

The Impact of Metalinguistic and Learners' Uptake Feedbacks on Second Language Writing

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Abstract: *This study was conducted to investigate the impact of metalinguistic and learners' uptake feedbacks on second language writing. To do so, 90 female Persian-speaking EFL learners studying English at Gooyesh Language Institute were chosen as the participants of the study. Then, they were randomly assigned to one of the three groups, a control (group A) and two experimental groups (Metalinguistic and Uptake). At first, a pre-test was given to students in the first session and the students wrote a paragraph about a given topic. Then, they were taking the writing course and the first seven chapters of Zemach and Rumisek's (2003) Academic Writing: from paragraph to essay were used as the main course book taught to students in ten sessions. Finally, One day after the experimental intervention ended, the post-test was administered to all participants in order to test the hypothesis of the study. Then Analytic Scale for Rating Composition Tasks by Brown and Bailey (1985) was employed for the scoring procedure (by three raters). At the end, appropriate statistical operations, including t-test, were used to analyze the data. The results indicated that metalinguistic and learners' uptake feedbacks are effective on second language writing.*

Keywords: *Metalinguistic, Uptake, feedback, Second language writing*

How language learners develop their writing skills has been the main focus of attention in second language acquisition (SLA) research. Researchers have tried to find answers to some questions faced with in language classroom such as learning to write in second language and teaching writing skills in the most effective ways. Language teachers, on the other hand, are more concerned with questions such as the role of input enhancement in teaching writing skill, the effective way to correct second language students' writing, the factors affect second language writing, and the efficiency of each type of corrective feedback. In fact, teaching writing, in particular, to speakers of other languages is a controversial issue in the TESL/TEFL research. Researchers have applied and tested many methods of teaching writing, and the argument remains on how writing tasks should be corrected, and what type of corrective feedback should be provided to language learners.

Generally speaking, corrective feedbacks have been categorized into explicit and implicit ones. An influential study on the use of different types of corrective feedback by Lyster and Ranta (1997, pp. 46-48) has shown that teachers generally use six different feedback types when correcting learners' errors: explicit correction, recast, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, repetition, and clarification request. The role of input enhancement is to make some forms of the second/foreign language more salient in order to draw the language learners' attention to them (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). In recent researches, uptake is not considered a feedback but an inseparable part of feedback, Sheen (2004).

2. Literature review

Writing is considered as one of the most important aspects of the language learning process, in second language instruction and evaluation, researchers have been concerned with the way they can improve this decisive skill. One strategy, actually, to consider writing accurately is to take into account the errors made by the writers by paying attention to this fact that writing in the target language is not an effortless job for L2 learners, and L2 teachers are responsible to help them in order to improve their writing proficiency. Generally, the occurrence of errors depends on the way of correcting them by teachers; therefore, written feedback is an essential aspect of any English language writing course.

2.1. Corrective Feedback

Lightbown and Spada (1999) (as cited in Tatawy, 2001) defined CF as any indication to the learners that their use of the target language is incorrect. CF includes various responses that the learners receive, and they believed that CF can be explicit or implicit.

2.1.1. Different types of corrective feedback

2.1.1.1. Recast

One type of CF that has received much attention in the field of SLA is recast. Recasts refer to the reformulation of the whole or part of the learner's erroneous part into a correct form. The reformulation not only provides the learner with the correct form but may also signal to the learner that his or her written output is deviant in some way.

Additionally, Ellis and Sheen (2006) argued recasts are of various types including corrective recasts, corrective/non-corrective recasts, full/partial recasts, single/multiple recasts, single utterance/extended utterance recasts, and simple/complex recasts. In the 1980s, the definition of recasts was further divided into simple and complex recasts.

2.1.1.2. Explicit feedback

Feedback that carries explicit error correction falls at the explicit extreme on the continuum of corrective feedback, the teacher clearly indicates that the student's utterance (production) was

incorrect by providing the correct form. Explicit error correction is characterized by an overt and clear indication of the existence of an error and the provision of the target-like reformulation. According to Ellis, Bastukmen, and Loewen (2001) explicit feedback can take two forms:

- □ Explicit correction: This type of corrective feedback provides both positive and negative evidence by clearly saying that what the learner has produced is erroneous, e.g. No, not goed - went.
- □ Meta-linguistic feedback: It is defined as comments, information, or questions related to the well-formed learners' utterance.

