ON THE EFFECT OF TYPE OF TEACHER CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK ON IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS’ WRITING PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Despite the dominance of process-oriented approach to writing in recent decades, teachers particularly in Iran contexts do not find it practical. There is also debate regarding the effectiveness of various types of corrective feedback. In addition, the revisions that students make to their compositions as a result of teacher corrective feedback (TCF) are not clearly identified and they are restricted to overall assessment of performance of learners’ writing or the writing product. So, the present study aimed at identifying the types of teacher corrective feedback based on its form and purpose, investigating the effects of different types of teacher corrective feedback on Iranian EFL learners’ writings and determining the types of revisions that the language learners make to their writings as a result of TCF they receive. To this end, this study was conducted among 58 advanced EFL learners studying General English classes and a syntactic categorization by Ferris et al. (1997), a Scoring Rubric developed by Ferris and Hedgcock (1998), and Faigly and Witte’s (1981) taxonomy of revision changes were used to collect data. The findings of the study showed that the most common types of TCF were make a grammar/mechanics comment, give information/statement, and ask for information/question, respectively. Most of the revisions that learners made to the writings at the surface rather than the meaning-preserving level. The current study supports having process-oriented writing classes and has useful implications for L2 writing pedagogy.

KEYWORDS: Teacher Corrective Feedback (TCF), Process-Oriented Approach to Writing, Revision

Writing can be challenging whether in one's native or second language but, as one of the basic language skills, it boosts language acquisition as learners experiment with words, sentences, and larger chunks of writing to communicate their ideas effectively and to reinforce the grammar and vocabulary they are learning in class (Bello, 1997). Writing was traditionally concerned with the written products; however, during the recent decades there has been a shift from what students write to how students write. The change of focus from the product to the process of writing gave dominance to some recently neglected aspects of writing including feedback. Feedback plays a vital role in language learning and language instruction, including writing in English as a second or foreign language. Through the process approach to writing, student writers benefit from sufficient writing practices and revisions on multiple drafts to produce a final piece of writing. In this process, student writers often rely on the feedback given by a teacher, peer, or other sources. Feedback tells them what is good and what needs to be improved or incorporated so a high quality final product is produced. Due to the significant effect of feedback on writing, a large number of studies have started examining the effectiveness of corrective feedback (CF) on student writing. Of all the feedback sources, teacher corrective feedback (TCF) is still valued as the main source of feedback and many studies have found it as helpful and effective in improving student writing. However, the feedback types which are more effective in bringing about positive changes in students’ writing, and more importantly the changes students make to their writing as a result of the TCF they receive require more inquiry and are, thus, the subjects of the present study.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the dominance of process-oriented language teaching and learning in recent decades, teachers particularly in Asian contexts and writing classes do not find it practical so they spend long hours marking mostly the surface and linguistic errors of students’ first drafts and they do not require them to use the feedback to improve the current draft of the compositions and produce higher quality further drafts. This traditional approach encourages students either to mimic a model text and reflect other peoples’ voices than themselves or view writing just as a finished product. This is actually a product approach to writing that, according to Nunan (1996), “(1) is very easy to implement, (2) it often enforces a minimal level of writing, (3) it has been widely used, and is often how parents and teachers were taught;
therefore, it is easily accepted by teachers and parents” (p. 96).

On the one hand, most teachers claim that provision of feedback is a frustrating task and takes most of their time. In addition, they concern about the consequences of these feedbacks, to elaborate, if they are clear and legible, if students read them, if they are understood by the students, if they help students to produce higher quality compositions in the future; etc. On the other hand, whether good or not, students still expect their teachers to read their compositions and provide more and more feedback although the previous research has confirmed that some of these comments are useless and students do not always study and use them to make changes to the same or the subsequent drafts.

Nevertheless, there is controversy regarding the effectiveness of various types of corrective feedback. Students utilize certain types of corrective feedback more than the others thus it is important for teachers to limit these certain types of feedback if students do not prefer them and are less likely to impact their revisions (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010). As such, the best way to cope with this dilemma is to identify and provide the types of feedback that has been proved as more successful than the others. The effects of different types of corrective feedback have been examined in various research (e.g., Bitchener et al., 2005; Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 1997; Sheen, 2007). However, despite the support for corrective feedback in general, more effective corrective feedback types are not still clearly known. So, it is necessary to conduct more studies to identify and apply the CF types from which students can benefit more.

In addition, the revisions that students make to their compositions as a result of TCF should not be restricted to the overall performance of the students’ writing or the writing product (Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 1997; Sugita, 2006) because the results may be under the influence of other extraneous factors, such as practice effect, than the effect of TCF, itself. Until recently, most language instructors resorted to holistic approaches by assessing the overall effect of TCF via the scores given to particular compositions and most of the time the scores were not reliable due to the subjectivity of scoring. So, there is a need to employ more comprehensive taxonomies which clearly represent the types of revisions students make to their writings as a result of TCF than simply evaluating their overall effect. These important issues require further inquiry.

**Error Correction**

Webster Dictionary defines an error as “something that is not correct: a wrong action or statement”. In L2 writing, errors are categorized as global and local. Global errors interfere with the entire message of the written text whereas local errors are minor linguistic deviations with no effect on the overall meaning of the text (Burt, 1975). According to Coder (1967), errors are important because, first, the show how far students have progressed towards the language course objectives. Second, they provide the researchers with information on how L2 is learnt. Third, they are tools by which students learn L2. Therefore, students’ errors give us clues on the nature of language learning and are important for improving writing.

