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A comparison of peer, teacher and self-feedback on the reduction of language errors in student essays



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ABSTRACT

This quasi-experimental study examined the effect of different sources of corrective feedback (teacher, peer, self) on reducing pronoun agreement and lexical errors in student essays. Three Lebanese university student groups sat for a pre-test, received instruction on the errors under study, and practiced correcting them in response to their respective source of feedback. Next, students sat for an immediate and a delayed post-test. Comparison of students' performance on pronoun agreement errors revealed that all groups increased the percentage of this error on the immediate post-test but decreased it on the delayed post-test, with no significant difference between the groups. However, comparison of students' performance on lexical errors at the immediate post-test revealed that the self-feedback group significantly decreased this error percentage compared to the peer feedback group. No significant difference appeared between teacher and peer feedback groups, nor between teacher and self-feedback groups on that test. On the delayed post-test, the self-feedback group significantly reduced the percentage of lexical errors compared to the teacher feedback group, but no significant differences appeared between peer and self-feedback groups, nor between teacher and peer feedback groups. Results show that language development is mediated by source of CF, type of error, and affective factors.

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1. Introduction

ESL teachers who follow the process approach to writing usually involve students in the development of their own writing skills by asking them to revise their essays in response to teacher corrective feedback and, more recently, in response to peer corrective feedback (Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008; Ferris, 2006). Corrective feedback in this paper refers to direct and indirect feedback given on student language errors (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009, 2010a, 2010b). A number of studies have examined different kinds of corrective feedback and their impact on students' writing, including those on teacher feedback (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009, 2010a, 2010b); peer feedback (Foster & Ohta, 2005); and self-feedback (Xiang, 2004) as well as studies comparing different sources or methods of feedback (Miao, Badger, & Zhen, 2006). However, to the knowledge of this researcher, there has been no research comparing the effects of peer, teacher, and self-feedback on the reduction of language errors in essays that had not received any feedback. Accordingly, the present study compares the effect of these three sources of feedback (teacher, peer, and self-feedback) on students' ability to reduce two language errors namely,

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pronoun agreement errors and lexical errors in essays that had not received any feedback. Lexical errors in this study are operationalized as wrong words that are not articles, prepositions, or wrong word forms (i.e. words written as adjectives instead of nouns or adverbs).

2. Literature review

Below is a critique of some recent research on feedback given by teachers, peers as well as students themselves.

2.1. Teacher feedback studies

Research on teacher feedback traced the effects of this kind of feedback on reducing various types of language errors in revised essays (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Zheng, 2007), in essays that had not received any feedback (Mawlawi Diab, 2015), and in those written in response to feedback and without it (Ferris, 2006; Sampson, 2012). In Zheng's (2007) study, students of different language proficiency were asked to write an essay and then to correct a list of errors found in their essays. Results revealed that students encountered difficulties in correcting word usage and sentence structures. However, the study did not examine error reduction in subsequent essays.

Mawlawi Diab (2015) examined the effects of corrective feedback on students' reduction of pronoun agreement errors and lexical errors in essays that had not received any feedback. Three student groups (two experimental and one control) received on three practice assignments direct error correction along with metalinguistic feedback; only metalinguistic feedback, and no feedback respectively. Next, all groups wrote an immediate and a delayed post-test essays that received no feedback. Results of the immediate post-test revealed a significant difference in pronoun agreement errors for the direct metalinguistic group, but no significant difference among the three groups on lexical errors. At the delayed post-test, significant difference appeared only on the lexical errors of the direct metalinguistic group.

Ferris's (2006) study traced the effects of different types of teacher feedback on reducing various language errors in revised essays and in essays that had not received any feedback. It concluded that students successfully corrected their errors in the revised drafts. Moreover, a comparison of students' first and last essay in the semester showed a significant improvement in the accuracy of five out of 15 error categories. Ferris reported that error type rather than type of feedback affected accuracy and that the lexical errors were "untreatable". However, the study did not include a control group.

Moreover, Sampson (2012) compared the effects of coded and un-coded feedback on reducing errors in four student assignments (productive tests). Four days after revising errors made on each assignment, students were given back an un-corrected copy of their original work and were asked to correct their errors (receptive test). A comparison of the first and fourth receptive tests showed that most students corrected more errors in Essay 4 than Essay 1 but that individual student performance fluctuated. With respect to productive tests, coded feedback resulted in reduced errors in Essay 4 more than un-coded feedback but certain errors, like spelling and lexical errors, were harder to correct than others.

In contrast to monitoring the effects of different types of feedback on the reduction of errors, Riazantseva (2012) investigated the impact of three different writing assignments (in-class essays, in-class summaries and at-home essays) on graduate students' L2 accuracy in essays that had not received any feedback. Students received direct as well as coded error correction on all their errors but were not required to revise them. A comparison of pre-test and post-test results revealed that at-home summaries had the lowest percentage of error among the three assignments, on the pre-test and the post-test. Comparison of student performance from pre-test to post-test revealed a significant decrease in lexical errors on all assignments, while grammatical errors were only reduced on in-class essays and at-home summaries. However, the study did not employ a control group.

Other teacher feedback studies monitored the effect of different kinds of teacher feedback on the reduction of article errors made in essays that had not received any feedback; however, these studies did not require students to correct their errors after receiving feedback (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen, 2007). Results of these studies revealed that article errors made by the experimental groups who received teacher feedback were generally reduced more than those of the control group that received no feedback, irrespective of the type of teacher feedback given. However, since these studies examined only one error, their findings may not be generalized to other language errors.

A couple of feedback studies employed a blended research design to investigate the effect of teacher feedback on reducing multiple errors (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010; Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2012). A blended research study takes place in a real classroom, analyzes actual class assignments, and examines specific errors that appear in revised essays as well as in ones that have not received any feedback. Storch and Wigglesworth (2010) compared the effects of reformulations (direct correction) and editing (indirect correction) on different error categories (lexical, grammatical, mechanics) made on graduate students' essays revised collaboratively, and on a new essay written individually. Results revealed that error type and editing played a role in reducing language errors. The study attributed its findings to students' engagement with feedback which may have allowed them to pay attention to their linguistic structures, thus reducing their errors.

On the other hand, Van Beuningen et al. (2012) traced the effects of comprehensive, direct, and indirect teacher feedback on students' accurate use of lexical, grammatical and orthographic errors in revised and new writing. The study concluded that different feedback reduces different types of errors and attributed its finding to cognitive processes that students engaged in while addressing feedback. Cognitive processes are defined by cognitive theories of second language acquisition (Anderson, 1983, 1985; McLaughlin, 1987, 1990, McLaughlin, Rossman, & McLeod, 1983) as the mental activity learners engage

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