

Explicit vs. Implicit Corrective Feedback: Which is More Effective?

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ABSTRACT

Corrective feedback (CF) has become an important concept in EFL learning since it is viewed as a facilitator for improving L2 learning. CF refers to any feedback given to a student that comprises evidence of the learner's language being used incorrectly or the teacher's immediate response to the learner's incorrect utterances. There is a distinction between implicit and explicit CF types, that is, there is no apparent sign of error in implicit CF but there is in explicit CF types. This paper argues that compared with the implicit CF, explicit CF is more desirable and advantageous for EFL students' L2 growth, especially in terms of L2 willingness to communicate (WTC), L2 speaking development, and L2 grammatical accuracy and awareness. Firstly, several linguistic theories are applied to demonstrate why explicit CF is more effective than implicit CF, and then the study critically reviews the previous research to explain how students provided with explicit CF outperformed those receiving implicit one in terms of L2 WTC, L2 speaking development, and L2 grammar awareness and accuracy.

Keywords: *Corrective feedback, Explicit corrective feedback, Implicit corrective feedback.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Corrective feedback (CF) refers to language learners' corrections of faults in their oral or written performance [9]. It has been at the forefront of second language studies because of its theoretical and pedagogical importance over the past two decades. An increasing body of evidence suggests that CF is not only beneficial but also necessary for enhancing four fundamental language abilities of the second language (L2) learners concerning reading, listening, speaking, and writing [10]. In second language research, CF can be characterised based on whether it is implicit or explicit [16]. Explicit feedback, which includes elicitation, explicit correction, and metalinguistic hints, aims to draw L2 learners' attention to their errors [12]. Implicit feedback, on the other hand, uses methods such as clarification queries, repetition, and recasts to attract students' correcting interest without interrupting the flow of interaction and learning activities or publicly informing them that they have made a mistake [7]. Although it is commonly acknowledged that both explicit and implicit CF positively function in second language acquisition (SLA), a controversy has emerged as to which kind contributes more [21].

This study aims to investigate the use of explicit and implicit types of corrective feedback used by teachers in language classrooms, and to examine compared with implicit CF, whether the explicit one is more beneficial to students who acquire English as a foreign language (EFL), particularly in terms of L2 willingness to communicate (WTC), L2 speaking development, and L2 grammatical correctness and awareness. In this case, the current study will first demonstrate the reason why explicit CF is more effective than implicit CF using several language theories. Then, based on the critical review of the previous research and the author's own teaching experiences, this study will illustrate how students receiving explicit CF outperformed those receiving implicit CF in terms of L2 WTC, L2 speaking development, and L2 grammar awareness and accuracy.

This study is important because its findings could demonstrate pedagogical implications for EFL classrooms since it investigates the use of explicit feedback as an effective strategy for delivering input that encourages students to recognize their errors and revise their assignments, and offers suggestions for language teachers that they could concentrate on delivering specific and clear feedback in class to help students feel more at ease.

2. THEORIES RELATING TO CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK

The practical application of CF in language acquisition [2] has been supported by numerous linguistic theories in SLA, including the Interaction Hypothesis, the Noticing Hypothesis, Social Constructivist Theory, and the Output Hypothesis. However, these theories demonstrated the conflicting perspectives on the role of explicit and implicit CF in L2 development.

The Interaction Hypothesis provides the most solid foundation for the effectiveness of implicit CF: when a communicative challenge arises, implicitly negotiating the meaning encourages students to narrow the gap in their current interlanguage and to modify their L2 output, thereby providing opportunities for L2 enhancement [13]. However, despite its ubiquitous use in language classrooms, implicit feedback appears to exert a minimal effect on L2 development [14]. This might be due to students' cognitive bias or misunderstanding between teachers' feedback and their language output. They may be bewildered by a variety of factors, for instance, L2 learners may find it difficult to locate the inappropriate language use with implicit hints; they may be confused whether the mistakes focus on grammar or meaning; it is also probable for them to recognize teacher's repetition of sentences as meaning explaining. Schmidt's [22] Noticing Hypothesis claims that when students pay attention to language forms, they are more likely to acquire and improve L2. As a result, explicit CF should be preferred over implicit CF as it increases the likelihood that students will be aware of their own faults as well as their professors' CF. Furthermore, Carroll's [3] Autonomous Induction Theory asserts that CF will play a desirable role in students' L2 acquisition on the condition that they are able to detect the correction, highlighting the positive function of explicit CF. As a result, whereas implicit CF is more commonly employed in language classrooms [9], explicit CF seems to provide a more penetrating insight into students' L2 development since it helps them to detect the gaps between the instructor's CF and what they have generated.

3. STUDENTS' WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE

WTC represents an essential prerequisite for acquiring another language as it relates to learners' meaningful and active engagement [4]. It has been regarded a significant section of second language learning and communication process, playing an essential role in the development of EFL learners' communicative competence. It is proposed that teachers' CF can have a positive influence on students' WTC in the language classroom [11]. Instead of implicit

CF, the explicit feedback has been proven to be more advantageous to language learners' L2 WTC because it may significantly boost their self-confidence, thereby prompting them to explore excessive opportunities to practice L2 both within and outside of the language classroom [20].