2.1.1.3. Clarification request

By using phrases like "Excuse me?" or "I don't understand," the teacher indicates that the message has not been understood or that the student's utterance contained some kind of mistake and that a repetition or a reformulation is required.

2.1.1.4. Meta-linguistic feedback

The teacher indicates the presence of an error by providing verbal and linguistic clues inviting the learner to self-correct (e.g., "Do we say it like that?", and "It's masculine").

2.1.1.5. Elicitation

According to Panova and Lyster (2002), elicitation is a correction technique that helps the learner to self-correct and may be accomplished in one of three ways during face-to-face interaction:

- Through requests for reformulation of an ill-formed utterance (e.g. Say that again? or did you say that right?)
- Through the use of open questions (e.g. How do we say X in French?), and
- Through the use of strategic pauses to allow a learner to complete an utterance.

In other words, the teacher directly elicits the correct form from learners by using questions or by pausing to elicit completion of learners' utterances or by asking learners to reformulate their utterances.

2.1.1.6. Repetition

The teacher repeats the learners' erroneous forms and adjusts intonation on the error to draw attention to the incorrect form.

The six corrective feedback techniques outlined above can be classified as input providing as is the case with reformulations and explicit feedback because the correct form is provided by the teacher or output eliciting as in repetition, meta-linguistic feedback, elicitation and clarification requests because the teacher refuses to give the correct form and pushes the learner to self-correct.

2.2. Corrective Feedback and Uptake

Uptake is a key term in studies on CF. According to applied Longman dictionary, it has mainly two definitions: 1) "the illocutionary force a hearer interprets from an utterance. For example in the following exchange:

Child: *I'm tired.*

Mother: *You can stop doing your homework now.*

The uptake or interpretation by the mother is as if the child had said "Can I stop doing my homework now?" But sometimes there may be a difference between the intended uptake (what the speaker wants the hearer to understand) and the actual uptake (what the hearer actually understands)" and 2) "in interactionist SLA, a learner's response to feedback that acknowledges that feedback in some way, for example, when a learner repeats a teacher's correction or incorporates it into a subsequent utterance"(p.619).

There are two types of uptake, namely *repair* and *needs- repair*. *Repair* refers to instances when the student manages to produce the correct form after the teacher's feedback, it can be in the form of repetition or incorporation. Repetition refers to instances when the learner repeats the correct form supplied by the teacher. Incorporation, on the other hand, corresponds to episodes in which the learner incorporates the teacher's correction in a larger context.

Another type of uptake is *needs repair* that includes six sub-categories:

1. **Acknowledgement** in which the learner responds to the teacher's feedback by simply saying "yes" or "yeah".
2. **Same error** is where the learner repeats his initial error despite the feedback.
3. **Different error** corresponds to instances in which the learner produces an error other than the one that the teacher corrected in his own uptake.
4. **Off target** refers to uptake that is unrelated to form target by the teacher's feedback.
5. **Hesitation** corresponds to instances in which the student hesitates to respond to the teacher's feedback.
6. **Partial repair** which refers to student reactions that include a correction of parts of the initial error.

2.3. EFL/ESL Studies of Corrective Feedback in L2 Writing

Most studies on error correction in L2 writing classes have provided evidence that students who receive error feedback from teachers improve their writing overtime.

Bitchener (2008) presented the results of a two-month study of the efficacy of written CF to 75 low intermediate international ESL students in Auckland, New Zealand. The study found that the accuracy of students who received written CF in the immediate post-test outperformed those in the control group, and that this level of performance was retained two months later.

Similarly, Farrokhi and Sattarpour (2012) reported the findings of a study that explored (1) whether direct written CF can help high-proficient L2 learners, who has already achieved a rather high level of accuracy in English, improve in the accurate use of two functions of English articles (the use of 'a' for first mention and 'the' for subsequent or anaphoric mentions); and (2) whether there are any differential effects in providing the two different types of direct written CF (focused and unfocused) on the accurate use of these grammatical forms by these EFL learners. In this study, sixty high-proficient L2 learners formed a control group and two experimental groups. One experimental group received focused written CF and the other experimental group received unfocused written CF, while the control group received no feedback. The statistical analyses indicated that both experimental groups did better than control group in the post-test, and moreover, focused group significantly outperformed unfocused one in terms of accurate use of definite and indefinite English articles. Overall, these results suggested that focused written CF is more effective than unfocused one; at least where English articles are concerned, in improving grammatical accuracy of high-proficient L2 writers, and thus strengthens the case for teachers providing focused written CF.

