

Corrective Feedback Types and Improving Grammatical Accuracy in Spoken Language

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ABSTRACT: The role of Corrective Feedback in the development of inters language system of language learners is not at all negligible. Corrective feedback in writing skill has extensively been the focus of attention by scholars. When it comes to medium of speaking, however, more investigations seemed necessary. This study aimed to shed light on the possible impact of two different types of corrective feedback, Focused Corrective Feedback and Unfocused Corrective Feedback, on foreign language learners' spoken language accuracy. Eighty intermediate learners randomly formed two experimental groups. One experimental group received focused spoken corrective feedback while the other received unfocused spoken corrective feedback. The participants' grammatical accuracy in their spoken language was measured through the speaking section of Cambridge Preliminary English Test both before and after the treatment. The results showed that the corrective feedback was of value by itself in both groups. However, the learners in focused corrective feedback group significantly outperformed the unfocused counterpart regarding their grammatical accuracy in the spoken language.

Key words: Corrective Feedback, Focused Corrective Feedback, Unfocused Corrective Feedback, Grammatical Accuracy.

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INTRODUCTION

For learners studying English in a non-English speaking setting, it is very important to experience a rich context of learning in which they learn how to express themselves. It is very essential for the EFL learners to say what they mean both accurately and appropriately. Speaking skill is considered the most challenging and complex of the four language skills (Nunan, 1999; Zhang, 2009). Due to the fact that enriching competence and gaining quality performance in speaking skill is a tough and painstaking job for most of language learners, few studies have ever dealt with the speaking skill in Iran. A primary source of problem faced by the EFL speakers is their lack of knowledge or the hesitance on the accuracy in their oral proficiency which is the researchers' major concern in the present study.

Since the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in 1980s, the goal of instruction has turned to be the development of fluency and acceptable language use (Omaggio Hadley, 2001). For the proponents of CLT, meaning had priority over forms. However, in 1990s, a few scholars asserted that the explicit instruction of structure and error correction can improve accuracy in oral and written output of the learners (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Doughty & Varela, 1998; Ellis, 1993, 1994; Fotos, 1994).

Corrective feedback has been categorized by different researchers in different categories. Lyster and Ranta (1997) studied the different types of corrective feedback provided by the teachers to their

learners while engaged in speaking activities. They found that teachers mainly employ recasts, elicitation, metalinguistic corrective feedback, clarification requests, corrective repetition, and explicit correction which included both implicit and explicit types of feedback. In the feedback typology presented by Ellis (2008) which was based on writing skill, there are direct, indirect, metalinguistic, focused, unfocused, electronic, and reformulation corrective feedback. He defined focused and unfocused corrective feedback, which are the concern of the present study, as the one in which the teacher can select specific error types for correction for the former and the one in which the teacher elect to correct all of the learners' errors for the latter.

An extant literature review was conducted to examine the effectiveness of corrective feedback on language learning. Some viewed corrective feedback as not only ineffective but also potentially harmful to L2 accuracy (e.g., Truscott, 2007) while some researchers (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 2002; Mohammadi, 2009; Sheen, 2007) believe that CF is of value in promoting better grammatical accuracy. A few studies have been conducted based on investigating the possible effect of corrective feedback on oral production of learners. In a study carried out by Chaudron (1977), he found out that some types of corrective feedback (e.g., repetition) led to more immediate reformulation of utterances than other types. Doughty and Varela (1998) also revealed that students who received recast on specific language forms exhibit greater oral

accuracy comparing with those who had not received a feedback. Few studies are carried out on focused (FCF) and unfocused corrective feedback (UCF). Sheen (2007) examined the effects of FCF on the development of 91 adult ESL learners' accuracy in the use of articles under the category of grammatical accuracy in learners' written production. The study done by Sheen (2007) asserted the effectiveness of CF on learners' accuracy in their written production. Ellis, Sheen, Takashima and Murakami (2008) compared the possible effect of FCF and UCF on the accuracy of English articles and reported that both FCF and UCF groups outperformed the control group which received no CF. Speaking in a foreign language seems frustrating and hard to deal task for many EFL learners.