On the other hand, error correction is the most widely used method of responding to students’ errors. According to Ferris (2002, cited in Corpuz, 2011, p. 28), error correction is “the process of providing clear, comprehensive, and consistent corrective feedback on a student’s grammatical errors for the purpose of improving the student’s ability to write accurately”. Hence, error correction particularly plays a vital role in L2 writing accuracy (Lee, 2004). In this view, it is identified as a focus-on-form instrument which draws student’s attention to linguistic elements.

Providing error correction is important because it allows for individualized teacher-to-student communication that is rarely possible in the day-to-day operations of an L2 writing class (Ferris et al., 1997).

There are two general viewpoints regarding the effects of error correction. One the one hand, a group of researchers specifically Truscott (1996) argue that error correction should be abandoned by providing evidence from the past research that demonstrated it as ineffective. Truscott (1996) proposes that, writing accuracy can be improved by more extensive experience with the target language. To justify this claim, he associates it to three problems related to SLA theory. First, the processes underlying language development are not still completely understood, thus, we cannot be certain whether error correction or the correct forms which are provided through feedback can be learnt by the learners. Second, grammatical rules are learnt in a specific order but language instruction does not follow that specific
sequence. That is, when teachers correct the errors that learners are not still ready to learn, then error correction would not be valuable. Third, some teaching and learning strategies are inconsistent with the interlanguage due to its complexity. Interlanguage is the language produced by language learners which has both the characteristics of L1 and L2.

On the contrary, advocates of error correction provide evidence of its effectiveness and there are numerous studies (Bitchner, 2008; Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 2004; Lee, 2004) which have supported the use of error correction in L2 writing pedagogy. Guenette (2007) examined the existing research and found that the studies were different regarding three parameters including population, comparison between groups and design (longitudinal vs. cross-sectional). Thus, we cannot simply judge whether or not error correction or similar practices necessarily lead to improvement or they are of little value so he calls a need for more exploration on the issue of the effectiveness of error correction.

Types of Feedback and their Effect on Learners’ Writing

In the context of writing, Keh (1990) defines feedback as “input from a reader to a writer with the effect of providing information to the writer for revision” (p. 294). It is further explained that feedback consists of comments, questions, and suggestions that a reader gives a writer to produce a ‘reader-based prose’ (Flower, 1979). According to Lightbown and Spada (1999, p. 171), CF is “Any indication to the learners that their use of the target language is incorrect”. As Walker (2009) notes, feedback is “a necessary precondition for a student to act on a gap is that she/he is given a comment that enables her/him to do so: the comments must be usable by the student” (p. 68).

As discussed earlier provision of feedback is of high importance, as a result, much attempt has been made by the researchers to identify and categorize the TCF types which has resulted in several typologies which are summarized in Table 2.1.

The first line of research deals with direct and indirect types of TCF and its subsequent influence on students’ revision however, the results are controversial. Lee (1997) studied 149 advance level ESL students’ performance on a writing task. The findings of her study showed that implicit error correction was more desirable than explicit error correction. She argued that students’ inaccuracy mainly rooted in their failure to detect the errors rather than their limited L2 knowledge.

### Table 1: Typology of Written Corrective Feedback Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of CF</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indirect (Implicit)</td>
<td>Indicating an error, e.g., underlining the error, using error codes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Focused</td>
<td>Providing feedback on a small number of forms</td>
<td>Ellis et al. (2006, 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfocused</td>
<td>Providing feedback on a wide array of errors</td>
<td>Sheen (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Coded</td>
<td>Pointing to the exact location of an error</td>
<td>Sheppard (1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncoded</td>
<td>Instances like circling an error and leaving the student to diagnose the error</td>
<td>Ferris &amp; Roberts (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Formative</td>
<td>Addressing the specific needs of individual writers</td>
<td>McGarell &amp; Verbeem (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative</td>
<td>Expressing how well the instructional expectations are satisfied by the writer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Form-focused</td>
<td>Providing feedback on form</td>
<td>Doughty &amp; Williams (1998b), Polio et al. (1998), Magno &amp; Amarless (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning-focused</td>
<td>Providing feedback on meaning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chandler (2003) investigated the effects of direct and indirect types of CF. The results showed that direct feedback resulted in the greatest improvement in students’ writing accuracy and the improvement was evident both
in immediate revisions and in the subsequent writing. According to the author, requiring rewriting, including direct correction, ensured that the student read the teacher’s response carefully. Thus, providing that the students incorporate the corrections in their revisions, the accuracy of the writings would highly improve.

Ferris et al. (2000) investigated the effects of different treatment conditions (both direct and indirect) on both text revisions and new pieces of writing. The authors observed that direct error correction led to more correct revisions (88%) compared to indirect error feedback (77%). Over the course of the semester, however, it was noted that students receiving indirect feedback managed to reduce their error frequency ratios substantially more than those receiving direct feedback. In another study, Ellis et al. (2006) investigated the effectiveness of explicit corrective comments. The participants were 34 ESL students in New Zealand.

They compared two types of corrective feedback: explicit feedback in the form of metalinguistic explanation and implicit feedback in the form recast, with a control group receiving no feedback. Results of their study indicated that students receiving explicit feedback with metalinguistic information took more advantage of teacher feedback.

Rahimi (2009) investigated the effect of writing accuracy of 56 Iranian English majors over a period of four months. He compared two groups, one with indirect grammar feedback and the other with no grammar feedback. The findings of his study indicated improved writing accuracy in both groups, with the feedback group making more progress. These studies are also vulnerable to criticism. Similarly, Fathman and Whalley (1990) contend that their studies show that indirect written CF has a positive effect on the development of L2 writing accuracy. But critics like Sheen (2007) challenge such claims and argue “that students’ ability to edit marked errors in their papers is not a valid indication of learning” (Sheen et al., 2009, p. 558).

