

A Study on the Effect of Focused and Unfocused Corrective Feedback on Non-finite Verbs Correction

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Abstract

In this study, the effectiveness of corrective feedback was studied by comparing focused corrective feedback with unfocused corrective feedback. It chooses non-finite verbs as the target language. The experimental design of "pretest-feedback-immediate posttest-delayed posttest" was used to investigate the correction effects of these two feedback methods on non-predicate errors. The experimental results show that focused corrective feedback and unfocused corrective feedback are effective for non-predicate errors, indicating that feedback as a teaching method can promote foreign language learning. In addition, the effect of focused corrective feedback is better than that of unfocused corrective feedback.

Keywords

Focused corrective feedback; Unfocused corrective feedback; Non-finite verbs; Effect.

1. Introduction

Writing as an important indicator of students' English proficiency has been being a weak point for English language learners and overwhelming majority of learners often make errors in their writing. In order to improve learners' language proficiency, researchers made a great effort to find an effective approach to improve learners' writing level. Most of them paid great attention to find a good approach to treating errors. In 1960s, under the influence of behaviorism which highlighted the formation of habit, errors were believed to be harmful to language learning and errors should be avoided in language use. Teachers had the responsibility to offer corrective feedback (CF) to language learners. CF was of significance to language acquisition. At the end of 1970s, error analysis was advocated. Teachers can obtain some information about learners' language learning condition by this approach. Errors played an important role in language acquisition and teachers are supposed to analyze the cause of making errors and summarize the error types. In 1980s, interactionist theory which emphasized the function of interaction was proposed. Teacher-student interaction was considered to be very important for language learning. Error treatment in interaction has an active effect on the language learning, thus the function of CF was gradually established. From above researches, we can find that CF as a method to treat errors in learners' utterance received a wide support.

However, there are still a lot of controversies on the effectiveness of CF in writing. Truscott (1996) claimed that CF in writing, known as written corrective feedback (WCF), had potential harm to second language acquisition, so the abandonment of CF was indispensable in writing teaching. Ferris (1999) expressed a strong opposition and stated CF provided appropriately and adequately could generate effectiveness in the writing. An increasing number of researchers employed experimental evidence to prove the effectiveness of CF. (eg., Ferris, 2006; Su Jianhong, 2020). These researchers who support that CF can improve language accuracy in writing still can't determine which type of CF is more useful on account of the diversity of CF type and language item. Although the uncertainty of the effectiveness exists,

some teachers still use CF to deal with students' composition without consideration of the time-consuming and energy-consuming shortcomings. In order to save time and achieve high effectiveness, a few of studies advocated to using focused approach to deal with the specific grammar item in learners' writing. Wilkins (1972) stated "Without grammar very little can be conveyed", so it seems reasonable to set grammar item as target language. Besides, some studies which had been conducted to compare the effectiveness between focused and unfocused feedback proved that adopting focused approach was more useful for some specific grammar items in the short term and long term. However, these results didn't reach an absolute agreement, because of the methodological variation, the background of participants, the duration of the research and the way to correct errors and so on. In consideration of the different learning environment and the influence of native language, researchers in china need to make further study to make the answer clearly. The target structures which may generate influence on the effectiveness of CF are limited in current studies. Based on above reasons, conducting more studies to determine which CF type is more suitable to different grammar items is needed.

Ellis et al. (2008) proposed a new classification method, the focused corrective feedback which is also called selective corrective feedback and non-focused feedback which is also called comprehensive corrective feedback. The former one refers to point out only a certain type of grammar error in a chapter by the teacher, while the latter refers to point out all the grammar errors by the teacher in the passage. Ellis et al. (2008) and Asiah & Luan (2014) found that focused feedback and unfocused feedback are useful for specific grammar in English. However, Sheen et al. (2009) and Ekiert & Gennaro(2019) found that Focused feedback is more effective than unfocused feedback in the acquisition of English articles. There is no consensus on the effectiveness of focused feedback and unfocused feedback. There are relatively few studies on the effectiveness of written feedback in English preposition acquisition, especially the study of the non-finite verbs acquisition in English writing.

2. Theoretical Basis

Long (1996) concluded that giving feedback to learners' output can help learners to correct their incorrect hypotheses. The fact that learners' hypotheses occurring in the output process obtain feedback will inspire learners to make hypotheses to promote acquisition. The problematic output causes the generation of feedback (external feedback or internal feedback), which may make learners rethink and correct their output. CF, as an external feedback, which aims at correcting errors plays an essential role in students' output.

