

Reactive Focus on Form through Negotiated Dynamic Written Corrective Feedback: Writing Fluency or Accuracy?

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Abstract

There is growing body of evidence regarding the positive role of corrective feedback and FoF (focus on form) in L2 learning. This study explored the effect of reactive focus on form through dynamic written corrective feedback on writing fluency and writing accuracy. To collect the data, 30EFL students from intermediate level were selected. A writing pretest was given to them and scored 2 times from two different points of view: fluency (complexity of sentence, and number of words) and accuracy. They had 16 sessions, 2 sessions a week and in each session they were given a topic and they wrote an essay for this. In every next session they brought their essays to class and the teacher collected them. The teacher checked the essay and marked the student grammatical errors. Next session the erroneous forms were identified, reacted and resolved through negotiation. At the end of sessions a writing test was taken and scored two times, first according to the fluency and then accuracy. Comparing the scores of fluency and accuracy in pretest and posttest showed that there was a significant advancement in writing fluency scores rather than accuracy.

Keywords: Focus on form, Corrective feedback, Writing Fluency, Writing accuracy

1. Introduction

Though writing ability is one of the most salient outcomes of higher education, many learners of English as second language (ESL) continue to struggle to produce writing that is linguistically accurate. In an attempt to help teachers to teach second language writing, many studies over the past years have examined the effects of error correction or written corrective feedback (WCF). Although some studies have claimed that WCF is ineffective or harmful (Truscott, 2007) others have shown that, in certain contexts it can improve aspects of L2 accuracy (Ellis, 2008). There are several ways by which we can make the WCF more effective. By making WCF interactive we can make it more effective in improving writing ability of students. In recent years with current interests in FOF and on the one hand the importance attributed to the role of communicative interaction in L2 learning and on the other the role of negotiation has attracted much theoretical and empirical attention (Lyster and Ranta 1997; McDonough and Mackey 2000). There is growing body of evidence regarding the positive role of WCF and FoF in L2 learning. However there is not yet a universal agreement among SLA researchers that FOF has any direct impact on L2 accuracy. A few recent studies have revealed significant benefits of feedback that involves interaction and negotiation between teacher and the learner. What was examined in this study was a kind of form negotiating, it happened for the purpose of learners' output i.e. the potential role of negotiation in an ESL classroom and in the context of addressing written errors. Thus the purpose of this paper is to investigate whether reactive focus on form through WCF affects writing accuracy or fluency.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Reactive Focus on Form

Reactive focus on Form treatments can deal more specifically with student output where the focus is on structures that students themselves have used, or have tried to use, during a communicative task. There are explicit and implicit ways of achieving reactive focus on form (Mennim, 2003). At the explicit end of this continuum students can be encouraged to discuss language form as part of a task. Swain (2000) has made use of the dictogloss, which involves the teacher reading out a short passage to the class, who must then reconstruct it in groups by pooling their linguistic resources. The dictogloss in Swain's study resulted in student dialogue that was concerned specifically with the language problems the students had in recalling the original text. In this way there was a collaborative, or joint, reaction to students' output. If there was uncertainty about the L2, or if an L2 error was made, dialogue about form helped students correct their own errors. Lyster and Ranta (1997: 57) believe that students' self-generated repairs are likely to benefit second language acquisition yet we must also accept that students will be unable to repair all of their L2 Errors they may make. Only a partially successful

repair, or a wrong repair, or indeed may be unable to see where some errors have occurred. It is not surprising, then, that many students are keen to hear teacher feedback, or see it in the form of red ink on the page. Because of this, the reactive aspect of focus on form might best be made up of student and teacher reactions to student output (Mennim, 2003). Arguments for the role of negotiation also comes from the Vygotskian sociocultural theories of L2 learning, which place particular emphasize on the role of student-teachers interaction and collaboration and collaboration when solving linguistic problems (Nassaji, 2007). In the sociocultural view, language learning is essentially a socially mediated process and one which is highly dependent on the face to face interaction.