Another study on the effectiveness of focused and unfocused CF was conducted by Ellis et al. (2008). Their study involved 49 EFL university students in Japan with two treatment groups, that is, focused corrective feedback on articles only and unfocused corrective feedback on articles and other errors, and one control group with no feedback. Based on the findings, both groups receiving corrective feedback outperformed the control group and the CF was equally effective for both the focused and unfocused groups.

Rezaei (2012), as a pioneering study investigating the nature and rhetoric of teacher comments in the Iranian academic setting, replicated Ferris’ study. The results showed that in both studies, marginal comments were more frequent than the end comments and make a grammar/mechanics comment was a frequently addressed comment (42%) compared to Ferris’ (18%). In the present study, most of the comments were short (71%) whereas in Ferris's study most of the comments were average (48%). The second most frequent type of marginal comment in her study was give information/statement (20%) which was the third frequent comment type with the rating of 19% (after make a positive comment at 18%) in Ferris's study. In terms of revision, this study reported that 57% of the marginal comments resulted in positive changes whereas Ferris showed the positive effect of revision at 47%. Finally, her study suggested that the type of comment is a stronger indicator of revision success than the comment characteristics such as length. The author argued that the comment type was not the most important factor influencing the revision success but the syntactic form of the comment type was a more decisive factor.

Types of Revisions

Revision is defined differently by researchers. To elaborate, Sommers (1980) view revision as a sequence of changes in a composition; in other words, “changes that are initiated by cues and occur continually throughout the writing of a work” (p. 380), and Hayes (1996) considered revision as a combination of “text interpretation, reflection and text production” (p. 15).

Most of the studies do not require students to revise their first drafts. Some just provide the student writers with the correct forms and simply ask them to study the corrections as it is the case in Iran (also see Sachs & Polio, 2007). However, it is worth mentioning that since the emergence of other forms of feedback particularly peer feedback, there is a growing body of literature on other forms of revisions that students make as a result of peer feedback which rely on exact identification of the revision type necessarily on the basis of a more comprehensive taxonomy of revision changes (Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Faigly & Witte, 1981; Villamil & De Guerrero, 1998), but there is not sufficient literature on the types of revision that students make to
their writings as a result of TCF and most of the studies on teacher feedback have evaluated the overall effect of TCF on students’ revision and they have just evaluated the revision success or failure (Conard & Goldstein, 1999; Ferris, 1997).

Faigly and Witte’s (1981) taxonomy of revision changes is the most comprehensive taxonomy evaluating the revisions which is developed in the context of peer feedback but is used in the present study to evaluate the revisions students make to their writings as a result of teacher feedback.

Faigly and Witte’s (1981) examined their taxonomy by conducting their study to six inexperienced student writers, six advanced student writers, and six expert adult writers. Based on the results, significant differences were observed among the three groups in the sense that changes made by the inexperienced writers were overwhelmingly surface changes with only 12% being meaning changes. The changes made by advanced and expert adults, in contrast, were more consistently distributed. Besides that, noticeable differences were observed in the number of revisions among the groups with inexperienced group making significantly fewer revisions than the advanced and expert adults.

Sze (2002) conducted a case study to examine the revision process of a reluctant ESL student writer. He studied the revisions made at the in-process stage and at the between draft stage of the writing process in which the student revised in response to written feedback. The findings showed that the participant made more surface-level revisions than structure and content revisions. He made more and higher-level revisions in response to written feedback than when working on his own. This finding suggest that incompetent L2 student writers seldom make self-initiated revisions, but just respond directly to the teacher’s comments, making local revisions that hardly improve the quality of the paper (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999). On the other hand, as suggested by Summers (1980), competent writers take more responsibility for their writing and revision.

Bitchener et al. (2005) studied the effect of feedback among 53 post-intermediate ESOL learners distributed in 3 groups. Group one received direct written corrective feedback and a 5 minute student–researcher conference after each piece of writing. Group two received direct written corrective feedback only. Group three received no corrective feedback on the targeted features but on the quality and organization of their content. The study found the revisions the students’ made as a result of combination of written and conference feedback improved the accuracy levels in the use of the past simple tense and the definite article in new pieces of writing but had no overall effect on accuracy when the three error categories were considered as a single group.

The aim of Al-Jarrah’s (2007) paper was to explore the effects of revision approach on the teaching of writing. The results of this study clearly indicated that students following the revision approach wrote more coherent as well as cohesive essays than the students who did not use revisions in their writing. Besides, the revision group exhibited only 28% syntax and mechanics errors whereas the non-revision group showed 56% of such errors. Accordingly, the study emphasized the importance of the revision approach in the teaching of writing.

Liu (2008) conducted a quasi-experimental classroom study to examine how explicit error feedback can help two groups of students self-edit their texts. According to the results, both types of feedback helped students self-edit their texts. Although the revisions students made as a result of direct feedback reduced their errors in the immediate draft, it did not improve the accuracy of a different paper. The revisions students made as a result of indirect feedback showed more reduction in morphological errors than semantic errors.

Holding that the computer provides good practice for the writing process, Nikiforou (2011) investigated whether students revise their writing globally or on the surface. Analysis of the data showed that students focused more on surface rather than on meaning changes and most of the revisions were related to spelling, grammar, and paraphrasing.

