The Impact of ‘Metalinguistic’ Corrective Feedback on EFL Learners’ Levels of Lexical Resource and Grammatical Range and Accuracy in Their Oral Proficiency

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ABSTRACT: The term "corrective feedback" has recently lured a great deal of attention in foreign language teaching. It is used to give foreign language learners information on correctness of what they have linguistically produced. This study tried to investigate probable impacts of ‘metalinguistic’ corrective feedback on learners’ levels of lexical resource and grammatical range and accuracy in their oral proficiency. The participants were 30 EFL learners studying the books ‘New Interchange 3’ and ‘Passages 1’. They were divided into two groups with lower-intermediate oral language proficiency which was specified by two raters having checklists of IELTS speaking band descriptor. So each group consisted of 15 members all at the same level of oral proficiency. In this study one of the groups, the experimental group, received metalinguistic feedback as the treatment and the other, the control group, received no feedback. Each group was instructed for approximately twenty hours. Then, after the treatment learners were given a post test. To discern any significant change in the mean of each group after receiving corrective feedback, t-test was applied. Based on the results of the post test, it was revealed that the experimental group which received ‘metalinguistic’ feedback outperformed the control group which received no feedback as treatment.

Keywords: met linguistic feedback, lexical resource, oral proficiency

INTRODUCTION

The term "corrective feedback" has recently drawn a great deal of attention in foreign language teaching. As the name suggests, corrective feedback is used to give foreign language learners information on correctness of what they have linguistically produced and provide learners with the correct form of their erroneous production. However, the advent of communicative language teaching, which is a new approach towards language teaching, seemed to mar the use of corrective feedback in EFL classes. As it is known, in communicative language teaching the tendency is towards elimination of correction on learners' linguistic production and putting them at ease to be stress-free to communicate through the foreign language in the class. Correction seemed to impose pressure and stress upon learners and hinder their production. But actually what was seen was that expunging correction was practically impossible. Learners' production accosted more and more inaccuracy resulting in lack of comprehension of what was produced from the partner's side. Since then, corrective feedback has gained much power and attention and also many types and categories.

Review of the Related Literature

Theoretical Background

Feedback is defined by Brandet (2008) as information supplied to learners related to some aspects of their performance on a task. He maintains that this piece of information can be provided for learners by the teacher and peers, for example. He also purports that there should be a balance in the authenticity of feedback provided for learners and that learners assume teacher feedback to be less face threatening than peer feedback and that the
torrent of feedback from the teacher and peers makes the learner feel uncomfortable. This means that some learners believe the usefulness of corrective feedback to dwindle as the course continues, which is tantamount to the fact that learners pay attention to each other’s linguistic improvement.

According to Naeini (2008), an effective teaching procedure entails feedback. As he argues, in classes where learners are deprived of corrective feedback and subsist on repetition of task only, no pedagogically significant outcome is obtained. He believes that learning occurs when there is an exchange of information between learners and teachers. Furthermore, he claims that there should even be a considerable amount of interaction within learners. As Naeini (2008) maintains, feedback should be given to learners ceremoniously and to a sufficient amount. There should be enough time for learners to allow them to think about the feedback given to them. Besides Lyster and Ranta (1997) offered such types as clarification request, ‘explicit correction’, recast, elicitation, and repetition of corrective feedback.

Regarding measuring speaking, however, Luoma (2005) argues that speaking is a hard proficiency aspect to measure. She states that there is no compatibility between the goal of assessment and the instruments through which oral proficiency is assessed. She believes that since such factors as motivation, age, L1 background, social status, intelligence, and talent have proven to have had a considerable influence on success or failure in acquisition of effective speaking skills, their being considered in the assessment process can be of paramount importance.

Besides, Byrne (1991) views speaking as a bilateral process in which both interlocutors are engaged. As Byrne suggests, in every conversation, we have a speaker and a listener; the speaker engages in the act of encoding his information and the listeners engage in the act of decoding. Byrne severely denounces the act of attributing listening to a passive act and believes that the listeners have the role of deciphering the codes elicited by the speaker. Additionally, Chastain (1998) gives the highest priority to speaking competency among four main competencies in a foreign language to be mastered. As Chastain (1998) argues, a good level of proficiency in speaking can guarantee the rise in other level of proficiency such as reading, writing, and listening. He purports that speaking can play two main roles of augmenting the retention and activating the current proficiency level of EFL learners.