2.2 Using written teacher feedback in EFL composition Classes

In recent years the process approach to writing has become the mainstream orthodoxy in EFL composition classes (Ferris, 1997). It is the one way of presenting input to learners like reactive focus on form as can be seen in Figure 1 (Long and P. Robinson, 1998, cited in Nicholas et al., 2001). Lynch (2001) stated that this approach seeks to shift emphasis away from an endless stream of compositions assigned by the teacher, written by the learners, handed in for marking by the teacher, handed back to the learners, and promptly forgotten by them as they start on the next assignment. Feedback is seen as essential to the multiple-draft process, as it is 'what pushes the writer through the various drafts and on to the eventual end-product'. Various types of feedback are possible, including peer feedback, conferencing, and written teacher-feedback, as well as more innovative methods such as the use of taped commentaries (Hyland 1990). One issue which often emerges from the body of research and advice about feedback, however, concerns the aim of feedback in the writing process—which seems to be a fairly short-term one and helps learners to improve their drafts in order to end up with a final piece of work which is better than those first attempts (Leki 1990: 58). Much of the research on the subject is about how feedback affects learners' revision of their work, and that most of the advice given for teachers was that they should intervene during the writing process so that the learners can use their comments in improving further drafts (Reid 1994). Providing this type of feedback during the writing process involves the teacher in assuming different roles—such as 'audience', 'assistant', 'consultant', or 'reader'. These are in addition to the more traditional teacher role of an evaluator of learners' work. Research in SLA emphasizes the need to help L2 learners notice their own L2 use in comparison to the use of the target language as produced by native speakers.

2.3 Making WCF Dynamic

Based on the need for practice that is both frequent and authentic, we can coin the term *dynamic WCF*, which has two essential elements: feedback that reflects what the individual learners needs most and a principal approach to pedagogy that ensure that writing task and feedback are *meaningful, timely, and manageable*. (Hartshon, Norman & Sudweeks, 2010). To insure that feedback is meaningful to learner at a cognitive level, the students must understand what do you mean by your feedback, i.e. by making your feedback reactive you make it meaningful. In order for the feedback to be meaningful enough to process effectively, it also needs to be timely and constant. In dynamic WCF, feedback is timely, in that students writing is consistently marked and returned the following session. Another vital aspect of feedback is that, in order for them to be meaningful, timely, and constant they also must be manageable. Feedback is manageable for teacher when they have enough time to attend to quality and completeness of what they communicate to students and it is manageable for students when they have time and ability to process, learn from and apply the feedback from their teachers.

3. Research questions

- 1- Does reactive focus on form through negotiated dynamic written corrective feedback affect writing fluency?
- 2- Does reactive focus on form through negotiated dynamic written corrective feedback affect writing accuracy?

4. Design

4.1 Research Site and Participants

This research was conducted in one English language institute in Tehran. This study included 10 students. All the students research participants were adult and all of them finished high school. They were in intermediate level and they had been studying there for 3 terms. The course book was *Top Notch Series* (Saslow & Ascher, 2007). None of the students had any previous instruction on writing and all of them are neophytes in essay writing. The teacher was an undergraduate MA student who passed a course in advanced writing in an MA program and passed several courses in writing in BA. The course is integrative and the students besides their course book had writing activities too, so the teacher was as rater too in this study.

4.2 Procedure

The data collection period lasted 2 month, from November 2010 to December 2010. One pretest was taken at the first session of class. This was a request for writing an essay about a one interesting topic. The students wrote the

essay and gave them to the teacher next session. The teacher corrected the essay two times, first from the point of view of accuracy. By stating accuracy; it means that how many grammatical errors the students had in their essays. Second time essays were corrected from the point of view of fluency. The criteria for correcting the essay in terms of fluency are simple: sentence complexity and number of words. the max score for each essay is 20. All the essays were scored holistically based on those criteria. The scores of students in pretest were recorded.

