

To What Extent Can EFL Learner's Writing Skill Improve by Receiving Metalinguistic Feedback and Unfocused Revised Articles?

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Abstract

The efficacy of written corrective feedback (CF) has always been a heated debate among language teachers. However, which type of CF benefits language learners the most has yet been discovered. This case study aims to probe into the effectiveness of metalinguistic CF as to what extent can this help improve L2 learners' writing skill. The design of the study uses unfocused example articles written by teacher as an assisting tool. This is a longitudinal case study lasted for 4 months. The findings suggest that metalinguistic feedback has positive influence on the participant's writing accuracy and the revised articles also help enhance the essay structure and organization in the narrative genre. This study concludes a practical teaching method for writing pedagogy in EFL context.

Keywords

written corrective feedback, metalinguistic feedback, unfocused feedback, L2 acquisition

1 Introduction

1.1 background of Metalinguistic CF

Written metalinguistic CF is defined as comments or questions related to the well-formedness from learner's writing (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). There are two types of metalinguistic CF: the error code and the descriptive one. Error code includes teachers providing codes in each error and mark them on the margin. Descriptive CF includes explicit explanation according to the nature of errors.

Through receiving metalinguistic CF, learners are more aware of their own errors. This motivate learners to monitor themselves (Gholaminia et al., 2013; Yu & Cheng, 2017).

1.2 Previous studies

Several researchers have compared metalinguistic CF and other types of feedback. Gholaminia (2013) compared the traditional direct error feedback with metalinguistic corrective feedback in Iranian EFL context. The findings revealed the experimental group who received error coding correction outperformed their traditionally-instructed counterpart in a paragraph writing post-test. In 2014, Azizi compared the error code metalinguistic CF and the description one. Both groups of participants had significant improvements in writing but the description CF group had better results than the error coding one.

In 2017, Yu and Cheng combined focused direct written CF with metalinguistic explanations. They targeted only one grammatical form - the usage of articles. The results showed that focused written CF plus metalinguistic comments have potential benefits in improving EFL learners' accuracy in the uses of article.

Based on the findings from C.L and Cheng, this case study aims to probe into more than one specific grammatical form. Although the positive results of metalinguistic CF were found, no specific writing skill and writing genre have been taken into account in previous studies. Therefore, this study targets at how descriptive metalinguistic CF help improve L2 learners' writing accuracy in a narrative genre.

2 Methodology

Sam (under the pseudonym name), a 12th grader whose English proficiency falls between intermediate and higher intermediate level. In the pre-test (the first practice General Scholastic Ability Test, GSAT), Sam's writing composition received 7 out of 20 in, the college entrance exam

in Taiwan. A piece of narrative writing task was assigned to Sam every week. Sam received descriptive metalinguistic CF with explicit comments according to his own writing. An unfocused revised article is also provided for Sam to read and reflect. A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview was conducted to see Sam's perspective towards metalinguistic CF.

Three categories in writing: article organization, spelling, and word choices are calculated, measured and further analyzed.

3 Result

As shown in Table 1, the length of Sam's article becomes longer and the errors from all categories dropped after 4 months of treatment. In the post-test (the second practice GSAT), Sam scored 13 out of 20. In the questionnaire and interview, Sam noted that he likes to read teacher's revision, which help him think deeper in terms of story development and provoke him into creating more creative pilot in the narrative writing.

Table 1: The number of errors in Sam's writings

	<i>spelling</i>	<i>word choice</i>	<i>organization</i>	<i>total number</i>
week 1	4	5	2	133
week 5	6	10	2	198
week 9	5	6	3	205
week 13	3	3	3	202
week 15	2	2	4	210

Note: The organization score is being measured by the rubrics of GSAT with the full score of 5.

4 Discussion and conclusion

Sam's article was too short in the beginning of the treatment. Due to the short length, the story plot and structure of the article were poor and the mistakes were quite a lot. Sam tried to write a longer article in week 5, thus he took the risk of using unfamiliar words and led to many word choice errors. After week 13, Sam gradually improved in organization and spelling. The length of his articles became longer as well. Overall, the case study shows that metalinguistic CF has potential benefits on the accuracy of certain grammatical form and is better assisted with teachers' revision. This finding corroborated the results of Yu and Cheng's (2017) study. In this study, Sam is ambitious and eager to learn, He tries his best to improve his writing skill by following the instruction. He corrected all the

mistakes in his revision according to described metalinguistic CF. He showed great interest in unfocused-revised article as well. The study draws the attention to the importance of teachers' revision in L2 writing pedagogy. Some may argue that teachers' revision could be very subjective. However, providing model examples for students is essential for their self-learning. Previous studies mostly focus on corrective feedback but quite few focus on example revised articles. If the participant didn't pay much attention to teacher's revisions, or hold a negative perspective toward them, then the result of this study could have been very different. Thus, further studies are needed to see if teacher's revision plays an important role or assistance in writing class, and what types of CF is the best partner with teachers' revisions.

References

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