As it is evident in the review of the empirical studies, TCF is still the main source of feedback given on students’ writings. However, teachers offer different forms of corrective feedback which consequently yield different improvements but the results are controversy. Most of the feedback studies reviewed in review of literature section, had addressed broad categorizations of teachers’ feedback such as form-focused and content-focused feedback but there is a new trend was introduced which, instead, attempted to examine the linguistic and the underlying purpose of feedback (Ferris et al., 1997). Thus, this study breaks new ground in examining TCF
and its impact on revision with a specificity and precision not found in previous L2 research on this topic.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study incorporates the process approach to writing in the Iranian educational context and seeks for 1) identifying the types of TCF based on their form and purpose; 2) investigating the effects of different types of TCF on Iranian EFL learners’ writings; and 3) determining the types of revisions that learners make to their writings as a result of TCF they receive. Based on the goals of the study, the following research questions are proposed:

1. What types of feedback does the teacher provide on EFL learners’ writings?
2. What is the effect of teacher corrective feedback on EFL learners’ writing scores?
3. What types of revisions do the learners make to their writings as a result of teacher corrective feedback?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

This study was conducted in the Iranian educational context. The population was about 70 advanced EFL learners studying General English in one of the major English institutes in Shiraz, Iran who were chosen upon their availability via convenience sampling. In this language institute, classes were mixed and language learners were within 22-30 age span. All the learners were at the advanced level but 12 were excluded from the study and 58 learners were placed in the advanced level based on their scores in Oxford Placement Test conducted by the institute and constituted the participants of the present study. All of them were at the same level of language proficiency and, thus, homogenous. All the students had passed the prerequisite level, that is, Passages 1 by Jack C. Richards and Chuck Sandy (2000) and had already started professional writing at this level. In the next semester, however, they were going to start Passages 2 by the same authors. The purpose of selecting advanced learners was that, it is at this level that students are required to write longer compositions and receive more comprehensive feedback from the teacher which is the focus of the current study.

Instruments

The instruments used in this study involves two taxonomies and also a scoring rubric. To identify the types of teacher feedback, a syntactic categorization developed by Ferris et al. (1997), is used. This taxonomy deals with linguistic form of each feedback across three categories: statement, question, and imperatives, as well as the purpose of feedback: ask for information, give information, make a request, make a positive comment, and make a grammar/dictation comment (Appendix A).

To evaluate the effect of TCF on students’ writing, both the first and second drafts of the writings were scored by the researcher and a proficient rater to assure its reliability. The Scoring Rubric developed by Ferris and Hedgcock (1998) was used for this purpose because it allows examination of writings at three important levels of writing qualities, namely, content, organization and vocabulary. Each aspect is scored across eight band scores: Excellent (7-8), Good (5-6), Fair (3-4), and Poor (1-2); therefore, the total score for each writing is 24 points. One tenth of the data was scored by another scorer and the inter-rater reliability was computed. The correlation coefficient was 98% which was quite high and acceptable.

To identify the type of changes students make to their writings, Faigly and Witte’s (1981) taxonomy of revision changes was used. This original taxonomy analyzes the effects of revision changes on meaning. According to this taxonomy, each revision made to the first and second drafts of the essay is categorized as either surface change (formal change or meaning-preserving change) or meaning change (microstructure change or macrostructure change). One tenth of the data was scored by another coder and the inter-rater reliability was computed. The reliability coefficient was 95% and disagreements were solved by discussion.

Data collection procedure

The advanced general English course was an intensive course and students attend the class three times a week. Each session lasts for 100 minutes. Throughout the course, which took a semester (3 months) the language learners were presented with different language skills and activities provided in their text book. Writing was also an important section of the book. The language learners were introduced to different genres of writing
including description, argumentation, etc. All the classes were taught by the same instructor.

Process approach to writing was practiced in this class and the teacher explained how the process approach to writing would be like by following a step by step instruction of how a piece of writing can be produced. To elaborate, each week the teacher introduced a topic, the learners brainstormed ideas, and the thesis statement and topic sentences were selected based on what the learners suggested. The teacher encouraged them to support each topic sentence by providing examples, statement of authority, statistics, etc. Finally, a conclusion was drawn upon what mentioned in the text. Different writing skills such as paraphrasing as organizing were also practiced.

Every week, the learners were given a new topic and assigned to write an essay on the introduced topic at home and submit it the following session. The teacher did not simply read and score the writings as the final product. She, rather, followed the process approach by providing written corrective feedback on learners’ written works and returned them to the learners the next session. They were required to study the comments and write the second draft of their compositions and submit them the following session. The students were supposed to write at least 4 writings during the semester. All the papers were collected and the researcher made a copy of them for future analysis. A good proportion of the learners’ overall score was devoted to this writing experience so the learners become committed to write both the first and second draft of each essay. The first and second drafts of the learners’ writings written throughout the semester were collected for data analysis.

Data Analysis Procedure

The major source of data for analysis in this study included the first and second drafts of the students’ writing in all classes. At first, to identify the types of teacher feedback, the teachers’ feedback was identified and codified by the researcher using a syntactic categorization developed by Ferris et al. (1997) (Appendix A). Then, the data was subjected to inferential and descriptive statistics where the frequency and percentage of teacher feedback types were computed.

Second, to evaluate the effect of TCF quantitatively, the first and second drafts of the students’ compositions were scored by the researcher using the Scoring Rubric (Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998). The raw scores were then subjected to descriptive statistics and the T-Test was run to account for the differences between the first and second drafts of the writings’ scores. One tenth of the papers were scored by a professional scorer in this field.

