

In the Name of God



Shahrekord University
Faculty of Letters & Humanities
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The Effect of Corrective **Written Feedback on Iranian High
School Students' Grammatical Accuracy**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of M.A. in TEFL

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September 2014



دانشگاه شهرکرد
دانشکده ادبیات و علوم انسانی
گروه زبان انگلیسی

پایان نامه برای دریافت درجه کارشناسی ارشد در رشته زبان انگلیسی
گرایش: آموزش

عنوان:

تاثیر بازخورد اصلاحی نوشتاری برصحت دستورزبانی دانش آموزان دوره
متوسطه در ایران

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مهر ۱۳۹۳

کلیه حقوق مترتب بر نتایج مطالعات، ابتکارات
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Shahrekord University
Faculty of Letters & Humanities
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This Is to Certify That the Content and the Quality of the Presentation of
the M.A. Thesis Submitted by **Hedayatollah Teimoori** Entitled:

**The Effect of Corrective Recast and Metalinguistic Feedback on
Iranian High School Students' Grammatical Accuracy**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of M.A. in
TEFL Is Acceptable to the Research Committee (**Score 18.25**).

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, my most grateful thanks must go to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Ali Roohani, for his continued support and guidance throughout all the stages in my M.A. studies, and for his invaluable advice during the preparation of my dissertation in form and content and his enthusiastic help with problems of analysis and description, line-by-line comments, guidance, additional support, constant correction, and insightful suggestions, which resulted in a large number of detailed corrections and improvements. It was he who introduced me to many of the fascinating topics and ideas (focus on form and noticing) that underpin this thesis. It was he whose critical eye, understanding of EFL instruction, and encouragement helped me a great deal. It is with my pleasure that I express my affectionate and deeply felt gratitude to my supervisor for his support and tolerance during writing this project.

I would also like to acknowledge the helpful comments made by my advisor, Dr. Ali Akbar Jafarpour, on the content of the thesis. It was he who were kind enough to read and comment on the entire text. He also made outstanding contribution to clarity and provided advice and assistance during the preparation of the thesis.

I would not have been able to write this thesis without the aid of the professors of English Department in Shahrekord University: Dr. Azizullah Mirzaei, Dr. Bashir Jam, Dr. Mahmood Hashemian, and Dr. Masoud Rahimi Domakani, for their teaching, advice, guidance, skills, contagious enthusiasm and incisive comments on various aspects of my study. I should be very grateful that they helped me in so many ways.

I must acknowledge my debt to Bahonar and Beheshti High Schools' staff and my colleagues in helping me to carry out this project. Also, I like to acknowledge the help from those students who responded and completed the questionnaires.

To My Dear
Mother & Father

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CF	▶▶▶▶	Corrective Feedback
Cond	▶▶▶▶	Conditional(s)
Cond. S.	▶▶▶▶	Conditional Sentences
Cont	▶▶▶▶	Control
EFL	▶▶▶▶	English as a Foreign Language
L1	▶▶▶▶	First Language
L2	▶▶▶▶	Second Language
OPT	▶▶▶▶	Oxford Placement Test
Rel. Cl.	▶▶▶▶	Relative Clauses
RWN	▶▶▶▶	Recast Without Saliency
RWS	▶▶▶▶	Recast With Saliency
SLA	▶▶▶▶	Second Language Acquisition
SLL	▶▶▶▶	Second Language Learning
WCF	▶▶▶▶	Written Corrective Feedback

