RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE IMPACT OF INDIRECT CODED VS. NON-CODED FEEDBACK ON IRANIAN ACADEMIC EFL LEARNERS' WRITING ACCURACY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the current study was to investigate the impact of indirect feedback on improving Iranian EFL learners' writing accuracy. Self-correcting and self-editing strategies were utilized as the two major criteria for assessing Iranian students' writing accuracy. To conduct the study, 51 pre-intermediate learners majoring in English literature at Urmia University were selected as the participants of the study. Then, the participants were randomly assigned to three groups, i.e. indirect coded feedback group, indirect non-coded feedback group, and control group. The learners in all groups were then required to write a composition and self-correct its second draft based on the feedback received from the instructor (control group received no treatment). Next, the participants were involved in a third writing task in which they were supposed to self-edit their writings. The final analysis of the obtained data through running independent samples t-test and ANOVA revealed that indirect feedback had a significant effect on improving Iranian students' writing accuracy. Indeed, both experimental groups were found to have acquired more self-correction ability than the control group. Outcomes also revealed that indirect coded feedback group had more self-editing ability than indirect non-coded feedback and control groups. Finally, indirect coded and non-coded feedback groups showed differential self-editing ability in the third draft.

INTRODUCTION

Error feedback plays a significant part in teaching writing. Learners, at times, need to be placed on the right track to be able to reflect on their use of language. Indeed, the provision of feedback to learners regarding their errors creates an appropriate groundwork for the appropriate negotiation of problematic areas in learners' language production. To move in line with Corder's (1981) assertion, errors provide the instructors with critical information regarding the progress of their learners, give the researchers valuable information concerning the learners' language learning processes, and help the learners themselves follow the right path for language learning (cited in Pongsiriwet, 2001).

The term corrective feedback (CF) refers to "any reaction of the teacher which clearly transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demands improvement of the learner utterance" (Chaudron, 1977, p. 31, cited in Vaezi, Zand-Vakili, & Fard Kashani, 2011). A variety of feedback types can be employed to improve students' accuracy in writing. Two renowned categories of corrective feedback are the so-called direct and indirect types. Direct feedback involves the teachers' identifying the learners' errors and applying direct corrections on them, whereas indirect feedback, as the name reveals, entails teachers' signaling the error spots and requiring the students to self-correct their errors. Further categorization of indirect feedback divides it to coded and non-coded classes. Through these two types of indirect feedback, the learners are provided with ample time to correct their own errors.

In effect, this manner of categorizing feedback types originates from the work of Robb, et al. (1986, cited in Hong, 2004) who divided indirect feedback to coded, non-coded, and marginal feedback. The distinction between these three kinds of feedback, as they put it, lies in the manner in which the teacher feeds the learners back on their errors. Hence, while the first type involves the teachers' signaling the error types via using a coding scheme, the second requires underlining or circling errors, and the last one is done through writing the number of errors of each line in the margin.

The present study aimed at pinpointing the potential effects of providing indirect coded and non-coded feedback on Iranian EFL learners' self-correction and self-editing abilities in writing. The main theory behind performing the current scrutiny was Schmidt's (1990, 2001) Noticing Hypothesis, according to which conscious attention is said to act as the leading factor in changing input to intake. In line with the objectives of the current study, the following research questions were put forth:
RQ1: Do indirect coded feedback and indirect non-coded feedback have a significant effect on Iranian academic EFL learners’ ability to self-correct grammatical errors in a second draft of writing?

RQ2: Do indirect coded feedback and indirect non-coded feedback have a significant effect on Iranian academic EFL learners’ ability to self-edit grammatical errors in a new piece of writing?

RQ3: Is there a significant difference between the self-editing ability of indirect coded and non-coded feedback groups and that of control group in a new piece of writing?

