The Effect of Post-text Feedback vs. Recast on Written Grammatical Accuracy of Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners

Mahvan Ebrahimzadeh, Ph.D. Candidate, Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon Branch, Tonekabon, Iran
mahvanebrahimzade@yahoo.com
Mohhamad Reza Khodareza*, Assistant Professor, Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon Branch, Tonekabon, Iran*
m.khodareza49@gmail.com

Abstract
This study examined the effect of two types of feedback, post-text as a written feedback and recast as an oral one on written grammatical accuracy of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. To this end, 45 intermediate students who were studying at Ideal Language Institute in Sari were selected based on their performance on the Nelson proficiency test, and then divided into three groups (two experimental and one control groups) randomly. As pretest, the participants were asked to write 150-200 words about the worst memory they had in their life. Then, they were exposed to 10 weeks of treatment. Each week, they received a topic to write. One of the experimental groups received post-text feedback and another one recast. Afterwards, the three groups sat for the posttest. The obtained results were compared using ANCOVA. The findings revealed that there was a significant difference between the post-test scores of the students in different groups. It was made clear that both treatments were effective on the reduction of students grammatical errors in writing, but post-text feedback was much more effective than recast.

Keywords: recast, post-text, writing, grammatical accuracy, feedback.

Introduction
Many studies indicate that in comparison to other skills, writing is most neglected by both teachers and students. There is no doubt that writing is the most difficult skill to master. These difficulties lie not only in generating and organizing idea but also in translating these ideas into readable context. In order to help students be aware of their errors, the teacher should provide appropriate feedback for them. The type of feedback used by teachers for correcting learners' grammatical errors has been a matter of controversy. For example, some teachers have found the positive effect for more indirect feedback strategies such as error coding and metalinguistic feedback (Ferris & Helt, 2000, Lalande, 1982; Lee, 1997). Others have reported no significant difference between coded and uncoded feedback (Ferris & Robert, 2001; Robb et al. 1986, cited in Nassaji 2011). In fact, majority of the earlier studies of error correction (Allwright, 1975; Corder, 1967; Hendrickson, 1978; Vigil& Oller, 1976) recommend pushing learners in their output rather than simply providing them with the correct form (as cited in Tatawy, 2006). Recast can be defined as utterance that rephrases an utterance 'by changing one or more of its sentence components (subject, verb, or object) while still referring to its central meaning' (Long, 1996, p. 436). For example: Student: 'I go to food court at weekend'. Teacher: 'You went to food court. What did you eat'? Student: 'Fried rice. It was great'.

Post-text written correction is an indirect feedback in which the teacher highlights or underlines grammar and vocabulary in text and writes comments about them at the end of the text

(Bankier, 2012).Then the student reads the comments and corrects the errors based on those comments. The teacher does not provide the correct form for the students but by writing comments he or she encourages the student to think of the error and try to correct them. For example: Student: 'I give you the book last Monday'. Teacher: 'Because of last Monday you must use past tense'. Student: 'I gave you the book last Monday'.

Theoretical framework

Concept of feedbacks is based on interaction hypothesis. The interaction approach emphasizes learning through input (exposure to language), production of language (output), and feedback that emerges as a result of interaction. It posits that interaction between a non-native speaker (NNS) and a native speaker (NS), or non-native speaker of a higher level, makes a naturalistic second language acquisition environment where the NNS learns through negotiation of meaning and / or becoming aware of gaps in their target language knowledge (Gas & Selinker, 2008).

The interaction hypothesis also stated that when an ESOL (ESL, EFL) learner is trying to negotiate conversation in the target language the gaps in their abilities are revealed to them. These abilities can include pronunciation, syntax, grammar and vocabulary. The interaction hypothesis concludes that this selfrealization, brought about by authentic interaction, will motivate the second language learner to produce target language output to communicate meaning and seek out the knowledge they lack (Lyster & Mori, 2006). According to Gas and Selinker, (2008), this interaction between the ESOL (ESL, EFL) learner and other students or the learner and the ESOL (ESL, EFL) teacher, results in language acquisition on the part of the learner, meaning they have internalized this chunk of language and will be able to produce it later when needed.

