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A Comparison of the Effects of Implicit/Explicit and Immediate/Delayed Corrective Feedback on Learners' Performance in Tailor-Made Tests

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Language
Teaching and Learning, Department of Applied Language Studies and
Linguistics, The University of Auckland, 2006

Abstract

The study investigated the effects of correction of learners' grammatical errors on acquisition. Specifically, it compared the effects of timing of correction (immediate versus delayed correction) and manner of correction (explicit versus implicit correction). It also investigated the relative effects of correction of morphological versus syntactic features and correction of developmental early versus developmental late features.

Data for the study were collected from 56 intermediate level students of English as a Foreign Language in Iranian university and private language school settings. Each participant was required to read and then retell a written text in their own words during an oral interview with the researcher. During or following the interview the researcher corrected the participants on their grammatical errors implicitly (using recasts) or explicitly (providing metalinguistic information). Individualised tests focusing on the errors that had been corrected were constructed for each participant and administered. Statistical analyses were conducted on the scores the participants received on their individualised tests.

Results showed no significant differences for timing of correction. However, significant differences were found for manner of correction. Participants who received explicit correction gained significantly higher scores than those who received implicit correction. This finding lends support to the argument of Schmidt (1994) concerning the role of metalinguistic awareness in language acquisition. Correction of morphological features was found to be more effective than that of syntactic features. It is argued that morphological features are generally learnt as items whereas syntactic features involve system learning. Correction of developmental early features was found to be more effective than correction of developmental late features. This finding lends support to suggestions that corrective feedback (like other types of form-focused instruction) needs to take into account learners' cognitive readiness to acquire features (Pienemann 1984; Mackey 1999).

Analyses of the interactions between independent variables were also conducted. It was found that explicit correction was more effective for the acquisition of developmental early features and implicit correction was more effective for the acquisition of developmental late features

The implications of these results for both second language acquisition and language pedagogy are considered.

Dedication

To my father whose loving care and encouragement was with me all his life and did not live on to see the completion of this work.

To my beloved mum who had to bear dad's departure and my absence in the time of hardship and whose patience supported me in the journey.

And

To Bahram and Mohammad with loving memory.

Acknowledgments

First of all, I would like to thank my wife, Zahra, and my sons, Mohammad and Shahab for their tolerance and support over the last three and a half years, the time that they needed me most but I was here in Auckland thousands of miles away. I promise I shall never be without them again. My thanks to my brother, Abdullah and sisters, Fatima, Zahra, and Maryam, who took care of mum while I was here.

My special thanks to my supervisors, Dr. Helen Basturkmen and Professor Rod Ellis whose insightful comments on all aspects of thesis were with me. Helen bore all the arduous tasks for all this time and provided valuable clues as to what was involved in writing a not-so easy thesis. Her reading of the text many times over led to minor and major changes throughout. I thank her for all her advice and comments. Rod provided detailed information on the last four chapters. Every time I asked him questions, immediately, no matter where he was, he loaded me with enlightening answers. He is one of those teachers whose dedication and love of the field will always be remembered by me. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Shawn Loewen for looking at the statistical analysis and providing useful comments, Dr. Garry Barkhuizen for his humane attitudes toward students, Susan Carter, Jenny Buxton of Student Learning Centre, and Russell Greenwood for their proof readings; Philip and Hannah of Graduate Office for their advice, and John Laurie for his library assistance.

I wish to thank the University of Auckland Scholarship Committee for giving me a doctoral scholarship to enable me to study without financial worries. Marcela Mcarthy, Bryan Lythe, and Charlie Tu'u are definitely worth remembering for their support. I would like to express my sincere appreciation for all those participants who generously took part in my research, without whom this research would not have been possible.

Finally, I made some friends at the university who gave me moral and trouble shooting support I thank them all, especially Halala, Mariajo, Janie, Jenifer, Inigo, Moale, Bizhan, Shahin, Aila, Kirsty, Tim, Chris, Kane, David, Tima, Lima, Tony, Savage, Leicester, John, Carlos and many others in the Graduate Centre of Faculty of Arts.

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List of Abbreviations

CF	Corrective Feedback
Corr.	Correction
Del.	Delayed
Dev.	Developmental
E.F.L.	English as a Foreign Language
E.S.L.	English as a Second language
Exp.	Explicit
Fig.	Figure
Freq.	Frequency
Imp.	Implicit
Immed.	Immediate
Irreg.	Irregular
MS	Mean Score
Morph.	Morphological
MP	Mean Percentage
SD	Standard Deviation
Reg.	Regular
Synt.	Syntactic
TC	Total Number of Corrections
TOEFL	Teaching of English to Students of Other Languages