Literature Review

Though it seems that behavioral psychologists were the first scholars who highlighted the salience of attending to errors (Williams & Burden, 1997), their extremist approach to error correction is not utterly endorsed on the part of pioneers of corrective feedback. As Ellis (1985, cited in Wang, 2008) puts it, in the behaviorists’ radical view toward error correction, which later turned to a methodology for contrastive analysts advocating the strong version, errors were regarded as the result of non-learning, rather than wrong learning. But in either case, there was almost total agreement that errors should be avoided. To this end, attempts were made to predict when they would occur. By comparing the L1 with the TL, differences could be identified and used to predict areas of potential errors. In this way classroom practice could be directed on the problem areas in order to help the learner overcome the negative effects of L1 transfer (p. 183).

On the contemporary error analysts’ agenda for dealing with learners’ errors, however, errors are not ill-treated anymore as signs of abnormal linguistic behavior; instead they are thought to assist learners to get insights into what goes on in their interlanguage system.

In view of the fact that corrective feedback has turned to a popular catch term in EFL and SLA research, and manifold studies, particularly in the present decade, have grappled with exploring various facets of this appealing notion, the literature review provided in this section is merely after briefing the most recent research in the domain of corrective feedback.

In an early study on the role of corrective feedback on learners’ writing performance, Chuang (2009) organized a probe into the effects of three different types of corrective feedback on 119 intermediate EFL Taiwanese learners. The distinct feedback types applied to the experimental groups were coded corrective teacher feedback followed by peer feedback and student-teacher conference, teacher feedback followed by student-teacher conference and mere direct feedback. As the findings of this study helped reveal, the first and second groups were characterized by better performance compared to the third experimental group and the control group with regard to the use of verb and noun endings in their post-review writings.

Sheen, Wright and Moldawa (2009) were interested in exploring the influence of direct focused and unfocused written correction as well as the sole writing practice on the accurate use of grammatical forms. To implement the investigation, they benefited from 80 adult ESL intermediate learners (in one control and three experimental groups). As the results manifested, while all three experimental groups performed significantly better than the control group in terms of grammatical accuracy in writing tasks, focused group gained the highest scores, followed by writing practice group, and finally unfocused group.

Rouhi and Samiei (2010) organized a similar campaign with the aim of probing the effects of focused and unfocused indirect feedback on EFL learners’ accurate use of simple past. The participants of their study were 60 Azeri students and the means of data collection were a short response test, an error correction test, a fill in the blank test and a narrative writing test. To apply the treatment all past tense errors were underlined in the focused feedback group, whereas for the unfocused group all kinds of structure errors were underlined. Based on the findings, the use of focused and unfocused indirect feedback had resulted in no significant difference in the performance of three groups.

In another investigation over the long-term effects of teacher feedback on EFL learners’ writing accuracy, Binglan and Jia (2010) investigated whether teacher feedback could be efficient in improving EFL students’ writing accuracy. The treatment utilized in the experimental group encompassed providing error corrections and giving comments to learners concerning structure, coherence, content, etc. Control group participants, on the other hand, simply received general commentary without error correction. The results pointed toward the fruitfulness of the implemented feedback strategies in augmenting the learners’ writing accuracy. Furthermore, as the researchers claimed, error corrections and explicit marginal illustrations had brought about long-term enhancement in the learners’ writing accuracy.

In a similar vein, Soori and Abd. Samad (2011) strived to gauge the effectiveness of immediate and delayed corrective feedback with a focus on the learners’ use of English definite and indefinite articles. The participants of their study were some 51 EFL freshmen majoring in medicine. The treatment applied to the experimental group participants was in the form of direct corrective feedback, whereas the one carried out in the control group involved the mere indication of location of errors for the learners to do the self-correction. Altogether, the findings of the study were in favor of the significant effect of direct corrective feedback on the learners’ proper use of English articles. This enhanced performance on the part of experimental group participants was also witnessed on the delayed posttest.

In another scrutiny performed by Baleghizadeh and Dadashi (2011), the effect of direct and indirect corrective feedback on junior high school students’ accuracy in English spelling was explored. To this aim, 44 male students were selected and assigned to two separate groups. Their treatment entailed the provision of direct and indirect feedback to two groups regarding the participants’ spelling errors. In tandem with the gained upshots, they claimed that indirect feedback had more significant effect than direct feedback in correcting students’ spelling errors.