In the present study, since the major concern was to provide appropriate techniques to expand students' grammatical accuracy needed to improve their writing skill, the researcher tried to compare two types of feedback, post-text written corrective feedback and recast, in order to see which one is more influential on students' grammatical accuracy in writing.

Significance of the Study

According to White and McGoven (1994) writing has been one of the most difficult skills for learners to develop. Before submitting the final draft, the students need to revise their writing several times. So, in order to help learners to write with minimal errors and maximal accuracy, the teacher must provide appropriate feedback to the students and write useful comments on the students' errors (Creme & Lea, 1997; Ennis, 1996; Ferris, 2002; Harmer, 2001; Krashen, 1987; Kroll, 2001). But according to Littlewood (1995) and Stern (1992) (as cited in Jimena, Tedjaatmadja, & Tian, 2005), teachers often feel that their effort in giving feedback to correct learners' work is not effective. Some learners keep on committing the same errors, and teachers understand that it is an arduous way for learners to achieve accuracy in writing, which is grammatically demanding. Therefore, the teacher requires thinking of and applying the most effective type of feedback to help learners to overcome writing difficulties.

The present study seeks to indicate that teachers' written and oral corrective feedback can play a role in improving grammatical accuracy of Iranian intermediate learners' writing. Among different types of WCF, the researcher used post-text feedback as a written form of corrective feedback and recast as an oral one in order to encourage learners to revise their writings and correct their errors based on the feedback given by the teacher. The findings of this study, therefore, can help the instructors to provide their students with the most useful type of feedback

and ensure their improvement in using accurate grammatical forms in writing. Thus, the researcher sought to answer the following research questions.

Research Questions
1. Does the teacher's oral and written corrective feedback affect Iranian intermediate EFL learners' grammatical accuracy in writing?
2. Which type of feedback, post-text or recast, is more effective?

Research Hypotheses
1. Teacher's oral and written feedback does not affect Iranian intermediate EFL learners' grammatical accuracy in writing.
2. There is no significant difference between post-text written corrective feedback and   recast in terms of their effect on Iranian intermediate students' accuracy in writing.

Background
According to Chastain (1988) (as cited in Movahed, 2011), writing is a basic communication skill and a unique asset in a process of learning a second language (L2). Both of these aspects of writing can serve to reinforce the other. Although writing is considered as one of the four language skills, it is not included in all language courses (p. 244). Different teachers, have different writing goals. Some teachers focus on the language itself, some on communication and others on both the form and message. Writing has both short term and long term goals. The latter must be the ability to use the learned materials to communicate a message that native speaker can understand. The former is the same except that they applied to specific segments of learning material. One way in improving the learners' writing is through providing appropriate feedback. Traditionally feedback has been understood as "any numerous procedures that are used to tell learner if an instructional response is right or wrong" (Kulhavy, 1977, as cited in Hawe, Dixon, & Watson 2008). A more expansive view is apparent in a notion of feedback as crucial interaction between teacher and student carried out for furthering students' learning (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & William, 2003, as cited in Hawe, Dixon, & Watson 2008).

The main responsibility of writing teacher is to know how well the students have done in writing process. In this sense, writing feedback can help teachers to do so. For students writing feedback is helpful since they can recognize their strengths and weaknesses in writing. Feedback in written language has been the focus of a number of studies (for example: Ferris, 1997; Hyland, 2000; Xiang, 2004). In early 20th century, writing was viewed as product. The most common role of the teacher was to be a judge, critical evaluator of finished product (Karim & Irine Ivy, 2011). In 1960s, writing instruction began to include the entire process of writing invention, drafting, feedback, and revision (Sokolik, 2003, as cited in Karim & Irine Ivy, 2011). These days the concept of feedback becomes more and more important in L_2 classes and it becomes an inevitable part of the whole writing process. For the past two decades or so, a number of teachers and researchers have explored the nature and effect of feedback in second language classrooms (e.g., Conard& Goldestein, 1999; Polio, Fleck, & Leder, 1998; Zamel, 1985; as cited in Ryoo, 2004, p. 166).