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the effects of 3 types of written corrective feedback (WCF), namely recast with saliency, recast without saliency and metalinguistic on Iranian senior high school EFL students' grammatical accuracy as regards English conditional sentences and relative clauses. In an experimental study with pretest and posttest design, 3 experimental groups and 1 control group, including 104 low intermediate learners, had picture description tasks/activities. The first experimental group received written recasts without saliency as the implicit feedback; the second experimental group received written recast with saliency as the less explicit feedback; the third experimental group experienced written metalinguistic as the explicit feedback in response to their error(s) in the production of L2 structures; and the control group received no WCF. Development in accuracy was measured through performance on the grammaticality judgment tests as a result of the provision of WCF instruction. The analysis of covariance and multivariate analysis on the EFL participants' performance on the posttests showed that the experimental WCF groups outperformed the control group; the explicit type of feedback had an advantage over the implicit type of feedback; and there was a significant differential effect of certain types of WCF for the two grammatical items/structures. The findings are discussed from the perspective of the teaching potential of WCF in L2 learning. It is concluded that WCF, as an interactional strategy in teaching if done collaboratively by the teacher and learners, can have effects on EFL learners' performance in grammar.

Key Words: Corrective feedback, Explicit feedback, Implicit feedback, Recast, Metalinguistic, Grammaticality judgment test

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

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1.1. Overview

One of the current concerns in L2 which has attracted the attention of L2 researchers is corrective feedback (CF), and its effectiveness on improving L2 learners' grammatical accuracy. According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), teachers react to learners' errors in one or more of six different ways, such as explicit correction, recast, clarification request, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition. Most L2 researchers and educators (e.g., Ellis, 2001; Hulstijn, 1995; Skehan, 1998) agree with the importance of the provision of CF; however, there are disagreements on what type of CF should be provided at different contexts for different learners.

Theoretical supports for the role of CF can be found in Schmidt's (1995) claim about the importance of noticing in L2 learning. CF may help L2 learners notice linguistic forms that they might otherwise ignore and identify how their utterances differ from the linguistic norms of the language. Swain's claims (1995), about noticing within the output hypothesis draw on the work by (Schmidt, 1990) who claimed that learners need to notice a form before they can acquire it. According to Swain (1995), noticing can take place when learners in the process of generating

output perceive that they do not know how to express their **intended meanings**. A specific aspect of noticing (**i.e., noticing the gap**) occurs when learners receive CF and notice that it differs from their original output.

A number of **L2 researchers** (e.g., Mackey, 2007; Mackey & Gass, 2006; Mackey & Goo, 2007; Russell & Spada, 2006) have explored the usefulness and effectiveness of CF for L2 development. Although they have shown positive effects for interactional feedback in general, questions have remained as to how and under what conditions such feedback works most effectively and what factors or characteristics of feedback may influence its effectiveness. There are various studies (e.g., Ellis 2010; Sheen & Ellis 2011; Pawlak 2012) carried out to inspect the role and the effectiveness of CF in the development of L2 grammatical accuracy. Furthermore, most of these studies have assessed the effectiveness of feedback in terms of learner immediate uptake and repair. Few studies have investigated the effects of such feedback on L2 learning, or if they have, they have measured feedback effectiveness through individualized posttests without having any pretests (e.g., Loewen, 2005; Williams, 2001). The present study was designed to examine the development in accuracy with regard to the forms that occurred with CF.

However, most of the prior studies have been framed mainly in psycholinguistic and cognitive theories of SLA. Among them, the effectiveness of implicit and explicit types of CF has been examined (e.g., Carroll, 2001; Carroll & Swain, 1993; 2006; Mackey, 2000; Nagata, **1993**). **Implicit** feedback often takes the form of recasts (Loewen, 2006). For the purpose of this research project, CF defined **by Ellis, Loewen and Erlam (2006)** as “taking the form of responses to learner utterances that contain an error” (p. 340) has been the subject of investigation. The

responses (by the teacher or peer) can indicate that an error has been committed, specify the correct L2 form, or contain metalinguistic information about the nature of the error (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006). It draws on **Loewen's definition** (2006). According to Loewen (2006), "recast is a reformulation of all or part of a learner's immediately preceding utterance in which one or more nontarget like items are replaced by the corresponding L2 form(s)." According to Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, (2006), in the explicit feedback a teacher provides metalinguistic feedback by giving comments or questions related to the well-formedness of the learner's utterance.