In like manner, Farrokhi and Sattarpour (2012) investigated the efficacy of direct written corrective feedback for enhancing L2 learners’ correct use of English definite and indefinite articles. The study was conducted with 60 learners who enjoyed a high level of proficiency, and were divided to one control and two experimental groups. Another objective of
this study was finding the differential impact of direct focused and unfocused written CF on EFL learners’ proper use of English articles. Though both experimental groups outperformed the control group, the performance of focused feedback group was much better than the unfocused one.

In an attempt aimed at exploring the learners’ attitudes toward the impact of teacher feedback, peer feedback, and teacher-peer feedback on ESL learners’ writing, Maazof, Yamat and Li (2011) surveyed a sample of five secondary school classes, comprising a total of 150 students. The final analysis of data gathered through questionnaire administration revealed the learners’ preference toward teacher and peer feedback type.

In a similar probe, Jodaie and Farrokhi (2012) surveyed EFL teachers’ perceptions concerning written grammar feedback. The attitudes of the thirty participant taking part in the study were tapped through questionnaire analysis. Based on the gained upshots through this study, the majority of participants had evaluated the use of written grammatical feedback as a positive trend. Furthermore, as the findings revealed, they had preferred the use of direct feedback rather than the indirect one.

In like manner, Farrah (2012) explored the learners’ outlook toward the impact of peer feedback on students’ written performance. The participants of this study were 150 university students. Drawing on the obtained results, based on the learners’ viewpoints regarding the efficacy of peer feedback, the researcher pointed out that learners had assessed peer feedback as a useful technique in triggering interaction among peers as well as a practical tool for enhancing their writing skills.

Finally, Shirazi and Sadeghi (2012) made use of recasts and elicitation procedure to organize another scrutiny with 60 EFL learners who were divided into three separate groups (Two experimental and one control). The researchers in this study came up with a significant difference between the performance of two experimental groups and that of control group (on both immediate and delayed posttests), as a result of the treatment applied. They also found that learners who received elicitations had better performance than those who were treated through recast.

The studies listed in this section represent only a small fraction of the vast body of research performed on varied aspects of corrective feedback and its applications in diverse facets of pedagogical endeavors. Though a great deal has been revealed with regard to various applications of corrective feedback in educational settings, there still seems a paucity of research in the domain of indirect coded versus non-coded feedback and its effects on various aspects of learners’ written/grammatical accuracy, a major gap in the literature toward which the current study is targeted.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

A total of 51 (24 male and 27 female) EFL learners studying at Urmia University participated in the current study. These learners were within the age range of 19 to 21, and in terms of language proficiency they were found to be at the pre-intermediate level. They attended the university four days a week. To conduct the research, the participants were randomly assigned to two experimental groups (indirect coded and non-coded feedback groups) and one control group. Thus, an equal number of students was present in each of the three groups.

**Instruments**

At the outset of the study, Key English Test (KET) was utilized as the means of homogenizing learners in terms of language proficiency. There were 56 questions in KET and students were to reply the test items in a matter of 70 minutes. The test comprised five parts: In part one, there were 5 sentences and 8 notices, and the students were supposed to match the notices with the sentences. Part two involved themed sentences with gaps, and was intended to test students’ vocabulary. Part three was composed of two kinds of tests. At first, students were required to complete 5 conversations in multiple choice format, which were then to be matched with the correct answers. Then, they had to complete another set of 5 conversations and match them with the correct responses. Part four entailed reading a partially long text and answering 8 comprehension questions based on that. Finally, in part five the learners were demanded to read a shorter text and fill in 9 blanks in the multiple choice questions that followed. The other major tool for data collection in the present investigation was the learners’ written work which appeared in three separate drafts. It’s worth noting that the second and third pieces of writing were included as the reflections of learners’ self-correction and self-editing abilities, respectively.

