

## The Effect of Oral Metalinguistic Corrective Feedback on Learners' Knowledge of Pronoun among Iranian EFL Learners

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### Abstract

A great number of language learners claim that they are unable to produce the foreign language accurately without any grammatical errors at the end of their language course. In this study, the impact of oral metalinguistic corrective feedback, among various types of corrective feedback, on learners' pronoun accuracy was considered. The participants were 74 EFL learners (46 females, 28 males) studying English at Safir English language institutes in Tehran. In order to homogenize the learners, KET test was given to them. 60 learners were selected for the study and 14 learners were removed. Participants were randomly divided into two groups, each group consisted of 30 learners and one group received metalinguistic feedback and the other group received explicit correction feedback. Grammatical judgment test was used as a pretest and posttest. Eight reading passages from "Select Readings" were another instrument that was used for training through jigsaw task in this study. Then t-test was run to check the significance of the mean difference between pretest and post-test of groups. The results show the priority of experimental group (which received oral metalinguistic feedback) on control group (which received explicit feedback).

**Key Words:** Direct Corrective Feedback, Metalinguistic Corrective Feedback, Knowledge of Pronunciation

### Introduction

Direct corrective feedback (DCF) and metalinguistic explanation (ME) organize two different techniques of performing written and oral error correction. DCF gives the correct forms to students but it is a hard attempt which is needed to be revised and it needs some process by students. Furthermore, it should be mentioned this process have to be utilized the ME to their own errors. However, it presupposes that students can utilize the ME to identify and self-correct their own errors. Metalinguistic CF will facilitate learning when learners have implicit knowledge of a grammatical feature. Chandler (2003) mentioned that metalinguistic CF gives learners the ability to internalize the correct form directly while indirect CF does not inform learners about the accuracy of their corrections. This will be a significant concern if learners have limited L2 proficiency and deficiently extended oral abilities of the learners.

According to Ferris and Roberts (2001) and Chandler (2003), metalinguistic CF was influential for learners to improve their errors. Thus, they had access to the corrections when revising so they only required imitate the corrections. Some evidences in the learning process has occurred when they used CF on grammatical accuracy in new writing. Other studies (e.g., Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008) which examined only direct CF have pointed out that it enhances accuracy in both the short and the long term. Farrokhi and Sattarpour (2012) also considered that direct corrective feedback has significant advantages in accuracy in the use of English articles in a new piece of writing. Truscott and Hsu (2008) displayed that metalinguistic CF didn't enhance accuracy in new writing. Furthermore, the research displays that direct CF is influential not only in revision but also in enhancing accuracy in new pieces of grammar accuracy. Moreover, it represents that the effects of the CF are clear not just in the CF treatment but in the long-term time. This assisted to modify the learners' implicit L2 knowledge. Also, it focuses on one grammatical feature with the probability that students will not just memorize the particular corrections but increase an awareness of the basic rule (i.e., develop explicit knowledge). This will occur if some types of errors are corrected. In this study, the kind of metalinguistic description is on the contrary with the kind examined in previous error correction studies. In previous studies, ME provided some error codes showing the type of error a learner has made (as in Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986) and then providing a metalinguistic description of each kind of error (as in Bitchener & Knoch, 2010b). In both cases, it is required to identify and correct the errors in individual learners' work. To the best of our knowledge, no previous study has considered the oral metalinguistic on the knowledge of grammar accuracy in pronunciation. The ME in our study can be seen as a form of direct consciousness-raising. Then, this study mentioned that types of consciousness-raising resulted in learners' comprehending of the target structure as assessed by a grammaticality judgment test. However, in this study, the explicit metalinguistic explanation was provided orally by a teacher.

### **Significance of the Study**

The most studies have investigated the effect of corrective feedback or metalinguistic feedback based of learning consequences (i.e., enhancements in accuracy). They did not take into account the learners' respond to the feedback they received while retelling. We discuss that if we investigate whether oral error feedback assists to learning pronoun knowledge we need to comprehend how learners reply to the feedback. Regarding the metalinguistic, we have to know if learners consider the corrections and also whether they use the corrections to comprehend the rule and whether they can use it by identifying and self-correcting the errors they have made. What are needed are methods to examine how learners have responded to the correction and the utilization they have made of it. There are very few studies of learners' real involvement with oral correction and there isn't any oral feedback to investigate learners' knowledge of pronoun. Therefore, it is significant to consider this study through oral metalinguistic feedback.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Recently, different kinds of corrective feedback have been suggested and many studies have been performed on these kinds of corrective feedback. The positive effect of corrective feedback on learning language has been illustrated but few studies have been performed on the impact of corrective feedback on the assessment of learners' knowledge of pronoun accuracy to