Third, to identify the type of changes students make to their compositions, Faigly and Witte’s (1981) taxonomy of revision changes was utilized. The codification of the revision types was done by the researcher and a rater specialist in this field to maximize the reliability of the coding. Any disagreement between the coders was solved through discussion. Using descriptive statistics, the frequency and percentage of revision types were computed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Types of Teacher Corrective Feedback

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of TCF types based on their linguistic form and purpose.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ask for information/question</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>20.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Make a request/question</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>5.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Make a request/statement</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Make a request/imperative</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>7.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Give information/question</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Give information/statement</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>21.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Make a positive comment/statement or exclamation</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>11.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Make a grammar/mechanics comment/</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>30.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>question, statement, or imperative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total comments 1764 100
The fifty-eight students produced four writings during the course of the term which resulted in the total of 232 first draft papers.

As Table 2 shows, the teacher gave 1764 feedback on the writings. The most common type of TCF was make a grammar/mechanics comment (30.95%). The second most common types of TCF were give information/statement and ask for information/question with more or less the same percentage (21.43% and 20.01%, respectively). However, the question form of give information was not a frequent linguistic form comprising only 2.50% of the total percentage of TCF. The teacher also provided a high proportion of make a positive comment/statement or exclamation (11.40%). Make a request in all of its linguistic forms was the least provided form of TCF. The imperative, question and statement forms of make a request, comprised 7.20%, 5.21%, 1.30% of the total percentage of TCF, respectively. However, taken together all its linguistic forms, the proportion of make a request (13.71%) was higher than make a positive comment/statement or exclamation (11.40%).

These findings partially support the findings of previous studies. In their study, Rezaei (2012) and Martin (2012) also found that the teacher made as much as 42% and 47.9% grammar/mechanics comments respectively as the most frequent type of TCF. Similarly, give information/statement (%20) and ask for information/question (14%) were the next most common types of TCF, respectively. However, taken together all its linguistic forms, the proportion of ask for information/question was higher in this study (20.01%). However, these two comment types, with the same percentage (2.1%), were the least frequent TCF types in Martin’s study.

These findings were not in agreement with those obtained by Ferris (1995). In her study, only 18% of TCF types were make a grammar/mechanics comment. She observed that the majority of marginal comments centered on ask for information/question (31%) compared to the 20.01% collected in the current study. As far as the endnotes were concerned, make a positive comment was the most frequently employed type of TCF in both Rezaei’s and Ferris’ studies (45% and 31%, respectively) as opposed to 11.40% accumulated in the current study. The percentage of this TCF type was also low in Martin’s study (5.46%). However, it should be noted that this study did not make a distinction between marginal and end notes and all comments were taken together regardless of the place (in margins or at the end of the paper) where comments were provided.

Whereas make a request/statement was the least frequent TCF type (1.30%) in the current study, it comprised 23% of the end notes in Ferris’ study. This TCF type had the highest percentage in Martin’s study after make a grammar/mechanics comment. Nevertheless, its imperative and question form were more frequent (19.75% and 13.87%) than its statement form (4.62%).

**Effect of teacher corrective feedback on EFL learners’ writing scores**

Results of paired t-test which was run to compare the scores of the students in each first and second draft pairs of writings is shown in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Task</th>
<th>Mean 1st draft</th>
<th>Mean 2nd draft</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>SD 1st draft</th>
<th>SD 2nd draft</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Writing</td>
<td>8.34</td>
<td>9.51</td>
<td>-1.17</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Writing</td>
<td>10.93</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>-1.06</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Writing</td>
<td>12.44</td>
<td>14.10</td>
<td>-1.65</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Writing</td>
<td>15.55</td>
<td>16.79</td>
<td>-1.24</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 3, in all writings, the 2nd drafts scored higher than the 1st drafts. In the first writing, the mean of the 1st draft was 8.34 whereas it was 9.51 in the 2nd draft and the mean difference (-1.17) was significant at P<0.05. Likewise, in the second writing, the mean of the 2nd draft exceeded that in the 1st draft (12.00 vs 10.93) and the mean difference (-1.06) was again significant at P<0.05. In the third and fourth writings also the mean of the 2nd drafts was higher than those in the 1st drafts (14.10 vs 12.44 and 16.79 vs 15.55) and the mean
differences (-1.65 and -1.24) was again significant at P<0.05.

The result of the second research question highlights the effectiveness of TCF in improving the EFL learners' writing. These findings are in agreement with many other studies done in this area. In their studies, some researchers (Bitchener, 2005, 2008; Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen, 2007) indicated that all treatment groups receiving teacher written corrective feedback outperformed non-feedback control groups.

Numerous studies support the effect of different types of TCF. Chandler (2003) and Ferris et al. (1997) and Lalande (1982) proved the effectiveness of direct and indirect feedback, respectively. Sheen (2007) and Bitchener (2005, 2008) provided evidence for the usefulness of focused feedback. Sheppard (1992) demonstrated the positive influence of holistic comments. Sampson (2012) confirmed the efficiency of coded annotation and uncoded correction. Fathman and Whally (1990), Rahimi (2009), and Purnawarman (2011) showed the worth of TCF on developing writing accuracy. Ferris (1997), Martin (2011), and Rezaei (2012) utilized the same taxonomy of TCF types used in this study and similarly provided evidence for the helpfulness of TCF.

The writing development observed here shows that the learners did not ignore TCF and found it useful.

**Types of Student Revision**

Frequency and percentage of the types of revisions that students made to their writings as a result of TCF is shown in Table 4.

In general, the students made 1403 changes to their writings. The frequency of surface changes (n = 990) was clearly higher than meaning changes (n = 413). In other words, of these changes 70.26% was surface revisions and 29.74% was meaning changes. This shows that students made use of the TCF mostly to develop the grammatical aspects of their writings. At the surface level, the revisions made were mostly formal (49.98%, n = 704) than meaning-preserving (20.28%, n = 286). In the formal category, mechanics of writing including spelling, capitalization and punctuation had the highest percentage (13.25) following by verb forms with 10.40%.

