

## The Effect of Metalinguistic Corrective Feedback on Students' Writing Performance

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**Abstract** – The potentiality of giving corrective feedback (CF) in the process of learning a new language is still a matter of controversy among researchers. Despite the fact that different aspects of CF have been discussed so far, the result is not applicable to pedagogical settings. Accordingly, the present study intends to investigate the effect of giving CF on students' performances in EFL writing classes. To this purpose, 53 intermediate EFL learners were selected; they were randomly assigned into two experimental groups and one control group. One of the experimental groups received focused Metalinguistic CF and the other received unfocused Metalinguistic CF, after 12 sessions of instruction they sat for a post test. The results of statistical analysis (ANOVA) indicated that there were significant differences among the three groups in favor of focused Metalinguistic and unfocused metalinguistic groups.

**Keywords:** corrective feedback, writing ability, metalinguistic, EFL learners,

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### I. INTRODUCTION

As a matter of fact second language acquisition has been tied to the issue of interaction between instructors and pupils. In this regard, writing instruction, like any other language skill, demands for constructive interaction. By considering the significance of writing ability in the process of language learning, writing instruction finds a prominent role in English classes.

In recent years, many research studies have been done for writing instruction asserting the importance of corrective feedback as a powerful tool for instruction. Historically speaking, in all due fairness, it has been stated by the Truscott (1996) for the first time that grammar correction in writing courses should be abandoned but in that time he disregarded that corrective feedback is not unique to grammar correction; mainly this issue raised the researchers and the practitioners to evaluate the dimensions and potentials of corrective feedback in writing classes (DeKeyser, 1993; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami & Takashima, 2008; Elwood & Bode, 2014).

Beyond the research carried out in the area, the present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of different methods of giving corrective feedback in EFL writing classes as a lost ring of this chain.

For equipping students with the power of writing efficiently numerous tools can be utilized, one of which is giving corrective feedback (CF). The marginal suggestions on this issue concern the term “treatment of error” which could be a good motivator for kicking off the discussion concerning the CF. As it was suggested by Chaudron (1988) “any teacher behavior following an error that minimally attempts to inform the learner of the fact of error” (p. 150) could be a manifestation of treatment of error, making students aware of mistakes in their performances.

What is more common with CF in writing instruction is its typology which has been suggested by Ellis (200<sup>9</sup>). He disclosed that six different types of CF could be applied to writing classes including direct CF, indirect CF, Metalinguistic CF. Applying the focused CF to all the preceding types is possible and many research studies have been done in this area (Lalande, 1982; Chandler, 2003; Sheen, 2007; Ferris, 2006; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008).

What is well seated in the mind of researchers is that the most and best type of CF is bounded to direct and indirect types and applying the other types in this regards, has been partially overlooked. Albeit what has been said, based on the idea of Truscott (1996) it could be stated that, error correction does not improve the students’ writing ability because it disregards the SLA theories of acquisition and totally it is dependent to the ability and willingness of teachers. Previously in order to compare the effectiveness of different types of CF some studies were conducted investigating the effect of error correction, content comment and combination of these two, none of them found significant differences among different types of CF (Kepner, 1991; Sheppard, 1992).

In a research study Bitchener, Young, and Cameron (2005) examined the effect of different types of CF on ESL students’ writings. They suggested “direct, explicit written feedback and student–researcher 5 minute individual conferences; direct, explicit written feedback only; no corrective feedback” as major categories of CF. They found that combination of written and conference feedback could improve the accuracy of writings significantly. On the other hand, it is suggested by Hyland (2003) that teachers’ CF could improve the accuracy over time; by observing six participants during 14 weeks of English proficiency course.

By taking into account the multifacetedness CF, Farrokhi and Sattarpour (2012) tried to investigate whether giving direct written corrective feedback can improve grammatical accuracy of high-proficient L2 learners or not. To this purpose 60 high-proficient L2 learners were selected and received focused written CF, unfocused written CF and no CF in different groups. After the instruction they examined three groups and it became clear that receiving CF significantly increase the grammatical accuracy, and its focused type is better than unfocused type.

Maleki and Eslami (2013) in their study examined the impact of direct and indirect written CF on 90 intermediate Iranian EFL students in short and long period of time. As Maleki and Eslami (2013) stated the written CF was effective and useful for learners both in direct and indirect types. By taking the time into consideration Lalande (1982) showed that indirect CF was better than direct one.

By considering the literature, it is clear that there is an account for taste of researchers on this issue. In majority of EFL settings the question deals with the method of providing CF rather than whether to give feedback or not (Brown, 2001). In addition to this different typologies have been suggested by researchers (e.g. Burke & Pieterick, 2010; R. Ellis, 2009 ;) providing the causes of confusion for teachers. In the present study based on the Ellis (2009) classification of CF, we examine the effectiveness of the focused and unfocused metalinguistic CF on EFL learners' writing ability. Metalinguistic CF, to its real meaning has been defined as providing learners with some form of explicit comment about the nature of their errors (Ellis, 2009).

### **A. Research Questions**

Thus, the present study intends to answer the following research questions:

- 1- Dose giving metalinguistic corrective feedbacks have a significant effect on students' writing performances?
- 2- Is there any significant difference between focused and unfocused types of metalinguistic corrective feedback?