be learned and learners have to be mastered in its accuracy. Some language learners think that they can't produce the foreign language accurately without any grammatical errors. In this study, the impact of metalinguistic corrective feedback, among various types of corrective feedback, on grammatical range and accuracy of in foreign language learners was considered. In most Iranian EFL contexts, language learners are not skillful enough in English, specifically in producing grammatical sentences. Therefore, teachers are as a scaffold to assist learners to meet the requirement of oral problems by providing useful feedback on their learners' knowledge of grammar accuracy. Traditionally, in Iranian EFL context, one of the best techniques is to give direct metalinguistic feedback to exercise on error treatment in speaking classes. Some of the previous studies have considered the impact of EF in improving students' speaking but there were few studies investigating the role of oral metalinguistic feedback on pronoun knowledge of learners, particularly through utilizing and providing metalinguistic clues on EFL learners' knowledge of pronoun. The current study emphasized only on the acquisition of the pronouns and how to improve L2 learners' grammar accuracy, and tries to find proper teaching techniques in the acquisition of L2 pronouns.

## Research Questions

The researcher is attempt to response the following questions based on the findings:

- 1) Does explicit correction feedback have a significant effect on EFL learners' knowledge of pronoun?
- 2) Does metalinguistic feedback have a significant effect on EFL learners' knowledge of pronoun?
- 3) Does exposure to metalinguistic feedback in EFL learners conduct to a greater improvement in their knowledge of pronoun than exposure to explicit correction feedback?

## Review of Literature

A factor which is likely to affect improvement in language accuracy is the type of corrective feedback that is given to students. As Lalande (1982) for indirect feedback and Bitchener and Knoch (2009) and Yilmaz (2013) for direct corrective feedback pointed out, this area of research is growing fast. A recent research on corrective feedback is about meta-linguistic feedback as a direct corrective feedback (Bitchener, 2012). In Meta-linguistic feedback, all errors which can be seen in producing writing and speaking can be explicit or implicit. Explicit type of meta-linguistic feedback in writing refers to grammatical rule related to the error which can either be oral or written (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009).

Kubota (1994) investigated the impacts of implicit and explicit types of meta-linguistic feedback on English dative alternation. The result of the study advocates the role of explicit meta-linguistic feedback in teaching grammatical rules. The study carried out by Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam (2006) on implicit and explicit forms of feedback also displayed useful effects of meta-linguistic feedback on language acquisition. Other studies performed by Bitchener, Young and Cameron (2005), and Sheen (2007) about different types of direct corrective feedback and specifically meta-linguistic feedback on second language student writing. Sheen (2007) compared direct error correction with meta-linguistic feedback. The results of the study showed

improvement for both treatment groups compared to the control group in the immediate post-tests, however, the direct meta-linguistic group performed better in the delayed post-test. In addition, Bitchener (2008) investigated the effects of metalinguistic feedback on enhancing of the English article (the/a). The findings showed that the group which received both oral and written meta-linguistic feedback in combination with direct error correction and the students, who only received direct feedback, outperformed the students in the control group.

According to Petchprasert (2012), there are four aspects of oral feedback: (1) it advocates students in acquiring of learning vocabulary and structures in context; (2) it provides information for both teachers and students for assessment; (3) it gives incentive to students to enhance their performance, and (4) it can help the students toward self-reliance in order to identify their own mistakes and guess how to correct them. When the corrective feedback occurs in foreign language classes, it assists students to learn more.

As Ebadi, Mohd Saad & Abedalaziz (2014) pointed out, acquiring grammatical features in L2 is not easy for all the features. Some features are hard to acquire and cannot be observed by simple exposure to the language. Therefore, the impact of teaching language learning in various forms of intervention need to be investigated. In addition, the other study done by Bowles (2011) displayed the weak interface position in cognitive psychology in order to find out the effects of implicit and explicit corrective feedback on acquisition of different grammatical features in ESL learners.