The present study aimed to investigate the possible effect of focused corrective feedback and unfocused corrective feedback on accurate use of grammatical structures in the learners' spoken production among intermediate EFL learners. To this end, the following research questions were raised:

- Does focused and unfocused types of corrective feedback have any effect on improving grammatical accuracy of oral output among Iranian EFL learners?

- Does focused corrective feedback have more effect than unfocused corrective feedback on improving grammatical accuracy of oral output among Iranian EFL learners?

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study is a quasi-experimental one since the researchers could not find the chance to randomly select the sample groups out of target population. The participants consisted of 80 intermediate EFL learners including 23 males and 57 females who were between 16-32 years old studying in an English language institute in Tehran, Iran. They were selected out of 98 learners who had sat for Cambridge Preliminary English Test (PET) at the beginning of the study for their homogeneity regarding their English language proficiency. They all had the experience of learning English for at least one year in the educational setting of the same English language institute. Two experimental groups were formed. One experimental group received focused oral corrective feedback on only specific grammatical points assigned by the syllabus every session while the other received unfocused oral corrective feedback on all the grammatical problems they committed while speaking. The participants' grammatical accuracy in their spoken language was measured through the speaking section of Cambridge Preliminary English

Test both before and after the treatments. Two trained raters were involved rating the students spontaneously based on the rating scale of PET speaking section in which one category is grammatical accuracy. The inter-rater reliability indexes for both pre- and post-tests were .93 and .75 respectively.

RESULTS

The data collected from both groups were finally analyzed to trace the probable changes in and between groups as a result of the treatments. The statistical analyses of Paired-Samples t-test and One-Way Analysis of Covariance were run to investigate the effect of types of corrective feedback on the performance of the participants on the pretest and posttest on the grammatical accuracy of their oral output. The main assumptions of these two analyses are normality of data and homogeneity of variances. As displayed in Table 1 the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors were lower than +/- 1.96 (Field, 2013). Thus, the assumption of normality was met.

The assumption of homogeneity of variances is dealt with when reporting the results of ANCOVA. To test the first hypothesis, a Paired-Samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of focused and unfocused corrective feedback types on EFL learners' grammatical accuracy of oral output.

According to Table 2, there was a statistically significant difference between the learners' pretest ($M = 10.50$, $SD = 3.76$) and posttest ($M = 15.42$, $SD = 3.12$), $t(39) = -5.86$, $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed) of the focused group. The mean increase was 4.92 with 95% confidence interval ranging from -6.62 to -3.22. The eta squared statistic (.47) indicated a large effect size.

There was also a statistically significant difference between the unfocused group learners' pretest ($M = 10.32$, $SD = 3.28$) and posttest ($M = 13.75$, $SD = 3.34$), $t(39) = -6.87$, $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed). The mean increase was 3.42 with 95% confidence interval ranging from -4.43 to -2.41. The eta squared statistic (.44) indicated a large effect size. The results showed that both corrective feedback types (focused and unfocused) could significantly affect the learners' grammatical accuracy of oral output.

To test the second hypothesis, One-Way between-groups Analysis of Covariance was conducted to compare the effectiveness of two different feedback types (focused and unfocused) on improving the learners' grammatical accuracy in oral output while controlling for pretest scores.

As shown in Table 3, the independent variable was the type of feedback (focused and unfocused), and the dependent variable consisted of scores on

their grammatical accuracy of oral output after the treatments were completed. Participants' scores on the pre-test of the grammatical accuracy of oral output were used as the covariate in this analysis.