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

### **A. Participants**

Since the majority of the problems concerning this issue deals with intermediate students who do not acquire the target language rules completely, a sample of 53 intermediate EFL learners, both male and female, majoring in English literature were selected. Their ages ranged from eighteen to late twenty two, participating in writing classes in Iranian universities. Besides, they were divided into three groups: two experimental groups and one control group.

### **B. Instruments**

The proper instruments for data collection were pre- & post-tests. Firstly, to ensure about the homogeneity of the participants they sat for the Cambridge English Proficiency test (CEP). After receiving 12 sessions of instruction they participated in a writing test as the indicator of their final performances. Besides for the data analysis part SPSS software version 21 (IBM Corp., Released 2012) was used.

### **C. Procedure**

In the present study, it has been tried to shed light on the metalinguistic category of CF in writing classes. Students, participating in their academic education were selected conveniently and randomly assigned into three groups: two experimental and one control group. The length of instruction for all the three groups was 12 sessions, and the method of instruction was different for each group. To ensure that the participants in the study were homogeneous they sat for the pretest in the form of the writing sample. In the following, after

giving the treatment, they sat for another writing test as the final indicator of the instructional effectiveness.

As a matter of fact, the control group received the traditional instruction, but one experimental group received focused CF and the other received unfocused CF during the course. The participants of the unfocused group received coded comments from the instructor about all of the grammatical mistakes in writing while the focused group received coded comments about just a limited number of grammatical mistakes (e.g. articles, time). Before the instruction and giving the metalinguistic comments both instructors and students were totally familiar with the meaning of the codes and also the goal of the study.

### III. RESULTS

#### A. Data analysis

In order to reduce the effect of construct irrelevant factors in scoring procedures, two raters participated in the present study and the reliability of the scores were calculated prior to the statistical analysis. The index of Inter- Rater Reliability (Cronbach alpha) was .82 showing a high level of agreement between two different raters in the present study.

At the end of the treatment sessions, a post-test of writing as the indicator of the participants' final performances was administered. Thus, in order to check the effectiveness of giving different types of CF in writing classes a one way ANOVA was conducted. As table 1 shows, there are significant difference among the three groups of participants (Sig=.000).

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	59.827	2	29.913	19.588	.000
Within Groups	76.356	50	1.527		
Total	136.183	52			

Accordingly, it should be noted that for investigating differences among the three groups a post hoc test was conducted. The result is presented in the table 2 below. By examining the results of the Scheffe test (table 2), it could be inferred that the participants of the experimental groups outperformed those of the control group. In fact, the performance of the Focused Metalinguistic CF group, by showing a mean of 2.73433 which is more than that of the control group, provides a good interpretation for its effectiveness.

**Table 2: Multiple Comparisons**

Scheffe						
(I) G	(J) G	Mean Differenc e (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Control	Focused Metalinguistic	-2.73433*	.44480	.000	-3.8565	-1.6121
	Unfocused Metalinguistic	-1.21491*	.43611	.027	-2.3152	-.1146
Focused Metalinguistic	Control	2.73433*	.44480	.000	1.6121	3.8565
	Unfocused Metalinguistic	1.51942*	.39127	.001	.5323	2.5066
Unfocused Metalinguistic	Control	1.21491*	.43611	.027	.1146	2.3152
	Focused Metalinguistic	-1.51942*	.39127	.001	-2.5066	-.5323

\*, The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The best performance belonged to the Focused Metalinguistic group by the mean of 17.8789 followed by the Unfocused Metalinguistic and the control group. Likewise, there was a significant difference between the focused and unfocused Metalinguistic groups and the members of the focused group had a mean score of 1.51942, which is more than that of the unfocused group.

#### IV. DISSCUTION & CONCLUTION

By taking into account the results of the present study, it recommended that giving focused corrective feedback is significantly better than giving unfocused CF. Since the literature on this issue overlooked the effectiveness of the focused and unfocused metalinguistic CF, the present study investigated gradual consequences of giving CF on the mastery of writing skills and rules for EFL learners. Within the scope of the present study 53 EFL learners participated in Essay writing classrooms.

Metalinguistic CF, as Ellis (2009) describes, means providing learners with explicit comments about the nature of the errors. When the instructor put his comments as pre-defined abbreviated labels for different kinds of errors the learners gradually grasp the most frequent type of the error and also try to internalize the proper solution for this lack of knowledge. All in all metalinguistic CF aims to put the burden of accuracy on the shoulders

of the learners, to uproot the errors and also mistakes by the awareness of the nature of incompetency.

In the process of research, two groups received the CF method of instruction and one remaining group served as the control group. Since the those who received CF outperformed the others; it could be stated that receiving CF in writing instruction increases both awareness and attention of learners, in fact the aforementioned results are in line with the noticing hypotheses stated “that input does not become intake for language learning unless it is noticed, that is, consciously registered (Schmidt, 2001, 2012). The more new points are in the center of the attention, the more they are probable to be acquired and this pattern holds not only for L1 but also for new points in L2.

Hereupon, whoever received CF on the grammatical issues in his performance gradually mastered that point and whoever disregards this, lost the opportunity of improving his writing ability. Specially, giving focused feedback, because of its concentration, suggested as one the best methods of providing new rules to students and making them aware of the shortcomings.

Due to the achieved results in the present study, it is recommended that giving focused metalinguistic CF and unfocused metalinguistic CF improve students’ writing ability.

Concerning the second research question, the result showed that focused metalinguistic CF is significantly better than unfocused because the bias exists in the unfocused metalinguistic CF impedes the concentration which is required for acquisition.

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