## Method

### Participants

The participants were 74 EFL learners (46 females, 28 males) studying English at Safir English language institutes in Tehran. All the participants were in intermediate level. They were all aged between 18 to 25. In order to homogenize the learners, KET test was given to them. 60 learners were selected for the study and 14 learners were removed. The learners who were one standard deviation above the mean and one below the mean were selected for the intended study. Participants were randomly divided into two groups, each group consisted of 30 learners and one group received metalinguistic feedback and the other group received explicit correction feedback. Members of both groups consisted of both male and female participants. A pre-test consisting of 30 items grammatical judgment test was administered to 60 learners. The testees were divided into two groups according to their scores in pre-test. Both groups received the same amount of instruction (about 8 sessions), using the same material taught by the same instructor. Finally, students in both control group and experimental group were administered the same post-test.

### Instruments

Two instruments were used in this study, namely, KET, grammatical judgment test as a pretest and posttest. The KET (Key English Test) was administered at the beginning of the term to see if students in the experimental and control groups were at the same level of language proficiency.

Grammatical judgment test is taken to be one of the significant instruments which was used in the present study. Before administering the grammatical judgment test, the reliability and validity of the test were estimated. For estimating reliability, the researcher used test-retest reliability (Hatch & Farhady, 1981, p. 246). Reliability is done by administering the test to the same students twice and computing the correlation between the two administrations. The researcher administered the test twice to 20 EFL learners and then assessed the correlation between the two administrations. And also validity of the test was computed through content validity. To assure content validity of this test, the content of whatever the researcher wish to measure carefully defined. Eight reading passages from “Select Readings” were another instrument that was used in this study.

## Procedures

Firstly, 60 students from Safir institute were given a pre-test including 30 items grammatical judgment test adapted from Nelson English language tests (specially, tense and pronoun). The testees, then, were divided in two 30-member groups on the basis of their obtained scores. Then, one of the groups was randomly chosen as experimental group to receive the treatment.

Second, researcher created small teams among the experimental and control groups according to principles of jigsaw task. Here, regarding the students’ pre-test scores, the instructor tried to make six equal teams out of the 30 participants in the experimental group and make six equal teams out of the 30 participants in the control group. Consequently, the experimental and control groups were divided into six teams, each with five members to work together for the purpose of retelling the part of the reading passage according to principles of jigsaw task. In these kinds of tasks, every learner or group of learners has a piece of information. They combine the pieces to form a whole (e.g. two or three groups of learners have different parts of the story and put the pieces together to complete the story). In the present study, according to principles of jigsaw task, first paragraph was given to group one for retelling, second paragraph was given to group two and third paragraph to group three and so on.

Then, the researcher corrected the learners’ errors in the experimental group after they finished the retelling the passage (metalinguistic feedback). The instructor only corrected the errors related to pronoun. In each session, they covered one reading passage from Select Readings. Learners in control group didn’t receive any feedback. Both the experimental and control group lesson plans were based on the same reading selections. However, the experimental plans provided opportunities for receiving treatment through metalinguistic feedback. Conversely, students in the control group receive explicit feedback.

Finally, Students in both control and experimental groups were administered the same post-test, grammatically judgment test. The mean and standard deviation of both control and Experimental groups were computed. The data collected was computed through t-test.

## Design

The design of the current study is Quasi-experimental design. Accordingly, the study employed a pre-test and post-test, control group, experimental design while focusing on the

variables of metalinguistic feedback as an independent variable and grammatical accuracy as a dependent variable which was hypothesized to be influenced by the independent variable.

## Findings

To measure the grammatical accuracy, at the pre-test stage after collecting the learners' scores, the researcher analyzed the mean and standard deviation of both groups. To be confident that both groups were homogeneous and there was no significant difference among them before the treatment, their obtained mean scores of experimental and control groups in pretest were analyzed through t-test. At the post-test stage, to assess the effectiveness of the given treatment, also the same test as a post-test was administered for both control and experimental groups to examine differences after 6 sessions. After gathering both experimental and control groups' scores, the means, ranges, and standard deviation for both groups were analyzed. Then t-test was run to check the significance of the mean difference between pretest and post-test of groups.

## Results

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics encompassed the means, standard deviations, and frequency counts obtained from the scores of variables. Inferential statistics was run through t-test to examine the mean differences of two groups of scores.

