through tailoring their

feedback as well as their instruction to learners' most problematic language areas, teachers can help learners accelerate their language learning process. Thus, it is really important to seek helpful feedback methods. Ferris (2004) maintains that error treatment, including error feedback by teachers, is a necessary component of L2 writing instruction and urges that teachers must prepare themselves to do it competently; they must plan for it carefully in designing courses; and must execute it faithfully and consistently.

Therefore, language teachers should not only avoid viewing learner errors as negative signs of how poorly learners are performing or as barriers to their learning, but also utilize this chance to discover learners' areas of difficulty and devise a method to help them master those areas. Moreover, the emphasis Long (1969) puts on the role of feedback in language acquisition, as well as the fact that the majority of language learners desire teacher feedback further highlights the significance of feedback. As Naidu (2007) mentions, feedback is an essential aspect of any English language writing course and its goal is to teach skills that help students improve their writing proficiency to the point where they are able to produce their text with minimal errors as well as maximum clarity.

Leki (1960, as cited in Greene, 2003) recognizes the focus of contemporary discourse theory on the significance of teacher response to student writing and the impact it may have on students' attitudes toward writing. However, she remarks that due to the inherent differences in the composing skills of native and non-native writers, instructors should approach responding to the written discourse of second language learners in a different manner. She maintains that an element of prescription appears necessary in response to L2 student papers since L2 students have a smaller backlog of experience with English grammatical or rhetorical structure to fall back on. She infers that native speakers have already amassed sufficient linguistic and cultural input to enable them to concentrate more easily on the areas of voice and meaning in their writing. L2 Students, however, usually have

not had the extensive contact with English grammar, syntax and vocabulary as native-speakers. She specifically acknowledges the importance of teacher feedback to the ESL student and also urges L2 writing instructors to consider the special linguistic backgrounds of their students as they respond to their students' written work.

Another important point regarding using feedback is that it serves as the motivation factor in the ESL writing process. Ellis (1994, as cited in Naidu, 2007) reminds us that students' motivation is closely linked to their language acquisition. As an example, to motivate students, the writing teachers can include comments of praise and encouragement in their written feedback. Along the same lines, Richards (1996, as cited in Naidu, 2007) remarks that feedback may serve not only to let learners know how well they have performed but also to increase motivation and build a supportive classroom climate. Duomont (2002, as cited in Naidu, 2007), as well, asserts the centrality of feedback to learning. It is almost believed that practice makes perfect, but practice without feedback does not lead to improvement.

Unsurprisingly, one of the many challenges language researchers as well as teachers have dealt with is if and how to remind EFL/ESL student writers of errors they frequently make so as to help learners to prevent those errors from recurring in their future writings. Writing teachers have long acknowledged these problems and have provided individual feedback to their students. The most common form of feedback in the past has been written comments on the student's final draft, pointing out problems and making suggestions for improvement of future papers. More recently, following the process approach, many teachers have started making comments on students' initial drafts, offering suggestions for the future development of the final drafts (Naidu, 2007). This is especially true now with the predominance of the process approach to writing that requires some kind of second party feedback, usually the instructor, on students' drafts.

In general, feedback may be provided on content of student writing, its form, organization, rhetoric or a combination of them. Form feedback, which is the focus of the present study, consists of teacher response to the surface structure of student writing including lexis, grammar, spelling, and writing mechanics, etc.

Ellis (2009) reviewing research evidences on feedback, makes various categorizations of strategies for providing form feedback, each based on specific criteria. One of those categorizations is that of error correction and reformulation. Error correction, which is the focus of the present study, involves teacher's correcting of student errors which in itself bears many strategies. Reformulation consists of a native speaker's reworking of the student's entire text and learner's comparing his text with that of the native speaker's in order to self-correct his errors (Ellis, 2004).

Since the present study focuses only on form feedback, and among them error correction, the terms feedback, form feedback, CF (corrective feedback), and correction are used interchangeably. Additionally, the terms error log and error tally sheet are used interchangeably.

2.2 Statement of the Problem

The present study has been performed for many reasons: inconclusiveness of feedback literature regarding the impact of feedback; shortcomings of past researches that are attempted to overcome in the present study; and paucity of research on written feedback generally, and on focused feedback specifically, especially of the type in which learners are oriented toward feedback.

Firstly, the research evidence regarding the effectiveness of CF is scant. Though the study of ESL learner errors goes back to 1990s, the research evidences so far have been

inconclusive regarding the appropriacy of feedback. Truscott's (1996) article was the springboard for the debate over the issue of appropriacy of feedback in the area of language acquisition. There have been a lot of debates regarding this issue the hottest and most popular of which is the debate between Truscott (1996); Truscott (1999); and Ferris (1999).