**Data Collection and Analysis Procedure**

Successive to the administration of KET and homogenization of learners, the remaining 51 students were randomly divided into three (one control and two experimental) groups. The participants in each of the two experimental groups were then exposed to a different kind of feedback. **Indirect coded feedback** group received feedback regarding the places at which errors had occurred. Indeed, one of the researchers in the current study provided the feedback for this group by first underlining the places of errors and then using codes or written symbols to show the error types to the participants in this group. **Indirect non-coded feedback** group received the same kind of treatment, yet without codification of errors. In effect, the treatment in this group went on by the same researcher underlining the errors and making them bold-faced. The control group participants, however, didn’t receive any indirect feedback regarding their errors from the researcher and were required to reformulate their compositions on their own.

All in all, data collection procedure was carried out over a period of five sessions. During the first session, KET proficiency test was applied to learners. On the second session, the researcher provided the learners in all three groups with a topic (Summer Vacation) on which they were supposed to write a composition in 40 minutes and in no less than 100 words. On the following session, the researcher returned the compositions to the students. Two experimental groups received indirect feedback, whereas the control group received no such feedback. During the fourth session, all students participated in self-correction task for 30 minutes. Students revised their compositions and submitted the second draft of first composition to the researcher. Finally, the fifth session was allotted to introducing a new topic (The Effect of Technology on Human Life) along with some relevant key words to the learners in three groups and asking them to write
the third draft (a new piece of writing) within 40 minutes. Yet, this time, no feedback was provided for the two experimental groups, and the students went through self-editing process. For codification of errors, eight error types were considered and introduced to learners prior to their involvement with the writing tasks. The chosen labels for coding the errors were adopted from Erel and Bulut (2007), and encompassed the categories of Word Order, Article (definite and indefinite articles), Preposition, Possessive Marker (‘s/s’), Subject and Verb Agreement, Pronouns (object pronoun, subject pronoun, possessive pronoun, self-pronoun, and relative pronoun), Tenses (simple present tense, simple past tense, past continuous tense, present perfect tense, and past perfect tense) and Missing Tenses. The scale based on which the students' written compositions were scored was set at 100. The analysis of the collected data was mainly done through running ANOVA and T-test analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings Gained for the First Research Question

RQ1: Do indirect coded feedback and indirect non-coded feedback have a significant effect on Iranian academic EFL learners' ability to self-correct grammatical errors in a second draft of writing?

Due to the fact that two kinds of feedback (indirect coded and non-coded) are dealt with simultaneously in the first research question, the analysis of data for this section will be presented in two separate sections and under two distinct headings, i.e., The Effect of Indirect Coded Feedback on Learners' Self-Correction and The Effect of Indirect Non-Coded Feedback on Learners' Self-Correction.

The Effect of Indirect Coded Feedback on Learners' Self-Correction

As Figure 1 helps reveal, indirect coded feedback group has outperformed the control group in terms of all the eight categories of grammatical self-corrections applied in the second draft.

Findings Gained for the Second Research Question

RQ2: Do indirect coded feedback and indirect non-coded feedback have a significant effect on Iranian academic EFL learners' ability to self-edit grammatical errors in a new piece of writing?

To create a more reader-friendly account of the gained results, akin to the previous research question, the researchers are going to present the results under two other separate headings entitled The Effect of Indirect Coded Feedback on Learners' Self-Editing and The Effect of Indirect Non-Coded Feedback on Learners' Self-Editing.

The Effect of Indirect Coded Feedback on Learners' Self-Editing

Drawing on what is illustrated in Figure 3, it can be inferred that indirect coded group participants have outperformed their counterparts in the control group in terms of the self-editing ability applied to all eight categories determined in the study.

Moreover, in tandem with the gained upshots through running independent samples t-test analysis (the result of which has been briefed in Table 3), it is indicated that indirect coded feedback group participants were characterized by a significantly better self-editing ability.
in the case of Article, Subject and Verb Agreement, Tense, Possessive Marker, and Pronoun ($p < .05$). This piece of finding can be regarded as partial evidence in favor of the postulation that the provision of indirect coded feedback to the learners can significantly affect their general self-editing ability.