A further distinction that needs to be examined is between 'unfocused' and 'focused' CF. These two types of written CF can be provided either directly or indirectly, but nearly all the studies comparing the effects of these two CF types have used them in direct way. Sheen (2007) examined the effects of focused CF on the development of 91 adult ESL learners' accuracy in the use of two types of articles ('the' and 'a'). The study included a direct only group (the researcher indicated errors and provided correct forms), a direct-meta-linguistic group (the researcher indicated errors, provided correct forms, and supplied meta-linguistic explanations), and a control group.

To date only a few numbers of studies have focused on comparing the effects of focused and unfocused CF. For the first time, Ellis, Sheen, Takashima and Murakami (2008) compared the effects of direct focused and direct unfocused CF on the accurate use of English definite and indefinite articles and reported that both focused and unfocused CF groups gained from pre-test to post-tests on both an error correction test and on a test involving a new piece of narrative writing and also outperformed a control group, which received no correction, on the second posttest. Therefore, the CF was equally effective for the focused and unfocused groups. However, as mentioned by Sheen, Wright, and Moldawa (2009), one of the methodological problems with this study, acknowledged by the authors, was that the focused and unfocused CF were not sufficiently distinguished (i.e., article corrections figured strongly in both) and, another limitation of this study was that their measure of learning involved just one structure – articles (i.e., they did not examine whether focused CF had any effect, on the accuracy of structures not targeted by the CF).

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Participants of the study were female Persian-speaking EFL learners studying English at Gooyesh Language Institute. Their ages ranged between 18 and 25, and they were taking the writing course after passing at least ten terms in the institute or having studied English somewhere else ,but they were in the same level (upper-intermediate).

3.2. Instruments

First of all, in order to place the participants in relevant groups, an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was used. The second instrument was a pre-test given to students in the first session and the students wrote a paragraph about a given topic. The third instrument used in this study, was a posttest. One day after the experimental intervention ended, the post-test was administered to all participants in order to test the hypothesis of the study.

3.3. Materials

A book entitled: *Academic Writing: from Paragraph to Essay*: The first seven chapters of Zemach and Rumisek's (2003) *Academic Writing: from paragraph to essay* were used as the main course book taught to students in ten-sessions. The reason for choosing the first seven chapters was that; these chapters dealt specifically with paragraph development. The second material used in this study were paragraph writing tasks; Each section the teacher chose one topic for all the participants and they were asked to write about it.

3.4 Procedures

Initially, in order to see if the participants were homogenous or not, an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administrated to 120 EFL learners. Those learners who scored between 67 and 74 were chosen as the upper-intermediate level students and 90 of them were selected as the participants of the study. First, a pre-test was given to them to write a paragraph about a given topic. Second, they were randomly divided into 3 groups namely; metalinguistic, uptake, and control groups. Then, the participants were taking the writing course and the first seven chapters of Zemach and Rumisek's (2003) *Academic Writing: from paragraph to essay* were used as the main course book taught to students in ten-sessions. Additionally, the teacher explained about the book materials and gave the learners copies of the book and explained the criteria and rating procedure to them (the teacher for three groups was the same). Participants were also given instructions in writing by highlighting certain aspects of input by means of various typographic devices, such as bolding, underlining and italicizing through Word office. During the course, participants of the uptake group received feedbacks only through typographic ways (italicizing, bolding, underlining) while participants of the metalinguistic group received feedbacks through metalinguistic hints and typographic ways. The control group received no feedback. One day

after the experiment finished, a post test was given to all participants to investigate the efficiency of providing metalinguistic and eliciting uptake on Iranian EFL writing for the participants who met in ten sessions of writing class. Correcting procedure was done electronically, using the Review section of MS Office. Analytic Scale for Rating Composition Tasks by Brown and Bailey (1985) was employed for the scoring procedure. The teacher used this scoring grid during the course to grade each composition written by the learners and the learners' scores were reported to them; in addition, three raters scored the pre-test and post-test tasks to increase the reliability of scoring

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results for Control, Metalinguistic, and Uptake groups' Pretests

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 respectively, indicate the descriptive statistics and the results of the ANOVA for learners' pretests in these three groups (Metalinguistic, Uptake, and Control).