Students also made 7.68% and 6.12% of article and preposition changes, respectively. However, the least corrected aspects of language were related to abbreviations and contractions (2.92%), use of pronouns (2.99%), negation (3.36%), and number (3.56%).

At the meaning-preserving level, a total of 286 (20.28%) corrections were made. The most frequent type of correction in this category was permutation (6.12%) followed by addition (4.56%). Deletions and substitutions by 3.77% and 3.20% are the next mostly utilized forms are revisions whereas distributions is the least used one (2.63%).

**Table 4: Frequency and Percentage of Revision Changes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of revision</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Formal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling, capitalization, punctuation</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>13.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations; contractions</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb forms</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>10.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negation</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of articles</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>7.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of prepositions</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>6.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of pronouns</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>704</td>
<td>49.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As far as meaning changes are concerned, 413 (29.74%) revisions were made of which the revisions made were mostly microstructure (22.06%, n = 305) than macrostructure (7.68%, n = 68). At the microstructure level, the highest proportion of revisions was related to the category of additions (12.59%). The next microstructure revisions were additions (5.55%) and substitutions (3.92%), respectively. Deletions was the least frequent type (1.99%).

On the other hand, at the macrostructure level, additions and substitutions comprised more or less the same proportion of these changes by 2.99% and 2.70%, respectively. Deletions was the least frequent type (1.99%).

With regard to the third research question, as the analysis of the revision changes showed, most of the changes that the learners made to the writings at the surface level were formal. Formal changes “include most, but not all, conventional copy-editing operations” (Faigley & Witte, 1981, p. 402) which do not have any effect on the meaning of the text. Consider the following excerpts taken from a learners’ writing:

1st draft:
in other hand, he is one of the old-star singer in Iran’s music. He is very famous in Iran and the world. He is very young and starting his activities a few years ago.

2nd draft:
On the other hand, he is one of the old-star singers in Iran’s music. He is very famous in Iran and the world. He is very young and has started his activities a few years ago.

As discussed earlier and as it is evident in the above example, most of the corrections made by the learners are, on the first place, related to mechanics of writing and verb forms, and on the second place, to correct use of articles and pronouns. This is not actually a new finding as these forms of errors are frequently seen in Iranian EFL learners’ compositions and therefore the errors highlighted by the teachers and the corrections made by the learners fall in these categories.

At the meaning-preserving level of the surface changes, the revisions made include changes that...
"paraphrase" the concepts in the text but do not alter them (Faigley & Witte, 1981, p. 403). To elaborate more on the other forms of meaning-preserving changes, an excerpt is given below:

1st draft:

Public and Azad universities are different in amount of tuition. Public universities is free charge and don’t need to pay money except for miscellaneous items and objects (teacher comment: both have the same meaning). But tuition of universities is very up (not a good word!). This heavy tuition cause a lot of problems for most of Iranian families. Statistics show 70% families involved with problem of Azad’s tuition and in each 10 families about 7 families have a child that study in Azad university and this situation is difficult for everybody in family.

2nd draft:

Public and Azad universities are different in amount of tuition. Public universities is free charge and students don’t need to pay money except for miscellaneous items. But tuition of universities is very high. This heavy tuition cause a lot of problems for most of Iranian families. Statistics show 70% families involved with problem of Azad’s tuition. In each 10 families about 7 families have a child that study in Azad university and this situation is difficult for everybody in family.

As observed in the example, the first revision was an addition of a missing pronoun. The second revision is deleting “and objects”. Using two or more words of the same meaning is a frequent error usually made by Iranian students as it is a common form used in Farsi. Highlighting the error the learner realized that using two words of the same meaning might not be needed, thus, deleting the second word. The third revision, is an example of substitution where the learner substituted the wrong word “deep” with “high” upon the teacher’s request. Finally, the fourth revision is what referred to as distribution, and the least common type of meaning-preserving changes the EFL learners made to the writings. Distribution “occur when material in one text segment is passed into more than one segment. A change where a writer revises what has been compressed into a single unit so that it falls into more than one segment. A change where a writer revises what has been compressed into a single unit so that it falls into more than one segment. A change where a writer revises what has been compressed into a single unit so that it falls into more than one segment” (Faigley & Witte, 1981, p. 403). This form of error is usually manifested with Iranian students connecting several successive sentences with connector “and” together. This was corrected by omitting one of the extra “ands”.

Concerning the meaning changes, it was observed that microstructure changes were more frequent than microstructure ones. According to Faigley & Witte (1981), microstructure is a minor revision change which involves “simple adjustments or elaborations of existing text” whereas macrostructure is a major revision change which involves “more sweeping alterations” (p. 404). To elaborate how microstructure changes differed from the macrostructure ones, consider the following excerpt:

1st draft:

The second reason is that there isn’t any difference between male and female. Sex is not important. All human are identical (teacher comment: what do you mean?) either man or woman. Equal rights between man and woman and justice in any society are keys of success. (Teacher comment: this sentence seem irrelevant!) They have equal rights in any aspect. For instance, women can have social activity like men. (Teacher comment: provide more support)

2nd draft:

The second reason is that there isn’t any difference between male and female. Sex is not important. All humans are equal either man or woman. They have equal rights in any aspect. For instance, women can have social activity like men. They should have right to go to stadiums or do any sports they like such as wrestling. They should have right to do any job they like such as pilot, president etc.