### *Test of variable homogeneity*

Leven test represented the significant level of meaningfulness is 0.234 which show the variance of two groups are equal. In fact, 60 participants were selected as homogenous. To evaluate the homogeneity of regression coefficients (slope), a Levene test was used and as it has been shown in the Table 1, p-value is 0.234 that is higher than the significance level of 0.05. As a result, it can be concluded that data follow homogeneity of covariate regression coefficients (slope).

*Table 1. Test of homogeneity of variances*

Levene statistic	Df 1	Df 2	Sig.
9.232	2	58	0.234

### *Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality*

In order to examine the normality of the groups, test of Kolmogorov-Smirnov has been used in Table 2 in the following:

*Table 2. One-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test*

N	Data
	60
Normal parameters	Mean 15.20
	Std. Deviation 3.145
Test statistic	.215
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.07

Test statistic is 0.215 and meaningful level is 0.07 which represents the distribution of scores is normal.

### Investigation of the research questions

The research question sought to investigate whether oral metalinguistic feedback has any significant effect on knowledge of pronoun. Table 3, 4 summarizes the descriptive statistics for the learners' performance of experimental and control groups in pretest and posttest stage. Next, inferential statistics through t-test was run to examine the mean differences of two groups at pretest.

*Table 3. Descriptive statistics of experimental group's grammar test judgment scores in pre and post-test*

Exp	N	Mean	Std.deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Pre	60	14.47	2.949	11	20
Post	60	15.93	3.262	11	20

Regarding Table 3, mean score and standard deviation of experimental group in pre-test is 14.47 and 2.949, respectively. The minimum score of grammatical judgment test in pre-test of experimental group is 11 and the maximum score is 20. In addition, mean score and standard deviation of post-test in experimental group is 15.93 and 3.262, respectively. The minimum score of grammatical judgment test in post-test of experimental group is 11. It should be taken into consideration that the learners in post-test of experimental group had greater mean score than pre-test of experimental group. It shows that treatment of metalinguistic feedback has the impact on the improving learners' knowledge of pronoun.

### *Descriptive Statistics of grammar test judgment scores of control group in pre-test and post-test*

The obtained descriptive statistics of learners has been displayed in Table 4.

*Table 4. Descriptive statistics of control group's grammatical judgment test scores in pre and post-test*

Control	N	Mean	Std.deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Pre	60	17.47	1.846	14	20
Post	60	17.68	1.764	13	20

Regarding Table 4, mean score and standard deviation of control group in pre-test is 17.47 and 1.764, respectively. The minimum score of grammatical judgment test in pre-test of control group is 14 and the maximum score is 20. In addition, mean score and standard deviation of post-test in control group is 17.68 and 1.764, respectively. The maximum and minimum score in post-test of control group is 13 and 20, respectively. It should be taken into consideration that the learners in post-test of control group had nearly the same mean score as pre-test of control group.

In order to address the first research question “Does explicit correction feedback have a significant effect on EFL learners’ knowledge of pronoun?”, a paired t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of the participants on the pretest and posttest of the explicit correction feedback group in order to investigate the effect of explicit correction feedback as a control group on the improvement of their knowledge of pronoun. Tables 5 and 6 show the result of the comparison between the pretest and the posttest in a group which received the explicit instruction in the control group.

In order to know whether there is a significance difference between control and experimental group, a paired t-test was run in the following:

*Table 5. Independent sample t-test of control group's pre-test and post-test grammatical judgment test scores*

Control group	N	Mean	Std. deviation	T	Df	Sig
Pre	60	15.39	1.653	-3.216	14	0.006
Post	60	15.75	3.432			

Due to Table 5, t-test has been -3.216 and the significant level was 0.006 which displayed that there were no meaningful and significant difference among learners’ knowledge of pronoun scores through grammatical judgment test at control group in pretest and posttest.

To address the second research question “Does oral metalinguistic feedback have a significant effect on EFL learners’ knowledge of pronoun?”, a paired t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of the participants on the pretest and posttest of the metalinguistic feedback group in order to investigate the effect of metalinguistic feedback on the improvement of learners’ knowledge of pronoun. Tables 6 show the result of the grammar test judgment between the pretest and the posttest in a group which received metalinguistic feedback.



### *Comparisons of experimental group's pre-test and post-test grammatical judgment test mean scores*

Mean scores of learners' knowledge of pronoun in pre-test and post-test of experimental group is 14.47 and 15.93, respectively. Their mean comparisons of two groups have been run through independent t-test and have been shown in table 6.