After the pretest in subsequent sessions, the students were given the consensused topics and at the beginning of the each next session they gave them to teacher .He corrected the essay and marked every grammatical erroneous sentence. In the next session the teacher brought the essay to the class and for 35 minutes every grammatical erroneous sentence of each student was negotiated. By negotiation it means that the teacher give the essay to each student and the student ask about the reason behind each error and the teacher briefly explain it for the student, so a interaction was created between the teacher and the student. At the end of instruction the post test was taken and implemented like pretest. The students' essays in posttest were corrected and scored exactly in the same way of pretest.

5. Results

This Study has two phases. Investigation of the same group at the two points in time: beginning of term and at the end of it, As a result, a repeated measure t-test was implemented for comparing the fluency scores and accuracy scores of students in pretest and posttest. The max score both in pretest and posttest was 20.

Table 1, 2 shows the Comparison of the means of pretest and posttest with regard to fluency.

TABLE 1
 Paired Samples Statistics of FLUENCY scores in pretest and post test

Test	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
PRETEST	11.0500	10	3.48369
POSTTEST	15.1000	10	2.23358

TABLE 2
 Paired Samples- Test for FLUENCY scores in pretest and post test

Test	Mean	t	df	sig(2 tailed)
Pretest and posttest	5.05	5.3	29	.000

As can be seen in table 2, it becomes clear that there is significant difference in writing fluency score in pretest and posttests . So it can be inferred that reactive focus on form is effective in improving writing fluency.

Tables 3, 4 show the comparison between accuracy score of students in pretest and post test

TABLE 3
 Paired Samples Statistics of ACCURACY scores in pretest and posttest

Test	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
PRETEST	12.7	10	2.35
POSTTEST	14.3	10	2.11

TABLE 4
 Paired Samples Test for ACCURACY scores in pretest and posttest

Test	Mean	t	df	sig(2 tailed)
Pretest and posttest	0.6	1.616	29	.120

As can be seen in table 4 it can be inferred that reactive focus on form is not effective in improving writing accuracy.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to test the effects of reactive focus on form through negotiated written corrective feedback on writing fluency and accuracy of students. In order to do so, a group of students was selected and wrote essays every session then their grammatical errors in their writings were corrected by negotiated written

corrective feedback. As the results showed, contrary to the natural and prevailed belief that working on grammatical errors in writing increases writing accuracy, the reverse came true in this study. However as it can be seen in tables 1 and 3 that, the reactive focus on form through negotiated written corrective feedback influenced both fluency and accuracy, but its effect was greater and more statistically significant on fluency than accuracy. Besides, all the requirements of dynamicity of WCF were considered in this study by attending to learners' errors in all sessions, and with meaningful interaction between them and teacher. These findings highlight the importance of negotiation and hence support the argument that the effectiveness of feedback depends to a large extent on the degree of meaningful interaction between the learner and the teacher. While it might not be desirable for one teacher to explain the errors of students one by one (Boughy 1997, cited in Nassaji, 2007) but it has great effects on improving writing ability of learners. Although much theoretical discussion exists on how to implement FoF in SLA, much less attention has been paid to the way it actually occurs in L2 classrooms (Ellis 2001, cited in Nassaji, 2007). This small scale study documented and examined the efficacy of such reactive FoF practices, with particular focus on interactional negotiation in adult ESL classroom. The findings provide important insight into the nature and role of these processes.

6. Limitations and Questions for further Research

One of the main limitations of this study is the small number of participant which makes finding not generalizable. Another study is needed with more participants. Second is the matter of time limit which makes giving interactive feedback hard to deliver, because this class is not solely the writing class. These results were obtained from immediate post test, further research is necessary in order to check whether delayed post test gives same result or not. Further search is needed for checking other proficiency level of students ;for example advanced or elementary to investigate whether the same result will be achieved or not.

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