A number of studies have distinguished between direct and indirect feedback strategies and investigated the extent to which they facilitate greater accuracy (Ferris, 1995a,b; Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998; Lalande, 1982; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986, as cited in Bitchener, Young, & Comeron, 2005). Direct feedback occurs when the teacher corrects students' error. Indirect feedbacks are those that are indicated by teacher without correction, thereby leaving students to

diagnose and correct it. Indirect feedback has two types, coded and uncoded. Coded feedback shows the exact location of an error. The teacher indicates the type of error with a code (for example, wf shows that the type of error in this sentence is word form error, like *she is happiness*[wf,] cited in Bankier, 2012). Uncoded feedback refers to any indication of error, even by highlighting, circling, and underlining by the teacher, without correcting them. Therefore, the student must diagnose the error and correct it.

Oral and Written Feedback

There are two major categories of feedback, oral and written. Both of them have attracted considerable attention in recent years because they have an important place in L_2. Different researchers have discussed the efficacy of oral and written feedback.

Efficacy of Oral Feedback

The efficacy of oral feedback was discussed by Krashen and Long. According to Krashen (1982), error correction is a 'serious' mistake because it puts learners on the defensive and because it only assists the development of 'learned knowledge' and plays no role in 'acquired knowledge'. But error correction directed at simple and portable rules, such as third person –s is useful because it helps monitoring. CF in a form of negotiation of meaning can help learners notice their errors, create form-meaning connections and thus aid acquisition.

Efficacy of Written Feedback

Three researchers, Truscott, Ferris and Hyland & Hyland, have discussed the efficacy of written corrective feedback. Truscott (1996; 1999) states that correcting learners' errors in a written composition may enable them to eliminate the errors in a subsequent draft but has no effect on grammatical accuracy in a new piece of writing (i.e. it does not result in acquisition). According to Ferris (1999), if the correction is clear and consistent it will work for acquisition. Finally, in the study conducted by Hyland and Hyland (2006), they mention that 'it is difficult to draw any clear conclusions and generalizations from the literature as a result of varied populations, treatments and research designs' (p. 84).

Methodology

Participants

The present study included 45 intermediate students who were studying at Ideal Language Institute in Sari. Since this study consisted of 3 groups (two experimental groups and one control group), the researcher randomly assigned 15 students in each group. In order to come up with the reasonable answer to the research questions, the following procedure was gone through.

Procedures

The present study, with a pre/post-test quasi-experimental design, in the first phase, a homogeneity test was administered to the participants. Nelson Proficiency Test was used. After obtaining the scores and calculating the mean and standard deviation, those students whose scores fell between one SD above and below the mean were selected for the study. Then, the researcher divided the participants into three groups, one control and two experimental groups. The pre-test was administered to all these three groups. In this test, the participants were asked to write 150-200 words about the worst memory they had in their life. They were then exposed to 10 weeks of treatment. Each week, they received a topic to write. The ten chosen topics were the

same for all the three groups. Three raters graded the students' writings based on error count method.

Since working on all types of grammatical error is impossible in a limited amount of time, this study focused on three major grammatical errors the students had in their writing. Grammatical items that were focused on comprised verb tense, subject and verb agreement, and word order. During the period of treatment, the students were given post-text feedback in one experimental group and recast in the other one. It must be noted that in post-text feedback, the teacher highlighted the errors and wrote comments about them at the end of the paper and the students read the comments and revised their errors based on the comments. But in recast, the students read their writing task aloud in the classroom and the teacher repeated the errors back to the learners in a corrected form. The control group received traditional type of feedback, i.e. is direct feedback. The teacher wrote the correct form of errors above them. After the period of treatment, a post-test was administered to both control and experimental groups. In all groups the participants were asked to write about the best memory they had in their life in 150-200 words. Finally, the results of these tests were compared to each other and the effectiveness of the treatment was determined.