**The Effect of Indirect Non-Coded Feedback on Learners' Self-Editing**

A brief glance at Figure 4 helps grasp the difference between the performance of participants in indirect non-coded feedback group and the control group.
Though it appears tempting to take this as ample proof for the verity of the researchers’ credence in fruitfulness of their applied treatment in the indirect non-coded group, further evidence is called for to be able to confirm this postulation. However, as the results of independent samples t-test depict, no significant difference exists between the self-editing performance of two groups in terms of the eight constituents listed in the Table 4.

Findings Gained for the Third Research Question

RQ3: Is there a significant difference between the self-editing ability of indirect coded and non-coded feedback groups and that of control group in a new piece of writing?

The comparison of the self-editing performance of all three groups, illustrated in Figure 5, is indicative of the fact that indirect coded feedback group has acted better than the other two groups, i.e. indirect non-coded and control group, concerning the self-editing ability for the eight categories involved.

Table 3 Independent Samples T-test Run for the Effect of Indirect Coded Feedback on Learners’ Self-Editing Ability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of errors</th>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coded feedback</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.62</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.86</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>1.41</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subject Verb Agreement</td>
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<td>2.95</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.60</td>
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<td>.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Word order</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
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<td>.43</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>.83</td>
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<td>Coded feedback</td>
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<td>.00</td>
<td>.96</td>
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<td>4.81</td>
<td>.04</td>
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<td>12.04</td>
<td>2.94</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Coded feedback</td>
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<td>1.11</td>
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<td>.53</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>.91</td>
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Table 4 Independent Samples T-test Run for the Effect of Indirect Non-Coded Feedback on Learners’ Self-Editing Ability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of errors</th>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
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</table>

Additionally, in compliance with the ANOVA results reported in Table 5, it can be deduced that only in cases of Article, Tense and Possessive Marker, significant differences are witnessed among the performance of three groups regarding their self-editing ability. Hence, only partial evidence is gained in favor of the claim that there is a
The outcomes reached at via the implementation of the present scrutiny are likely to bring manifold implications mainly for teachers and learners. More mindful and strategic provision of corrective feedback in a non-threatening and appealing manner is thought to bring about higher levels of motivation and involvement among the learners, which, in turn, can help optimize the quality of learning. After all, emphasizing the key role of self-correction and self-editing abilities in individuals may produce more autonomous learners who are more aware of the appropriate learning processes and strategies, and can apply these proper ways in their life-long course of learning and development.

References


significant difference between the self-editing ability of indirect coded and non-coded feedback groups and that of control group in a new piece of writing

DISCUSSION

In brief, the present probe revealed that indirect coded feedback could influence Iranian Academic EFL students' ability in self-corrections applied to the second draft of writing (students of indirect coded feedback group had more self-correction ability than the students of control group). It was further indicated that the provision of indirect coded feedback can enhance Iranian students' ability in self-editing in a new piece of writing (in this regard, students of indirect coded feedback group were characterized by more self-editing ability than the students of control group). Furthermore, indirect coded and non-coded feedback types were reported to have different impacts on Iranian students' self-editing ability. The results of the current study are in line with those of Binglan and Jia (2010), Soori and Abd. Samad (2011), Baleghizadeh and Dadashi (2011) and Hashemnezhad and Mohammadnejad (2012) who came up with positive effect of feedback on students' written production. The study findings also corroborate those of Erel and Bulut (2007) who found that indirect coded feedback helped learners make fewer errors. These upshots are also in compliance with the results gained in Baleghizadeh and Dadashi's (2011) research, where they found that indirect feedback had more significant effect than direct feedback in correcting students’ spelling errors. Nevertheless, the findings of the current study are in contrast to those obtained by Rouhi and Samiei (2010) who found that focused and unfocused indirect feedback didn’t have any significant effect on the learners' written accuracy.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Two fundamental points rendered the present study different from earlier studies. First, the distinction between self-correction ability and self-editing ability was addressed under the auspices of the application of indirect corrective feedback. In line with the gained upshots, indirect feedback was proven helpful in improving the learners' self-correction ability in writing, as well as their self-editing capability. Second, indirect coded and non-coded feedback types, which had rarely been touched upon in relation to learners' self-correcting and self-editing abilities throughout the literature on the issue, were investigated in the current probe.