The above excerpt shows the three forms of microstructure revisions. The first change is related to the substitution of the word ‘identical’ with ‘equal’ since the use of incorrect form has made the meaning of the sentence obscure. The second revision is related to the category of deletion which is particularly manifested by providing irrelevant or unnecessary information among Iranian EFL learners. As can be seen, the irrelevant sentence is omitted in the second draft. In addition, as the paragraph seemed incomplete and not sufficient examples had been provided to support the topic sentence “there isn’t any difference between male and female”, the learner added a few sentences to support his idea and make the paragraph more meaningful. These microstructure changes although remove the ambiguities...
and make the text easier to understand, do not change the concepts involved in the text.

Macrostructure changes, on the other hand, affect the concepts involved in the text. In other words, they change the whole summary of the text. Consider the following excerpt which involves all three types of macrostructure changes.

1st draft:

So, most countries sell this power to another country because it is expensive and they can gain profit and use this profit for people and the country can make money! (Teacher comment: is this your second reason? Please expand your idea. It’s not clear).

2nd draft:

The second reason why electricity is important is that most countries export this power to another country and gain profit and use this profit for people. In fact, some countries produce electricity and export it to another country as a source for making money. Then, they use this money for developing electricity industry and also for building and developing their country.

As shown above, although the first paragraph vaguely conveys the idea that ‘electricity is important because of its money’, through some revisions including addition, deletion and substitutions this idea in conveyed in the second draft that ‘countries produce and export electricity as a source of income to develop their country or other industries’. So, the summaries of the two paragraphs are different showing that a macrostructure change has occurred (Faigley & Witte, 1981).

Generally, the findings suggest that TCF is a useful method of assisting learners to produce more advanced writings from the first draft to the next. The teacher gave a total of 1764 comments but the revisions made by the learners were 1403 indicating that the students did not use the full potential of TCF. However, as the analysis of the excerpt showed, most of the revisions made by them were successful. In this regard, Faigley and Witte (1981) argue that “successful revision results not from the number of changes a writer makes but from the degree to which revision changes bring a text closer to fitting the demands of the situation” (p. 411). So, quality of feedback rather than its number is a better predicator of revision success.

The findings partially support the findings of other studies which made use of this taxonomy or other typologies. In their study, Faigley and Witte (1981) also investigated the revisions that three groups of writers, i.e. expert adults, advanced students and inexperienced students made and found that the inexperienced writers’ changes were overwhelmingly surface changes whereas 24% of the advanced learners' and 34% of the expert adults’ changes were meaning changes. Likewise, Ferris and Roberts (2001) and Lee (1997) found that learners receiving teacher feedback could improve the accuracy of their writings.

CONCLUSION

This study inquired the types of TCF based on a more recent taxonomy develop by Ferris et al. (1997) which categorized teacher commentary based on linguistic form and pragmatic purpose. It was seen that some linguistic forms such as imperative were more frequent to be used for a particular purpose such as make a request than others whereas question form may be more frequent form of ask for information. So, linguistic form cannot be a determining factor in categorizing types of teacher corrective feedback. Instead, purpose of teacher feedback acts as a better criteria in classifying TCF.

As far as types of TCF was concerned, it was also concluded that type of TCF was not context-specific. The present study as well as Rezaei’s study were conducted in Iranian educational setting but Martin’s was conducted in a private college in south central Pennsylvania, USA, however, in all studies make a grammar/mechanics comment was the most common type of TCF. So, the types of comment that teachers give is rather dependent on teachers’ view about second or foreign language learning and particularly reflects the amount of weight they give to different aspects of writing.

In general, because providing feedback to students is the most time-consuming and challenging part of teacher’s profession, identifying and applying the most effective types of teacher corrective feedback is of high importance and can save teachers a lot of time and energy. Students also find teacher feedback more effective and are able to make use its potentials as much as possible. Comparing the language learners’ scores in the 1st and 2nd draft also showed the overall writing development proving the effectiveness of TCF in the Iranian EFL context.
It was generally found that the learners made a lot of revisions to their writings. However, learners could not use the full potential of TCF and the number of revisions was fewer than the number of teacher comments. According to Faigley and Witte (1981, p. 41), “Success in revision is intimately tied to a writer's planning and reviewing skills. Inadequate planning will force writers to write several drafts before they discover what it is that they have to say”. Hence, during process approach to writing, students not only receive corrective feedback and go through multiple drafting until the final product is produced, but also need to acquire the necessary writing skills and strategies such as brainstorming and planning which consequently assist them to compose better writings.

Teachers also should be careful about the comments they give. Sometimes students cannot revised their work simply because they do not understand them. In this view, Ferris (1997, p. 330) advises that “teachers should be careful (a) in their own responding strategies, (b) in explaining those strategies to their students, and (c) in helping students learn to revise and holding them accountable for considering feedback they have received (whether from teacher or peers) in doing so”.

The current study, in general, supports having process-oriented writing classes which “treats all writing as a creative act which requires time and positive feedback to be done well” (Stanley, 1993, cited in Sun and Feng, 2009, p. 150). As feedback is considered as one of “the most critical influences on student learning” (Hattie & Timperly, 2011, p.102), identifying its most useful types would be of high value. However, it is clear that providing and receiving feedback requires much skill by learners and teachers and this important knowledge is gradually being achieved through more studies in this area. The study presented here and the findings obtained from it emphasize the importance of feedback studies and identification of the most effective teacher corrective feedback types which hopefully result in more successful revisions and writing development.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

In this section, several implications are suggested particularly for EFL teachers and those practitioners who are interested in the area of teacher corrective feedback research.