Group	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Min	Max
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
control	30	13.600	1.632	.298	12.991	14.209	10.00	16.00
Metalinguistic	30	13.200	1.648	.301	12.585	13.816	10.00	16.00
Uptake	30	13.667	1.422	.260	13.136	14.198	10.00	17.00
Total	90	13.489	1.567	.165	13.161	13.817	10.00	17.00

Table 4.2

ANOVA for Control, Metalinguistic, and Uptake Groups' Pretests

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.822	2	1.911	.775	.464
Within Groups	214.667	87	2.467		
Total	218.489	89			

As the results indicate, the observed differences were not significant ($p=.464$). Thus, it can be concluded that the groups performed almost similarly from the starting point.

4.2. Results for Control Group Pretest and Posttest

Table 4.3 presents the descriptive statistics for control group pretest and posttest. To compare the control group results before and after treatment a matched t-test was run (Table4.4).

Table 4.3

Descriptive Statistics for Control Group Pretest and Posttest

	Mean	N	SD	SEM
Pair 1 pretest	13.600	30	1.632	.298
posttest	13.667	30	1.688	.308

Table 4.4

The Results of Matched-Paired T-test for Control Group

		Paired Differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig.
		Mean	SD	SEM	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	pretest posttest	-.0667	1.507	.275	-.629	.496	-.242	29	.810

Given the information in Table 4.4, one can clearly see that there is no significant difference in the scores obtained ($0.810 > 0.05$).

One can see in Table 4.5 that the mean scores obtained before and after treatment have been different. Having gained some rudimentary information about the differences in the performance across the treatment, the researcher had to determine whether or not the observed differences were significant at the critical value (Sig.) of $p < 0.05$. On a closer inspection of Table 4.6, one can conclude that observed differences were significant ($.000 < .001$).

Consequently, it can be concluded that presenting metalinguistic has a significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' paragraph writing abilities because the learners' performance was shown to have improved significantly.

Table 4.5

Descriptive Statistics for Metalinguistic Group pretest and posttest

		Mean	N	SD	SEM
Pair 1	pretest	13.200	30	1.648	.301
	posttest	16.733	30	1.574	.287

Table 4.6

The Results of Matched-Paired T-test for Metalinguistic Group

	Paired Differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig.
	Mean	SD	SEM	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 pretest - posttest	-3.533	1.871	.342	-4.232	-2.835	-10.346	29	.000

Table 4.7 reveals that the mean scores obtained before and after treatment have been different. Having gained some rudimentary information about the performance across the treatment, the researcher had to determine whether or not the observed differences were significant at the critical value (Sig.) of $p < 0.05$. On a closer inspection of Table 4.8, one can conclude that

observed differences were significant ($p=.000$). Thus it can be concluded that eliciting uptake has a significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' writing abilities.

Table 4.7

Descriptive Statistics for Uptake Group Pretest and Posttest

		Mean	N	SD	SEM
Pair 1	pretest	13.667	30	1.422	.260
	posttest	17.467	30	1.432	.261

Table 4.8

The Results of Matched-Paired T-test for Uptake Group

Group	Paired Differences						t	df	Sig.
	Mean	SD	SEM	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
				Lower	Upper				
Pair 1 pretest - posttest	-3.800	1.584	.289	-4.391	-3.208	-13.136	29	.000	

4.3. Control, Metalinguistic, and Uptake groups

The performance of all three groups were shown in Table 4.9. To this end, one-way ANOVA was conducted. Table 4.10 indicates the results of the ANOVA. However, the information in Table 4.10 does not reveal where the observed differences lie. The researcher therefore ran a Bonferroni Post-hoc test. This post-hoc test indicates where the differences occur. Table 4.11 provides the results of the post-hoc test. In the above table, if there is an asterisk (*) next to the values listed in the second column, this means that the groups being compared are significantly different from one another at the $p<0.05$ level. Accordingly, it can be claimed that there is not a significant difference between Metalinguistic group and uptake group with regard to Iranian EFL learners' writing abilities.