Results and discussion

After collecting the data through the above-mentioned procedures, ANCOVA was used to compare the students' pre-test and post-test scores. Table 1 below shows the descriptive statistics of post-text group.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for post-text feedback

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	15	11.33	16.00	13.8220	1.27205
Posttest	15	14.00	19.00	16.8000	1.32017
Valid N (listwise)	15				

As indicated in table 1, the mean score of the post-text group in pre-test is 13.82, whereas the mean of the post-test one is 16.80. This shows that post-text feedback is statistically effective on students' written grammatical accuracy. Descriptive statistics of the recast group are given in table 2 below.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Recast

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	15	11.00	15.00	13.7333	1.22280
Posttest	15	12.00	18.00	15.9333	1.48645
Valid N (listwise)	15				

On inspection of the mean scores, one can conclude that learners receiving post-text feedback performed better in posttest than those receiving recast and direct feedback. Since descriptive statistics alone are not strong enough, ANCOVA was performed to detect any

possible statistically significant difference between the performances of the three groups. Table 3 indicates the inferential statistic of the post-text group.

Table 3. Results of ANCOVA: posttest post-text feedback

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	22.300[a]	1	22.300	138.030	.000
Intercept	1.121	1	1.121	6.937	.021
Pretest	22.300	1	22.300	138.030	.000
Error	2.100	13	.162		
Total	4258.000	15			
Corrected Total	24.400	14			

The results reported in Table 3 above shows that P- value was less than the level of significance set in this analysis (P= .000 < .05) and F-value is more than 1 (F=138>1), suggesting that exposing learners to post-text feedback has improved the learners' grammatical accuracy. Tables 4 and 5 below indicate the inferential statistics of the recast and control groups, respectively.

Table 4. Results of ANCOVA posttest (recast)

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	15.023[a]	1	15.023	12.274	.004
Intercept	2.037	1	2.037	1.664	.220
pretest	15.023	1	15.023	12.274	.004
Error	15.911	13	1.224		
Total	3839.000	15			
Corrected Total	30.933	14			

a. R Squared = .486 (Adjusted R Squared = .446)

Table 5. Results of ANCOVA: post-test(control group)

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	6.457[a]	1	6.457	9.986	.008
Intercept	.530	1	.530	.819	.382
pretest	6.457	1	6.457	9.986	.008
Error	8.406	13	.647		

Total	3221.613	15
Corrected Total	14.863	14

a. R Squared = .434 (Adjusted R Squared = .391)

The results presented in the above tables indicate that the students' scores in three groups improved. This shows that both oral feedback and written feedback are influential in enhancing the grammatical competence of the students. So, the first null hypothesis which states that oral and written feedback does not affect learners' written grammatical accuracy is rejected here. But, there was a statistically significant difference between the performances of learners who received post-text feedback in comparison with those who were provided with recasts. That is, post-text feedback proved to be more effective than recasts and direct feedback in improving the written grammatical accuracy. The F-value in post-text group is 138(138>1). It is 12, (12>1) for recast group and 9,(9>1) for control group. Since the F-value for post-text feedback is much higher that the F value in recast, it can be concluded that the students who received post-text feedback outperformed the ones who received recast. Therefore, the null hypothesis that states there is no significant difference between post-text feedback and recast is rejected too.

Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that there was a significant difference between the post-test scores of the students in different groups. Information from the results revealed that both treatments were effective in the reduction of the students' grammatical errors in writing, but post-text feedback was much more effective than recast. Based on the results of the study, several conclusions can be drawn. First, feedback plays an important role in EFL students" writing. This has been proved in many previously-conducted studies in EFL as well as ESL contexts. But there exists some disagreement on the form of the feedback. While some people believe that teacher's oral feedback is more effective, some others maintain that the written one is more influential. The results of the present study proved that written feedback is a more effective tool that teachers can use in their writing classes.

References

Allwright, R. L. (1975), Problems in the study of the language teacher's treatment of learner error. In M. Burt & H. Dulay (Eds.), new directions in second language learning, teaching and bilingual education: *TESOL 75* (pp.96-109).

Bankier, J. (2012),Post-Text and In-Text Corrective Feedback1, *Language Education in Asia,Volume 3, Issue 1.*

Bichener, J., Young, S. & Cameron, D. (2005). The effect of different types of corrective feedback on ESL student writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 14, 191-205.*

Chastain, K. (1988). Developing second language skills: Theory and practice. 3rd edition, San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Corder, S. (1967), The significance of learner's errors. *International Review of Applied Linguistics, 5*, 161-170.