In 1996, Long put forward the updated version of interaction hypothesis, which emphasized that both external factor and internal factor exerted an influence in the interaction. Environment was a key factor to language acquisition. Creating favorable environment to help students learn language was necessary. Meanwhile, negotiation of meaning was an important part in the interaction. Negotiation of meaning was that speakers used interactive work to deal with the misunderstanding of language, which may develop learners' selective attention and second language process capacity. CF, offered in the writing, is an interaction form between teachers and students. This error treatment approach offers an opportunity for teachers and students to possess more interaction chances. It is conducive to strengthening the relationship between teachers and students and creating a supportive learning atmosphere.

The noticing/triggering function presented by Swain(1995) and the Noticing Hypothesis proposed by Schmidt(1990) highlight the significance of noticing. When the comparison between input and output is made, notice can be taken. Although not all the notice is meaningful, notice, the conscious awareness, is really essential to language acquisition. Because of the internal and external factors, students sometimes cannot notice or realize the input consciously.

CF as an intervention approach offered by teachers can promote learners' noticing, which has been approved by many researchers (e.g., Swain1995; Schmidt, 1994). After noticing the gap, some learners may invest a lot of time and energy to improve their language acquisition. Some linguistic knowledge, such as article and the subjunctive mood, is difficult to some learners to acquire, so teachers constantly arrange some practice about these grammar items to learners and then offer CF to them. The premise condition of grammar acquisition is notice. In practice, feedback has the ability to propel learners to notice the shortcomings of the writing, leading students to language output.

As above mentioned, the input hypothesis, output hypothesis, interaction hypothesis and noticing hypothesis have offered theory foundations for this study. CF can be regarded as input and output to arouse learners' notice, so that learners' language acquisition can be improved.

3. Research Design

3.1. The Research Question

The specific research questions of this study were (1) to explore whether corrective feedback in writing have effect on the improvement of the accurate use of non-finite verbs for learners.(2) to explore which type of corrective feedback is more effective for learners' accurate use of non-finite verbs between focused direct feedback and unfocused direct feedback.

3.2. Subjects

All the Participants in this research are freshmen of two parallel classes in a university in China. They are all Non-English majors. They were taught by the same English teacher in this term. Through analyzing English scores of National College Entrance Examination, researchers found that no significant difference between these two classes in the English proficiency. No student in this research had received CET4 test before this research conducted. Besides, researcher didn't tell participants that the compositions in this research are from CET4 examination. These participants all had forty minute classes four times a week

The present researcher chose 109 students from 127 students as the subject. The experimental group covered 51 students, while the control group included 58 students. After analyzing the data collected from pretest, researcher excluded three students in this research, because there is no error about non-finite verbs in their articles, which doesn't meet the subjects' selection criteria. What's more, Brown (1973) (quoted in Zhang, 2013) stated that "if the accuracy level is above 90%, it can be said that the feature has been "acquired". Seven students who had a good performance at this kind of grammar item in the composition were excluded. Besides, two students were excluded in this research, because of their bad performance in the experiment. It is unavoidable that some students may not attend certain test or finish the composition in certain treatment stage, so these students who failed to attend all the activities were excluded. In order to not influence these students' emotions, this research still allowed these students to receive the same treatment.

3.3. The Research Process

This study is divided into five stages: Introduction of non-finite verbs; pretest; treatment; posttest; delayed test. Considering student's unfamiliar and incomprehension of non-finite verb, the researchers used two English classes to introduce non-finite verbs. In the Pretest, the writing test and gap filling test were implemented. Students completed the writing test that covers 180 words in the forty minutes and finished the grammar filling test in twenty minutes. Participants were confirmed after pretest. Then, the treatments of the writing were conducted in each week. The requirements of writing in the treatment were the same as the writing tests. During the treatment, errors about non-finite verbs were corrected and the correct forms of them were offered in the experimental group, while all the errors were corrected and the

correct forms of all the errors were offered. In the post-test, all the participants finished a filling gap test about non-finite verbs. After four weeks, all the participants completed the delayed test of gap-filling test about non-finite verbs.

4. Research Results

4.1. Results From The Gap-Filling Test

Table 1. Independent sample t-test of pretest about the gap-filling test

Classes	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Control class	58	11.379	2.368	.802	.425
Experimental class	51	11.020	2.302		

Table 2. Independent sample t-test of pretest about writing test

Classes	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Control class	58	63.931	9.403	.252	.802
Experimental class	51	64.431	11.334		

Table 1 indicates that the P value is 0.425 (>0.05) in the gap filling test. Since the P values is over 0.05, it reflects that these two groups have the similar level in the accuracy use of non-finite verbs, which also can demonstrate that students have difficulty in having a good command of non-finite verbs. Table 2 indicates that the P value in writing test is 0.802 (>0.05), which also demonstrate that Choosing these two groups to carry out this study is appropriate, the students had difficulty in acquiring this kind of grammar item.