Table 4.9

Descriptive statistics for Comparing Control, Metalinguistic, and Uptake Groups

Group	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Min	Max
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
control	30	13.667	1.688	.308	13.036	14.297	10.00	17.00
Metalinguistic	30	16.733	1.574	.287	16.146	17.321	13.00	20.00
Uptake	30	17.467	1.432	.261	16.932	18.001	14.00	20.00
Total	90	15.956	2.268	.239	15.481	16.431	10.00	20.00

Table 4.10

ANOVA for Control, Metalinguistic, and Uptake Groups' Posttest

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	243.822	2	121.911	49.562	.000
Within Groups	214.000	87	2.460		
Total	457.822	89			

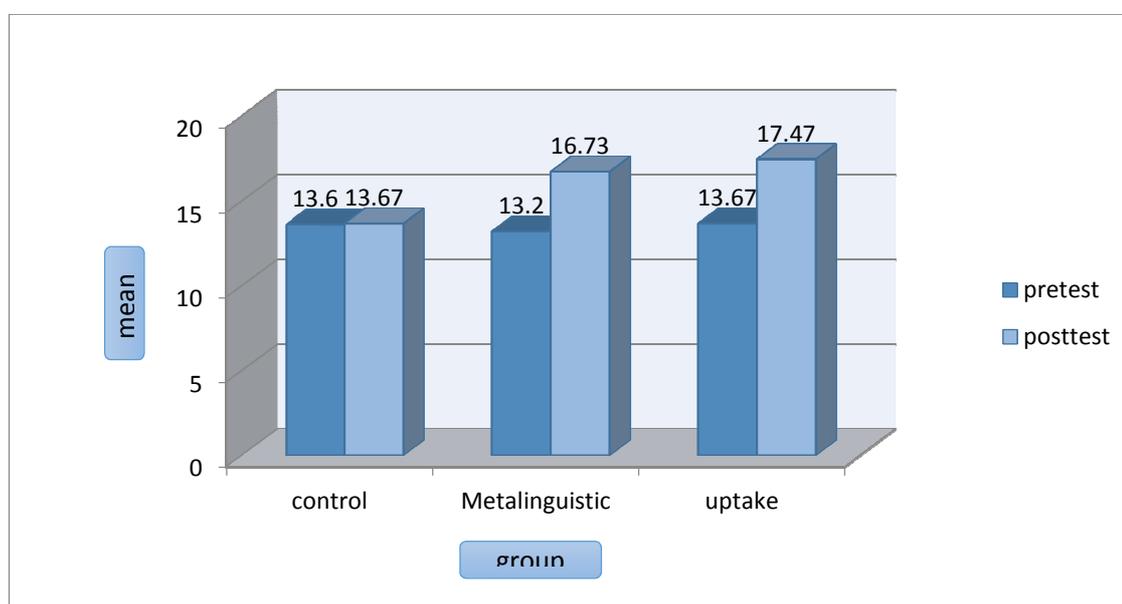
Table 4.11

The Results of Multiple Comparisons Bonferroni for the Posttest

Group	Group	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
control	Metalinguistic	-3.067 [*]	.405	.000	-4.055	-2.078
	Uptake	-3.800 [*]	.405	.000	-4.789	-2.812

Metalinguistic	control	3.067*	.405	.000	2.078	4.055
	Uptake	-.733	.405	.221	-1.722	.255
Uptake	control	3.800*	.405	.000	2.812	4.789
	Metalinguistic	.733	.405	.221	-.2552	1.722

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



The study was in fact an attempt to see the effect of two CF types on Iranian EFL learners' paragraph writing. It indicated that providing meta-linguistic and eliciting uptake is significant to enhance learners' writing skills.

To state it differently, providing learners with the correct form of their errors in their writing tasks seems to be more effective than being simply scored. Providing meta-linguistic gives the learners the chance to learn writing skills rules better.

The results of this study also reflect the fact that, the positive effect of eliciting uptake is transparent. Self-correction after an implicit feedback, may result in "discovery learning" which is supported from different theoretical positions as "experiential learning," "deep processing," "self-investment," "noticing," and "psychological readiness". (Tomlinson, 2007)

Considering uptake group and meta-linguistic group, the results indicate that while both meta-linguistic and uptake participants outperformed those of the control group, there was no significant difference between the performance of the participants in the meta-linguistic and uptake groups.

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