Previous Studies
In his analysis of teacher-student interaction, Tsang (2004) found that pushing the students towards modifying the output rather than providing them with feedback is beneficial to them in developing their interlanguage. He found that that uptake and repair rates are lower than that of feedback. Negotiation, i.e. elicitation, clarification request, ‘metalinguistic’ feedback, and repetition lead to more repair than recasts and explicit feedback. Neither recasts nor ‘explicit correction’ is effective in eliciting student generated repairs.

In a study done by Lyster (1998), it was found that recasts are less likely to be successful at drawing learners’ attention to their ill-form output, at least in content based classroom where recasts are not likely to be perceived by young learners at alternative or similar forms which are fulfilled other than corrective ones. Contrary to non-corrective repetition in classroom discourse, recasts deal with pursuing confirmation or the correction of errors from students’ side. In Lyster’s (1998) study Recasts did not seem to be able to provide learners with negative evidence perhaps due to the fact that learners did not faced the correct form before.

In a study done by Kormos and Denes (2004) it was seen that fluency is not only a temporal phenomenon but some variables such as accuracy and grammatical complexity are also taken into consideration. It was seen that those who were fluent regarding high degree of speed in their speech also depicted more accuracy in speaking. The criteria they proposed for accuracy includes such factors as speed, pace, smoothness, and grammatical accuracy. Furthermore, Elder, Iwashita, and McNamara (2002) investigated the impact of performance condition on perception of task difficulty. By the shift from the grammatical ability of learners to their real performance, the instruments of measuring this ability really changed. They found that that more complex tasks distract students’ attention from the form and direct it towards context.

Statement of the Problem
Recently, various types of corrective feedback have been proposed and a great number of studies have been done on these various types of corrective feedback. The positive effects corrective feedback on learning different aspects of a foreign language have been proven. However, few studies have been done on the impact of corrective feedback on different measures of speaking, which, as previously mentioned, appears to be the most important skill to be learned in the attempt to gain a mastery of a foreign language. A great number of language learners complain about their inability to orally produce the foreign language at the end of their language course. In this
study, the impact of metalinguistic corrective feedback, among various types of corrective feedback, on lexical
resource and grammatical range and accuracy of in speaking of foreign language learners was explored.

**Research Questions**

In order to conduct the study the following research questions were posed:

- Does metalinguistic feedback have a statistically significant impact on the measure of lexical resource in speaking proficiency?
- Does metalinguistic feedback have a statistically significant impact on the measure of grammatical range and accuracy in speaking proficiency?

**Research Null Hypotheses**

To investigate the above-mentioned research question empirically, the following null hypotheses were made:

- Metalinguistic feedback has no statistically significant impact on the measure of lexical resource in speaking proficiency.
- Metalinguistic feedback has no statistically significant impact on the measure of grammatical range and accuracy in speaking proficiency.

**Methodology**

**Participants**

Thirty male and female students at lower-intermediate level of proficiency aging from 16 to 25 and gaining 5.5 in
IELTS speaking test, were selected from among 100 students who were studying the books of ‘Interchange 3’
written by Richards (2005) and ‘Passages1’ written by Richards and Sandy (2008).Then, they were divided into 2
groups of 15. One the groups, experimental group, received metalinguistic feedback as the treatment and the other
group, control group, did not receive any kind of corrective feedback as the treatment; it received the usual
instruction with no corrective feedback.

**Instruments**

The instruments utilized were a pretest, a post test, and a scoring scale.

Pretest: The test which was used was a sample IELTS speaking test from the book ‘prepare for IELTS’ written by
Cameron and Todd (2005).

Post test: Another sample of speaking test from the book ‘prepare for IELTS’ was given to the control and
experimental groups.

Scoring scale: IELTS speaking band descriptor was used as a checklist for two experienced English teachers,
holding M.A in TEFL to determine learners’ level of oral proficiency.

In order to ensure the homogeneity of learners, an inter-rater reliability of the two the raters was gained.