Many studies have been performed in an effort to disclose the secret of the effectiveness of CF, to name just a few: Alghazo, Bani Abdelrahman, and Abu Qbeitah (2009); Bitchener, Young, and Cameron (2005); Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, and Takashima (2008); Ferris (1999), and (2007); Ferris and Roberts (2001); Greene (2003); Guenette (2007); Hyland (1998); Lee and Schallert (2007); Polio, Fleck and Leder (1998); Truscott (2001), (2004), and (2007); and Truscott and Hsu (2008). However, no conclusive comments have been attained so far. Concerning the inconclusiveness of the attained results, Hyland and Hyland (2006) commented that it is difficult to draw conclusions and generalizations from the literature as a result of varied populations, treatments, and research designs of researches conducted. Sheen (2007) also noted that L2 writing research investigating CF has suffered from a number of methodological limitations (e.g. lack of a control group as in Lalande, 1982; Rob, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986) which renders any generalization impossible.

The present study is, thus, another effort to shed further light on this issue. Utilizing a learner-oriented approach to feedback, it examines the impact of focused feedback on the accurate use of capitalization, mechanics, words, and number agreement in EFL writing. As Sheen, Wright, and Moldawa (2009) mention, until recently, few studies have examined the effect of focused written CF (i.e., CF directed at a limited number of linguistic features). Although researches have led to inconclusive results regarding the differential effects of focused and unfocused feedback, as two strategies to providing feedback, some studies show there is a trend for the former to outperform the latter (e.g. Sheen et al., 2009). The present study, hence, investigates the effect of focused feedback on accuracy.

Secondly, the present research has attempted to overcome some shortcomings of previous researches conducted on focused feedback. The few studies conducted on the issue are proved to suffer from a number of shortcomings, e.g. lack of control group; unhelpful post-feedback tasks; measurement of the impact in mere revisions; limited number of writings per student; and divergence in the focus of instruction. In the present study, it was attempted to overcome such shortcomings through, including a control group; assigning helpful feedback tasks, i.e. tasks requiring revisions of writings rather than mere looking at them; measurement of the impact of CF in new pieces of writing, rather than simply in revisions; collecting more pieces of writing from each student; and selecting participants from classes with similar instructional foci.

Thirdly, since the current language pedagogy focuses on the significance of learners in the language learning process, more active participation on the part of the learners is expected. Although recently a shift in focus has occurred from teacher to learner, most of the studies conducted on CF have focused on the impact of different feedback techniques implemented by teachers (e.g. Ferris & Robert, 2001) probably stemming from their beliefs, while disregarding the impact learner and learner reflection might pose on the effect of feedback. Schulz (2001, as cited in Russell, 2009) cautions that students may enter the classroom with different expectations, beliefs, and attitudes from those of their teachers, and when these are not met, students' success at learning the foreign language may be hindered. She warns that when teacher behavior does not mesh with student expectations, learner motivation and teacher's credibility may be diminished. She asserts that it is the teachers' responsibility to ascertain students' beliefs and expectations in order to either help modify what students believe, or to adjust their own instructional practices to meet the students' expectations.

Lee (2009) contends that currently the rule of the game is that once students have finished their writing, that is the end of their responsibility. They pass their papers to teachers and wash their hands of them. Then it is the teachers' turn to show their efforts by responding to the papers laboriously. Teachers become key players of the game. But why is this the case? Who should be doing the error correction and editing? And who should be learning? It is the students, not the teachers. To salvage the situation, he recommends changing the rule of the game, i.e. letting learners know that when they finish writing, their responsibility is not over. They should be held accountable for their own writing. He believes, if effective learning is to take place, learners have to be the key players in the game. For example, they should be given opportunities to tell teachers what they want to get from teacher feedback; they can help each other review their writing and improve it; they can also set themselves some short-term and long-term goals and monitor their own writing development. Keeping error logs has been suggested by some researchers (Bates, Lane, & Lange, 1993; Ferris, 1995a, 1995b; Lalande, 1982as cited in Icy lee, 2009) as another way of helping L2 writers take responsibility for their progress when writing independently outside the classroom environment. Though, very little research evidence is currently available on the effectiveness of this option.

No study, so far, has addressed the impact of the complementation of focused feedback with edit logs and error tally sheets on the accurate use of capitalization, mechanics, words, and number agreement, while including a control group as well. The present study not only will answer questions regarding the effect of mere focused feedback on accuracy, on the one hand, and its complementation with edit logs and error tally sheets, on the other, but also will answer questions regarding the differential effects of these two feedback approaches. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, the present study is the first study in the country tackling this issue.