Writing as an increasingly needed skill has given specific attention during the last decades however it has continued to be a major source of difficulty for most Iranian FEL students. A major source of weakness is that in the Iranian educational setting, and in this case, in writing classes, most teacher still have a product orientation so emphasis is put on the product that learners finally produce while underestimating the process of learning and teaching via which the final product is obtained. The findings of this study, along with other studies conducted in this area, proved that process approach to writing was a more viable and efficient method of teaching writing which yielded positive results. Actually, writing process is important because it gives a central position to learner’s needs, expectations, goals, learning styles and skills. So, teachers in EFL context are encouraged to integrate a process-oriented approach to their classes and allow language learners to benefit the task cognitively.

Writing process contains three steps including prewriting, drafting, and revising. These steps were practiced in this study where students produced a first draft and then revised their written products based on TCF and produced a final draft. Nonetheless, to produce a second draft or multiple drafts of the same writing, students need to receive comprehensive feedback from the teacher. In this study teacher gave learners a variety of feedbacks which were classified based on an analytic model developed by Ferris et al. (1997) which allowed identification of TCF types based on its pragmatic intent and syntactic form. As this was a more novel typology and both the current study and other studies which have utilized it, have found it interesting and useful, teachers and researchers are recommended to take advantage of this typology and provide more empirical evidence of its effectiveness specifically because the previous categorizations such as explicit, or implicit feedback etc. have yielded diverse results and are still open to question.

There are both quantitative and qualitative approaches to assess the effectiveness of TCF. The present study first evaluated the influence of TCF on the learners’ writing scores to provide a quantifiable basis which made comparing the first and second drafts easy to handle. Most of the previous studies likewise have resorted to statistical procedures and have seen the effect of different forms of teacher feedback on the final scores. Such quantifiable procedures are of value but insufficient. Some rating scale are also developed which consider the
degree to which learners utilize each comment. For example, Ferris (1997) proposed a subjective rating scale which rates the revisions as making no attempt, a minimal attempt, or a substantive attempt to address the comment and whether the resulting change(s) improved the paper, had mixed effects, or had a negligible or negative effect on the revision. Teachers are also recommended to employ such subjective scales. However, knowing the degree to which feedback has been successful is not still sufficient. It is, at the same time, vital to know which aspects of writing develops owing to the feedbacks provided to the learners. It is particularly a neglected aspect of research. To bridge this gap, the researcher in this study, utilized Faigley and Witt’s taxonomy of revision changes (1981) as the most detailed and comprehensive typology of revision changes. Although this taxonomy was originally developed for identifying the revisions in a peer-feedback context, it was used in this study to identify the revisions in a teacher-feedback context. So, it was clearly and exactly identified which aspects of writing developed. To elaborate, it was found that most of the TCF types were surface and formal relating to grammar/mechanics of writing. Consequently, the analysis of revisions showed that most of the changes that the learners made were related to grammatical aspects of writing. So, using the taxonomy of revision changes, teachers and researchers can easily trace what feedback type results in which revision type. Researchers must use typologies which are worthwhile and help them to reach at sounder findings.

As explained earlier, teachers mostly provided feedback on grammatical aspects of language and, as a result, learners primarily revised the grammatical aspects of writing. So, there is a direct link between feedback and revision types. Actually, these are the teachers who determines the content of the feedback, thus, s/he should consider the elements of the writing that are strong or that require more work.

It is important to identify positive features of the writing. Although learners have indicated that they do not always find positive comments helpful to improve their writing, they appreciate receiving praise to nurture their confidence as writers and their motivation to write. Some learners say that they find elaborated comments on specific elements of their writing most helpful in guiding their revisions. They appreciate teachers getting involved with the subject of their writing, but do not like to have their ideas questioned or criticized.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The present study aimed at identifying teacher corrective feedback types given on the writings of 58 advanced EFL learners and examining the effect of them on the learners’ subsequent revisions. Future studies, however, can be done along the following lines:

1. Similar studies can be carried out to identify teacher corrective feedback types based on the analytic model used in this study which was based on linguistic form and purpose of feedback than broad categorizations such as direct, indirect, which had been widely studied before.

2. Given that learners did not use the full potential of TCF and the number of revisions was fewer than the number of teacher comments, future studies can study in more depth which types of TCF are less likely to lead to revision success or, in other words, which TCF types are more likely to result in revision success.

3. Teachers and researchers are also encouraged to conduct observational studies. It is argued that “neither experimental studies of the causes nor studies of the effects of revision have been able to answer satisfactorily all the questions that they raise”. (Faigley & Witte, 1981, p. 412). Therefore, more observational studies of writers revising in non-experimental situations are required. Studies of how situational variables influence revision or how textual cues lead writers to revise their texts (Faigley & Witte, 1981) are a few examples of the areas of inquiry.

4. Since a limited sample including 58 language learners studying at a public language institute were used in the study, and feedbacks of only one teacher were examined, the findings, though useful, are not highly generalizable. So, future studies can include a wider array of language learners and, more importantly, examine the feedbacks of more teachers to reach at more generalizable results.

5. An interesting line of research would be to study TCF types and revisions among different language proficiency groups since it is assumed that particular types of TCF may fit better to a particular proficiency level (primary, intermediate, advanced) and, thus, result in more revision success.

6. In the present study the classes were mixed and gender differences were not considered. Researchers interested in gender differences can also conduct
similar studies with regard to gender to discover whether the gender type has any effect on the type of TCF given to the learners or its subsequent revisions.

REFERENCES


presented at International TESOL Convention, Vancouver, B.C., March 14-18.