**Procedure**

In this study, 100 learners of English studying the books ‘Interchange 3’ written by Richards (2005) and
‘Passages1’ written by Richards and Sandy (2008) in the language school of Afarinesh in the city of Sari, Iran, and
ranging from 17 to 25 in age were given speaking sample test 1 of the book ‘Prepare for IELTS’ written by
Cameron and Todd in (2005).The test was given to the learners by three experienced teachers. What these
teachers did was to ask the questions and record learners’ voices. After the voices’ being recorded, two well-
experienced teachers, having M.A in TEFL and teaching at the university of Payam-e-Noor listened to the
recordings separately and scored the learners according to the IELTS speaking band descriptor given to them as a
scoring scale. 30 learners who gained the score of 5.5, assumed to be at the lower intermediate level of oral
proficiency based on the inter rater reliability taken from the two raters’ scorings, were divided into two groups of
fifteen. Group one, the experimental group received ‘metalinguistic’ feedback for 20 hours and group two, the
control group, received no feedback in 20 hours. The treatment given to the experimental group was the speaking
sections of the books ‘Interchange 3’written by Richards (2005) and ‘Passages1’ written by Richards and Sandy
(2008) and the book ‘IELTS speaking’ written by Memarzadeh (2008). The treatment was given to the experimental
group by the researcher three hours a week. After giving the metalinguistic corrective feedback to the experimental
group for 20 hours and the usual instruction to the control group for also 20 hours, the learners were required to
take sample test 3 of the book ‘Prepare for IELTS’s written by Cameron and Todd (2005) as the post test. Here,
those three teachers entitled to give the pretest also gave the post test to the learners and recorded their voices.
Afterward, one of the raters entitled to give scores on the pretest, gave scores on the post test based on the specifications determined in the same IELTS speaking band descriptor.

To verify the intra-rater reliability, i.e. how reliable each of the rater was, each of the rater was required to again give scores to ten learners he had already rated after two weeks. And to ensure the feasibility of the research, a pilot study was conducted on two groups with five members, one of which receiving metalinguistic corrective feedback and the other of which receiving no corrective feedback.

**Analytic Statistics**

In this section, a step to step description on the analytic procedure of the research will be provided. It will be seen that a pretest was applied to homogenize learners. Metalinguistic corrective feedback was the treatment the experimental group received. To see the effect of treatment a post-test was utilized. Since each group was compared to itself after the treatment, t-test was used to determine the degree of change in its mean score of each group after the treatment. The statistical steps taken in this study are as follows:

To show how reliable the raters are, each of them was asked to score ten learners two times at one week interval; this aimed at measuring how reliable each of the raters was i.e. intra-rater reliability was taken.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Rater 1 Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>Re-Rater 1 correlation coefficient</th>
<th>Kappa</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.896</td>
<td>.833</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical resource</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.927</td>
<td>.864</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it can be seen in the table above the correlation coefficients in the first rater’s scores on grammatical range and accuracy are 1.000 and 0.896 in the first and second rating respectively, the kappa score of which is 0.833 as an acceptable degree of agreement. Also, as it is clearly depicted in the table above, the raters’ first and second ratings have the correlation coefficient of 1.000 and 0.927 on lexical resource respectively, with the Kappa degree of 0.864 again showing there being an acceptable degree of reliability of the first rater in scoring the measure of lexical resource.

When the certainty on the first rater’s intra – rater reliability was attained, the same procedures for indemnifying the existence of an acceptable degree of intra-rater reliability in the second rater were applied. The table below shows the statistical significance of the measures taken to be certain on the second rater’s reliability in scoring to be counted upon in the research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>rater2 Correlation coefficient</th>
<th>Re-rater 2 correlation coefficient</th>
<th>Kappa</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.976</td>
<td>.864</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical resource</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.896</td>
<td>.833</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Like the first rater, the second rater was asked to give scores to ten EFL learners on their oral grammatical range and accuracy, and lexical resource two times. Needless to say, there was an acceptable time interval between the two scorings to expunge the second scoring’s being influenced by the first scoring.1.000 and 0.976 are the correlation coefficients of the rater’s scoring the accuracy level for the first and the second time respectively and the value of Kappa is 0.864, showing an acceptable degree in intra-rater reliability. The correlation coefficients for lexical resource are 1.000 in the first scoring and 0.896 in the second scoring, and the degree of is0.833. So it seems that the second rater is also reliable in scoring the lexical resource level too.