Table 3. Paired samples t-test of the pretest and post-test about gap-filling test

Classes	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval		t	Sig. (2-tailed)
			Lower	Upper		
Control class	2.534	2.062	3.077	1.992	9.359	0.000
Experimental class	4.059	2.908	4.877	3.241	9.968	0.000

According to table 3, it demonstrates learners in the control class have obtained improvement in the accuracy use of target language in the post test. ($\text{sig}=.000<0.5$). In the meantime, learners in the Experimental class also has obtained improvement in the accuracy use of target language ($\text{sig}=.000<0.5$). In other words, it demonstrates that CF has a short term effect on the accuracy use of the non-finite verbs in tap-filling test.

Table 4. Paired samples t-test of the pretest and delayed post-test about gap-filling test

Classes	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval		t	Sig. (2-tailed)
			Lower	Upper		
Control class	3.448	2.341	4.064	2.833	11.219	0.000
Experimental class	5.137	2.577	5.862	4.412	14.237	0.000

Different CF may have different long-term influence on the accuracy use of non-finite verbs in gap-filling test. Table 4 demonstrates that Compared with post-test, CF has a long-term influence of the accuracy use of the non-finite verbs in the tap-filling test. Table 4.3and Table 4.4 reveal that CF has a continuous effect on promoting the accuracy use of non-finite verbs.

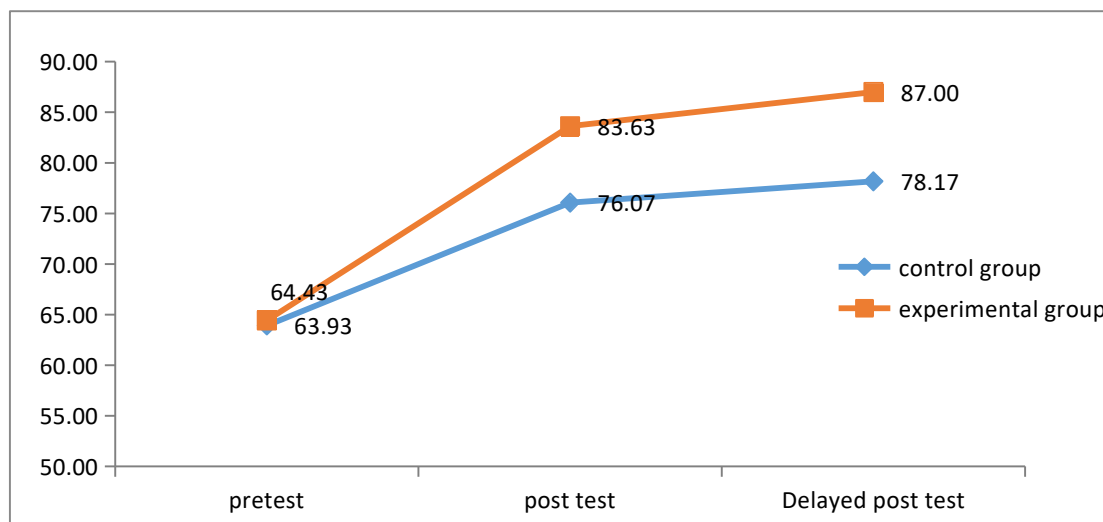


Figure 1. Comparison of the mean scores about writing between the experimental group and control group

In Figure 1, these two lines in the line chart indicate the change of the mean scores in these writing tests. The blue line stands for the control group. The red line, in contrast, stands for the control group. It is obvious that these two groups all made a continuous progress, but the progress made by the experimental group was more dramatic. Figure 1 offers a strong evidence to support the findings of paired sample t-test.

5. Conclusion

Based on the comparison of the scores of gap-filling tests, it can be easily found that the scores in the post-test and delayed test were higher than the pretest, which demonstrated students had made a progress in the accurate use of non-finite verbs over time. In other words, CF is conducive to correcting errors in writing. Besides, both focused group and unfocused group used the direct corrective feedback as the feedback strategy, which refuted the viewpoint of Green and Hetch (1992) that explicit CF cannot promote the acquisition of grammar rules. By making students understand the importance of non-finite verbs and encouraging them to use this grammar item in their writing to improve their writing, this study is a valid evidence to prove that CF can help students to acquire the complex language structure.

Through the comparative analysis of these two groups in the pretest, post-test and delayed test about gap-filling, researcher found that these two groups had a significant difference in the accurate use of non-finite verbs. The students who received focused direct feedback were superior to the students who received unfocused direct feedback on the accurate use of non-finite verb both in the short term and long term, which demonstrate that focused direct feedback is more efficacious than unfocused corrective feedback to help students to improve the accurate use of non-finite verb.

In conclusion, this study proves that CF can have a positive effect on the master of non-finite verbs and teachers need to focused direct feedback than unfocused direct feedback.

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