Preliminary checks were conducted to ensure that there was no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, homogeneity of variances, homogeneity of regression slopes, and reliable measurement of the covariate. After adjusting for pre-intervention scores, there was significant difference between the two intervention groups on post-test

scores on the learners' grammatical accuracy of oral output, $F(1, 77) = 5.26$, $p = .02$, partial eta squared = .06. This means that 6.4 per cent of the variance in the dependant variable is explained by the independent variable (FCF and UCF groups) which is, according to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013, p. 55), medium in size. The adjusted mean s in dependant variable in both groups also showed that FCF ($M = 15.41$, $SD = .51$) has more effect than UCF ($M = 13.76$, $SD = .51$) on improving grammatical accuracy of oral output among Iranian EFL learners.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for both focused and unfocused CF groups

	N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis
Gram. Accuracy Pretest	80	10.41	10.00	10.00	3.51	12.34	.085	-.647
Gram. Accuracy Posttest	80	14.58	15.00	15.00	3.32	11.05	-.39	-.64

Table 2. Paired-sample t-tests for pretest and posttest in focused and unfocused CF group

		Paired Differences							
		Mean	SD	SEM	95% confidence interval of the differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 (FCF)	Pre-gram. Post-gram.	-4.92	5.3	.839	-6.622	-3.227	-5.86	39	.000
Pair 2 (UCF)	Pre-gram. Post-gram.	-3.42	3.15	.498	-4.433	-2.416	-6.87	39	.000

Table 3. One-way between-groups analysis of covariance

Sources	Type III Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	80.05	2	40.02	3.88	.025	.092
Intercept	1356.65	1	1356.65	131.67	.000	.631
Pre.gram.	23.93	1	23.93	2.32	.132	.029
Groups	54.256	1	54.25	5.26	.024	.064
Error	793.33	77	10.30			
Total	17897.00	80				
Corrected Total	873.38	79				

After exploring what research has to say about CF in helping learners with problematic language learners, the researchers gained new appreciation and confidence in using focusing providing CF in oral production. Research has shown focused CF does not overload learners with too much information and when focused on a single targeted error, it does lead to gain in spoken language accuracy. Although both groups have improved by both types of corrective feedback, we can see that the group which received focused corrective feedback has improved better. As all the learners in both groups were intermediate, we can conclude that they were aware of some language points so the teacher attracted their attention in special language point in focused group. Those learners in unfocused group may be confused and

frustrated by correcting all the errors and not just focusing on specific point.

Thus, based on this study, the groups who received focused CF have outperformed the unfocused CF. The results suggest that unfocused CF is of limited value among Iranian EFL learners, whereas focused corrective feedback promoted learners' foreign language speaking skill accuracy more effectively.

DISCUSSION

The first research question of the study was concerned with the role of CF on learners spoken language accuracy. The statistical results of the study showed that both groups had improved level of

accuracy in their oral performances on their posttests. Concerning the results gained through this study, the results corroborate those of studies discussed before (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Mohammadi, 2009; Sheen, 2007). In these studies the effectiveness of the CF was valued in the field of grammatical accuracy in the learners' written production while in the current study the same findings were gained in the field of oral production.

The second research question was also based on the comparison of the effectiveness of the each kind of CF on learners' spoken accuracy. The results of the current study emphasize the effectiveness of the use of focused CF. Although both groups had improved, the focused group outperformed the UCF group and considered more effective. In line with the study done by Sheen (2007), the findings of the current study showed the effectiveness of the FCF use in the field of grammatical accuracy.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study are beneficial for EFL teachers as to help them find a way for dealing with learners' erroneous grammatical points in their spoken language. Furthermore, it suggests that they use FCF to improve the accuracy of spoken language which, per se, leads to more linguistically qualified production.

We recommend that further research be required to reconfirm and stabilize the results since some other factors such as socioeconomic background, educational system, cultural context ... can also reinforce such results. Only this way can the related literature witness an established fact about the influential role of corrective feedback, in general, and focused corrective feedback, in specific, on the process of language learning.

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