So as to come to a unanimous agreement on the number of learners chosen for a special level of oral proficiency, an inter rater reliability was taken from the two raters’ scores. The measure of Kappa was used to determine the value of agreement between the two raters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Rater 1 score</th>
<th>rater 2 score</th>
<th>Kappa</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>4 6 6</td>
<td>3 6 4</td>
<td>.792</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical resource</td>
<td>4 6 5</td>
<td>3 6 3</td>
<td>.728</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As it is shown in the table above, both raters gave the score 4 two three learners on their grammatical range and accuracy, and the score 5 to six learners, but, unlike the second rater who gave 6 to four learners, the first rater gave 6 to six of them. The value of Kappa is 0.792, which demonstrates a statistically significant and acceptable inter-rater reliability between the two raters in scoring the accuracy level of EFL learners. In lexical resource four of the learners got 4 from the first rater, but three of them got this score from the second rater. An equal number of learners got 5 from the two raters. 6 was the score five and learners could get from the first and the second rater respectively. The Kappa for the raters at this measure is 0.728, which is statistically significant.

To show the change in mean after the post-test at the level of grammatical range and accuracy the following table is provided.

Table 4. Mean difference in group at the measure of grammatical range and accuracy after receiving metalinguistic corrective feedback.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired T-Test</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of feedback</td>
<td>Pre-grammatical accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalinguistic feedback</td>
<td>5.4667</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it can be seen in the table above, ‘metalinguistic’ feedback could raise the means of the group receiving it from 5.4667 to 6.4667. The correlation for this feedback group is 0.159. The ‘metalinguistic’ feedback group at the level of grammatical range and accuracy is statistically significant (sig. sig=0.573). To show the change in mean after the post-test at the level of lexical fluency the following table is provided.

Table 5. Mean difference in group at the measure of lexical resource after receiving metalinguistic corrective feedback.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired T-Test</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of feedback</td>
<td>Pre-lexical resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalinguistic feedback</td>
<td>5.6667</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the table ‘Metalinguistic’ feedback could raise the lexical resource mean of the group receiving it from 5.6667 to 6.6667, yielding the correlation of 0.000. The change in mean for this group is highly significant and meaningful (sig. =1.000).

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

What can be concluded by comparing the mean of group’s oral achievement at the levels of fluency and grammatical range and accuracy in the pre-test and post-test stages is that corrective feedback will conducive to a better performance in post treatment stage. This finding confirms there being the need to include corrective feedback in classes aimed at improving the oral achievement of EFL learners. What this study did was to exert a greater degree of concentration on the type of corrective feedback which EFL learners were availed of. Needless to say, expunging other types of corrective feedback thoroughly was not feasible i.e. every group received a special type of corrective feedback dominantly.

Another important variable heeded in this study was the level of EFL learners’ level of oral proficiency. It was seen that for learners at the lower intermediate level of oral proficiency, 5.5 in IELTS speaking test, ‘metalinguistic’ feedback is a highly appropriate type of corrective feedback. It is clear that the finding of this study may not be extendable to studies in which the levels of oral proficiency of EFL learners are at such levels as advanced, upper-advanced, upper-intermediate, etc.

This study was conducted over the period of seven weeks. The experimental group received a certain type of, called ‘metalinguistic’ corrective feedback approximately three hours per week. Each group consisted of 15 members at the level of lower-intermediate in oral proficiency. Since the study did not consider the variable of age, the members of the groups differed in age. Nevertheless, the ones whose ages were drastically different from the normal range of age (18-30) were fairly distributed among the four groups. So as to have homogenous groups-all at the same level of oral proficiency- three experienced teachers gave a sample speaking test of IELTS chosen
from a valid IELTS test book to 150 learners EFL learners studying the books "Interchange 3" written by Jack C. Richards, an illustrious figure in TEFL and "Passages 1" written by Jack C. Richards and Chuck Sandy, as the pretest. Among these 100 EFL learners, 30 of them gaining the score 5.5 based on two other experienced teachers', as raters, scorings were divided into four groups each of which comprised 15 learners. The control group received no feedback. After the treatment, another sample speaking test of IELTS chosen from a valid IELTS test book was administered by an experienced teacher as the post test, and the recording of the interview was scored by an experienced rater.

During the treatment, when a learner's production was ill-formed at the levels of fluency, accuracy, lexical resource, and grammatical accuracy, corrective feedbacks were provided. Every session consisted of some discussion questions extracted from the afore-mentioned books. During the class the learners were all motivated to speak about the topic broached in the class and they were taught some rules related to the four criteria of oral proficiency, although they had already been taught in their classes. A great deal of attempt was exerted to indirectly engage all learners in the discussion. The sequence of corrective feedback was ignited by an ill-formed utterance of a learner. A certain kind of corrective feedback was sequel to the learner's utterance. The feedback was mostly followed by uptake from the learner's side. When uptake occurred, the flow of discussion was either interrupted or continued. It seems necessary to mention that after the teacher's feedback was followed by uptake and repair was made by learners, the non-target utterance was sometimes repeated by them. Needless to say, the teacher provided the corrective feedback again to raise the learner's consciousness about the abnormality of his utterance.

Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

What can be construed from the findings of this research is that corrective feedback will end in a rise in oral proficiency level of learners and that some types of corrective feedback could be given priority over some other types over a specific level of oral proficiency. It can be seen that providing learners exclusively with one type of corrective feedback is something fake and practically impossible in an English class aiming at raising the oral proficiency level of learners; however, a certain type of corrective feedback could be the dominant feedback provided in the class. It was found that corrective feedback can be a consciousness raising factor to other learners in addition to the learner provided with feedback.

During treatment, it seemed that corrective feedback was an indispensible part of teaching foreign language specifically for the classes were the enhancement of oral proficiency was of paramount importance. Learners did not seem to be annoyed by being corrected; on the contrary, they were so keen on being apprised of their mistakes so that they would spurn repeating them in their consequent oral productions. In practice, it was found being provided with corrective feedback gradually made learners more meticulous about the appropriateness and impeccability of their production. In Control group, where no corrective feedback was provided, the learners seemed to be keen on being corrected. As the sessions continued, the learners' motivation towards taking part in discussions plunged. They knew that their oral productions were not impeccable and needed to be pollarded by someone. They even sometimes ran into situations where they could not convey their meanings. Sometimes it was seen that peer feedback was provided in the class; classmates corrected each other at times and their corrections were highly appreciated, and they sometimes asked the teacher for corroborating the correctness of their corrections.

Feedback is the signal provided for the learners to make them cognizant and meticulous over the correctness of their utterances. It can emerge in EFL classes in such different forms as written and oral. Obviously, written feedback is mostly applied for written linguistic utterances while oral feedback is exerted upon learners' oral productions in the majority of cases. When an EFL learner produces a linguistic utterance which is malformed, the oral corrective feedback can be provided to him in different forms.

As previously mentioned, oral feedback has such different and miscellaneous forms as 'recast', 'clarification request', 'implicit correction' (e.g. ask for repetition), 'explicit correction', 'metalinguistic' feedback, etc. In an EFL class, when a learner is corrected by the teacher i.e. he is given the feedback, he either pays attention to the feedback and understands that what he has produced is not impeccable but does not know what the correct form is, where we say an uptake occurs, or repairs his production. This verifies the fact that feedback's being used in EFL classes, especially those the purpose of which is to ameliorate and augment the oral proficiency level of learners, result in the rise in proficiency level of pupils. It should also be mentioned that corrective feedback is a futile and preposterous tool to raise the level of oral proficiency in learners if EFL learners are no availed of some instruction beforehand. This is tantamount to the fact that corrective feedback had better be a complementary to the instruction previously provided for learners. If you give the feedback of 'ask for repetition', for example, to an utterance the choice of word of which is problematic there would be a fee possibility of the learner's repairing his production since he has no alternative to that word due to not being instructed about it. It is worth motioning that in
some types of corrective feedback like the feedback of ‘ask for repetition’, some new rules could be mastered by
learners where we can claim that and inductive type of learning has taken place; learners decipher the rules they
had never been instructed before. Corrective feedback can be counted upon as a device through which the passive
role of learners in the class can be dwindled; learners can correct each other i.e. provide peer corrective feedback
and learn from each other’s mistakes. What should be heeded in an EFL class is that learners should not be
bombarded with feedback; Needless to say, frequent corrections will obstacle the usual flow of discussion in the
class and will mar the fluency of learners as well as demotivating them to speak. One more factor accruing a
substantial attention is the class’s stress-free atmosphere. It is clear that the fear of being mocked at by other
classmates will prevent learners from making their attempts to participate in discussions broached by the teacher
or other classmates. Teachers should try to introduce errors and mistakes as the inevitable part of a foreign
language learning process, and he had also better create a good relationship among the members of the class
through various techniques. It can be said as the final comment that teachers should not suffice only with
immediate feedbacks and had better hanker for finding other ways through which feedback can be provided. Based
on the finding of this research, ‘metalinguistic feedback is an effective correction tool so as to enhance EFL
learners’ oral proficiency at the level of grammatical range and accuracy and lexical resource.

REFERENCES