To illustrate, a recent mixed-method study investigated the influence of explicit and implicit CF on EFL students' L2 WTC [25]. Overall 96 participants who had studied English for around two years with a low-intermediate English proficiency have been enrolled in the study. In order to collect quantifiable data, the researchers established a control group with limited teacher involvement and two experimental groups with two forms of CF, the explicit one and the implicit one. Then, qualitative data were also collected through designing and conducting a semi-structured interview based on the findings of the experiment.

Findings of the above study indicated that implicit CF had no effect on L2 WTC, whereas explicit CF promote L2 WTC by increasing students' self-perceived language ability and decreasing their degree of L2 anxiety, both of which are two indispensable elements influencing students' L2 self-confidence. This is mainly because explicit CF can present explicit explanations and corrections, which significantly benefits students' L2 self-assurance and can have a favourable impact on their L2 WTC in turn. Furthermore, the study also revealed that explicit CF provided students with specific information about the degree to which students acquire the L2, motivating them to continue improving their L2 communicative competencies in the long term.

Accordingly, explicit CF lowered students' L2 apprehension, increased their L2 self-assurance, and improved their L2 WTC as students would consider these feedbacks as an effective addition to their language awareness [18]. The aforementioned findings may be valuable to language teachers who work with EFL students in similar settings because those techniques and experience can be utilized to nurture cooperative and enthusiastic L2 learners.

4. EXPLICIT CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK

4.1. Explicit corrective feedback and speaking proficiency

Explicit CF, in addition to enhancing EFL learners' L2 WTC, can also improve students' L2 speaking proficiency by providing a declarative understanding of the L2 and promoting conscious observing and learning [23]. Explicit CF should be emphasized in language classes to boost learners' L2 speaking competence, which can be considered the most essential one among four fundamental language abilities [8]. Aghababaei and Biria [1] investigated the effectiveness of explicit and

implicit CF in increasing intermediate EFL students' L2 speaking competency. Participants were chosen from the same institution and randomly assigned to one of three groups: implicit CF, explicit CF, or the control group. This research revealed that (1) the group accepting both forms of CF made progress in their L2 speaking development from pretest to posttest; and (2) the explicit CF group outperformed both the implicit CF group and the control group with no statistically significant difference between the above-mentioned two groups. These findings are comparable to those of a previous study by Shamiri and Farvardin [24], which attempted to compare the efficiency of implicit and explicit CF on EFL students' accuracy in utilizing collocations in their speaking tasks. During the conversations, participants were given extensive explicit and implicit CF as replies to every collocation mistake, demonstrating that (1) only explicit CF remarkably affects students' use of collocations in oral assignments, and (2) the explicit CF group outperformed the implicit CF group.

4.2. Explicit corrective feedback and grammar awareness

Explicit feedback has been proven to be more effective than implicit feedback in boosting students' grammatical correctness and awareness as they could become more self-assured, calm, and motivated in the learning process [17]. According to Schmidt (2001), it is necessary and beneficial to pay particular attention to acquire grammatical structures. For example, Zohrabi and Ehsani [27] indicated that both explicit and implicit groups increased their grammatical awareness and correctness but the implicit CF group remained at a less significant level, demonstrating that the explicit CF was more effective than the implicit CF. Nazari [17] conducted a study which examined the function of implicit and explicit CF in imparting identical grammatical structures such as present perfect. As a result, it showed that students who received explicit CF were capable of applying the grammar more appropriately to writing assignments. The above literature indicated that language teachers should provide more definite and accurate feedback on students' language using faults in order to improve their grammatical correctness and awareness [5] [19]. Teachers should also be aware that recognizing the differences between the correct statements and students' statements can enable students to master grammatical knowledge effectively. Therefore, teachers should choose the explicit CF over the implicit one in identical teaching situations.

5. CONCLUSION

To summarize, the use of CF in the English classroom is a contentious and complicated question

that has piqued the interest of scholars in the field of SLA for many years. The Interaction Hypothesis, the Autonomous Induction Theory, and the Noticing Hypothesis all provide solid theoretical support for the favourable impact of explicit CF on EFL students' English language development. Based on the aforementioned language theories, this article explains why explicit CF is preferable to implicit CF in terms of improving EFL students' language competency from three perspectives: L2 WTC, L2 speaking development, and L2 grammatical correctness and awareness. As for the implications of this study, the findings could be an appropriate guideline for language teachers, educators or language program designers who are in a position to decide whether and how corrective feedback is to be presented in an instructional context. Extending empirical support for the weak interface position of cognitive psychology, we can propose that EFL students could benefit more from pedagogical techniques which promote their explicit knowledge such as interactional feedback in which a set of conversational devices such as clarification requests, comprehension checks, confirmation checks, and repetitions are used to draw learners' attention to ungrammatical forms in their output for modification.

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