**Table 6.** Independent sample t-test of experimental group's knowledge of pronoun scores through grammatical judgment test in pre-test and post-test

Exp test reading	N	Mean	Std. deviation	T	Df	Sig
Pre	60	14.46	2.984	-1.324	14	0.20
Post	60	15.93	3.261			

Based on Table 6, t-test is -1.324 and the significant level is 0.2 which displayed that there were meaningful and significant difference among knowledge of pronoun scores of experimental group learners in pre-test and post-test and shows the effectiveness of metalinguistic feedback.

In order to answer the third research question "Does exposure to oral metalinguistic feedback in EFL learners' knowledge of pronoun lead to a greater improvement than exposure to explicit correction feedback?", an independent samples t-test was also run to compare the mean scores of posttest in both groups in order to investigate the achievement of metalinguistic feedback with explicit correction feedback in the participants' oral proficiency.

### *Comparison between learners' scores in experimental and control groups*

Mean scores of learners' pronoun accuracy through grammar judgment test in experimental group and control group are 19.00 and 15.93, respectively. The comparison of mean scores in two groups has been represented in table 7.

**Table 7.** Paired sample t-test of pre-test and post-test in experimental and control groups

test reading	N	Mean	Std. deviation	T	Df	Sig
Exp	60	18.23	3.145	-4.625	58	0.08
Ctrl	60	15.20	1.736			

As Table 7 shows, t-test has been -4.625 and the significance level was 0.08 which represented there is a significant and meaningful difference between experimental and control groups' grammatical judgment test scores of learners in pre-test and post-test. The finding displayed that online learning has effect on oral metalinguistic feedback of the learners in experimental group.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

Based on the results of this study, oral corrective feedback can assist EFL learners to enhance the accuracy of pronoun. Also it can be concluded that Iranian English learners prefer to receive corrective feedback orally and directly in order to identify their errors. By examining grammatical accuracy, it can be concluded that metalinguistic corrective feedback was effective on the learners' performance. This study attempts to achieve a better comprehending of the role of oral corrective feedback in foreign language accuracy (pronoun). Wholly, findings of the current study advocate teacher corrective feedback which was supported by some prior researchers such as Bitchener (2008), Chandler (2003), and Ellis (2008), Ferris (1999). Also the findings displayed that feedback is useful for learning, without considering to the feedback strategies. Moreover, the findings are not in line with the claim of Truscott who discussed about the advantage of corrective feedback. Truscott (1996, 1999) explained that corrective feedback is ineffective in improving student accuracy and also it is significantly adverse. Therefore, he mentions that grammar correction feedback should not be considered. Moreover, Hsu and Truscott (2008) displayed that decrease of error during revision by learner cannot be taken into account as a predictor of learning process and also treatment groups on the post-test cannot be considered as a document on producing of corrective feedback on students' accuracy ability. The outcomes of this study evidently demonstrates that learners learned effectively from teacher corrective feedback by using correct form of some previous errors each session. Therefore, EFL learners reduced their grammatical errors. The findings of this study may provide practical evidence that the decrease of errors in learners' pronoun accuracy was the result of learning from corrective feedbacks that they received during the treatment period.

Regarding the first research question, it was found that the metalinguistic feedback had a positive effect on the grammar pronoun improvement of the Iranian EFL students. These results are consistent with those of the other research, which has been performed by some scholars (Bitchener, 2008; Ellis, 2008; Lyster, 2007; Sheen, 2007) and illustrated that all treatment groups that received teacher oral metalinguistic feedback carried out better than control groups.

As to the third research question, it was found that exposure to metalinguistic feedback in EFL learners lead to more effect than exposure to explicit correction feedback. There are some reasons why metalinguistic feedback performed better in this study in grammar accuracy of pronoun improvement. One reason is that the learners can increase their knowledge of the language rules and announcing of learners as a required section of language learning (Schmidt, 1993). It gives students information about the errors they did, so that they are aroused to think about the structures they used and accordingly take accountability and respond to feedback for their own learning during task. The second reason is that the metalinguistic feedback usually contains information on parts of speech like preposition, verb, and relative pronoun for the intention of explaining a speech episode. Schmidt's (2001) noticing hypothesis which affirms the significance role of attracting the students' attention to formal traits of language to attain linguistic development and metalinguistic feedback is a good strategy of making students to clearly recognize the gap or mismatch between their interlanguage and the target forms (errors).

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