Crème, P.& Lea,M.(1997),Writing at University: A guide for students. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Ennis, R. H. (1996). Critical Thinking; Journal: Argumentation·Volume 14, Issue 1, pp 48-51;

Ferris, D. R. (1999), The case for grammar correction in L2 writing classes: A response to Truscott (1996). *Journal of Second Language Writing, 8*(1), 1–11.

Ferris, D., & Helt, M. (2000), Was Truscott right? New evidence on the effects of error correction in L2 writing classes, Paper presented at AAAL Conference, Vancouver, BC.

Ferris, D., & Roberts, B. (2001), Error feedback in L2 writing classes: How explicit does it need to be? Journal of Second Language Writing, 10, 161–184.

Ferris, D. (2002), Treatment of error in second language student writing. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Gass, S. M. & Selinker, L. (2008), Second Language acquisition. New York: Routledge.

Harmer, J. (2001). The Practice of English Language Teaching, third edition, London, Longman.

Hawe, E., Dixon, H. & Watson, E. (2008). Oral Feedback in a Context of Written Language. Academic journal article from Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, Vol. 31, No. 1.

Hendrickson, J.M. (1978). Error correction in foreign language teaching: Recent theory, research and practice *Modern Language Journal, 62*(8), 387-395.

Hyland, K., & Hyland, F. (2006). Feedback on second language students' writing. *Language Teaching, 39*(2), 83–101.

Jimena, E.D., Tedjaatmadja, H. M. and Tian, M. (2005). *Error Correction: A Bridge to Grammatical Accuracy in L2 Writing*.International Conference on Language and Communication and Culture: "Dialogs and Contexts in Focus. Bangkok

Karim, M. Z., & Ivy, T. I. (2011). The nature of teacher feedback in second language (L2) writing classrooms: A study on some private universities in Bangladesh. *Journal of the Bangladesh Association of Young Researchers*, *1*(1), 31-48.

Krashen, S.D. (1987). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*, Oxford: Pergamon. (1982).

Krashen, S. D. Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition. Prentice-Hall International,

Kroll, B. (2001). Considerations for teaching an ESL/EFL writing course. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), Teaching English as a second or foreign language (3rd ed.) (pp.219-232). Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle.

Lalande, J.F. (1982). Reducing composition errors: An experiment. Modern Language Journal, 66, 140–149.

Lee, I. (1997). ESL learners' performance in error correction in writing: Some implications for teaching. *System, 25, 465-477.*

Lightbrown, P. M. & Spada, N. (1999). *How languages are learned (2nd ed.).*Oxford: Oxford Univercity Press.

Littlewood, W. (1995). Writing and reading as a joint journey through ideas. *Anthology Series 35*: 421-434.

Long, M. H. (1996).The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition.In W. C. Ritchie & T. K. Bhatia (Eds.).Handbook of Research on language Acquisition (pp. 413–468). San Diego. CA: Academic Press.

Lyster, R. & Mori, H. (2006). Interactional feedback and instructional counterbalance. Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 28, 269-300.

Movahed, A. (2011). The Effect of Unfocused and Focused Written Corrective Feedback on the Writing Accuracy of Advanced EFL Learners. Garmsar Azad University.

Nassaji, H. (2011). Correcting students' written grammatical errors: The effects of negotiated versus nonnegotiated feedback. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 1* (3). 315-334.

Robb, T., Ross, S., & Shortreed, I. (1986). Salience of feedback on error and its effect on EFL writing quality. *TESOL Quarterly, 20*(1), 83–95.

Stern, H.H. (1992). *Issues and Options in Language Teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tatawy, M. E. (2006). Corrective feedback in second language acquisition. Teachers' College,Columbia University. Retrieved March 8, 2012, from Journals.tc - library. org/ index. php/teso/article/download/160/158.

Truscott, J. (1996). The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes. Language Learning, 46(2), 327–369.

Truscott, J. (1999). The case for ''the case for grammar correction in L2 writing classes'': A response to Ferris.