In summary, most studies (e.g., Cesnik, 2001; Egi, 2007; Ellis & Sheen, 2006 Lyster & Saito, 2010; Mackey & Goo 2007; Russell & Spada, 2006) conducted on the topic of CF have investigated the effectiveness on and role of different types of feedback in L2 development. Furthermore, the central focus of the studies was almost on oral CF, while the way in which receiving and processing written corrective feedback (WCF) to aid L2 development has until recently been almost absent in the CF research agenda. However, there have **been few studies** investigating simultaneously the effect of two types of implicit or less explicit focus on form in the form of recast (WCF) and one type of explicit focus in the form of metalinguistic WCF on L2 learners' grammatical accuracy among other types of feedback in the Iranian context. Moreover, there has been no research targeting a particular set of linguistic features like conditional sentences and relative clauses, which the current study aimed to take into consideration.

Thus, this study was designed to focus on two types of WCF in terms of stimulating the development of implicit and explicit feedback. It was also designed to contribute to a better understanding of the utility of different types of recast (without

saliency and with saliency) and metalinguistic WCF on the acquisition of English conditional sentences and relative clauses by EFL high school students in Iran.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Considering the fact that grammatical instruction has predominantly been the mainstream in language education, especially in public schools in Iran is assumed important to investigate development in EFL learners' accuracy with the focus on different types of WCF. In this study, an attempt was made to examine the effect of using recasts (with two modes) and metalinguistic on grammatical accuracy (i.e., conditional sentences and relative clauses) through picture description tasks/activities. The traditional nature of classroom instruction in Iran depends extremely on memorization of grammatical items without any emphasis on the interactive aspects of language and focus on form. In this respect, many studies to shift and revise teachers' attention to approaches that emphasize the interaction and focus on form are much needed. Being always curious about what EFL students remember after grammar lessons, both immediately and in the long-term, teachers and teacher trainers may realize the importance of teacher/student interaction and that how that may contribute to their grammar learning.

In this light, a number of studies have investigated separately either implicit focus on form or explicit feedback, which facilitates the development in L2 grammar. Long (2006) and Ellis and Sheen (2008) provided reviews of the research on recast studies. In general, the recast studies demonstrated that implicit feedback could have a **beneficial effect on L2 grammar** acquisition, especially when the recasts were more explicit in nature (Doughty & Varela, 1998). But other studies (e.g., Carrol, 2001; Carrol & Swain, 1993; Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam , 2006) have shown

that explicit feedback can be beneficial in allowing learners to make gains in grammatical accuracy. Thus, there are some discrepancies among researchers' ideas toward the effectiveness of different kinds of WCF, and there are conflicting results which prior studies have obtained regarding effectiveness and role of WCF. As a result, it is not easy to come to clear conclusions about the results of the studies done. Additionally, one could find almost few research studies, to the best of the present researcher's knowledge, aimed at any systematic investigation of the effectiveness of three abovementioned WCF types.

Despite the controversy in oral L2 research, controversy also exists in currently available literature on L2 writing research. For example, Truscott (2007, p. 270) a reputable critic has claimed that "the best estimate is that correction has a small harmful effect on students' ability to write accurately." He further elaborated that the provision of WCF would result in the avoidance of using certain language structures in subsequent writings where learners might make mistakes.

By reviewing the available literature relating to CF, this study discovered some research gaps, worth further investigating in order to remedy the design flaws like having no pretests in studies conducted. Most research on WCF deals solely with the effect of implicit WCF on high school EFL participants' grammatical accuracy and pays little attention to the effect of more explicit type of WCF. In fact, it has rarely investigated the efficacy of incorporation of two types of CF. In order to contribute to the literature available on the topic and practice in language classes of high schools, this study aimed to investigate if WCF had any significant effect on L2 participants' grammatical accuracy in Iran. Besides it explored what type of WCF (recast without saliency or recast with saliency and metalinguistic) might be the most