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การพัฒนาความสามารถในการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษของนักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาตอนต้นในประเทศจีน โดยการให้ข้อมูลย้อนกลับแบบทางอ้อมและแบบตามหลักไวยากรณ์

Enhancing English Writing Ability in Chinese Lower Secondary Students through Indirect Corrective Feedback and Metalinguistic Corrective Feedback

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาผลกระทบที่แตกต่างกันของข้อมูลย้อนกลับแบบทางอ้อมและข้อมูลย้อนกลับทางภาษาศาสตร์ต่อความสามารถในการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษของนักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาตอนต้นของจีนและเพื่อสำรวจความคิดเห็นของนักเรียนที่มีต่อข้อมูลย้อนกลับทั้ง 2 ประเภท: ในด้านความชอบและความเข้าใจของนักเรียน กลุ่มตัวอย่างของงานวิจัย คือ นักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 3 จำนวน 30 คน ซึ่งเรียนที่โรงเรียนรัฐบาลแห่งหนึ่งในเมืองรื่อจ้าวมณฑลซานตง ประเทศจีน เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการเก็บข้อมูล คือ แบบทดสอบก่อนเรียน หลังเรียน และคำถามสัมภาษณ์ผลการศึกษาเชิงปริมาณจากการทดสอบ t ของตัวอย่างที่จับคู่ระบุว่าความแตกต่างระหว่างข้อมูลย้อนกลับทั้งสองประเภทไม่มีความแตกต่างอย่างมีนัยสำคัญผลจากการสัมภาษณ์ระบุว่านักเรียนชอบข้อมูลย้อนกลับแบบทางภาษาศาสตร์มากกว่าเพราะสามารถเข้าใจได้ง่ายกว่า งานวิจัยครั้งนี้เน้นคุณค่าของการให้ข้อมูลย้อนกลับประเภทต่างๆแก่นักเรียน ผู้สอนสามารถปรับ ข้อมูลย้อนกลับตามความต้องการของนักเรียนแต่ละคน

คำสำคัญ : ข้อมูลย้อนป้อนกลับ, ข้อมูลย้อนกลับแบบทางอ้อม, ข้อมูลย้อนกลับแบบตามหลักไวยากรณ์, ข้อมูลย้อนป้อนกลับ, ความสามารถในการเขียน

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Abstract

This study primarily aims to examine the distinct effects of indirect and metalinguistic corrective feedback on the English writing ability of lower secondary Chinese students. Additionally, it seeks to explore students' viewpoints regarding these two types of feedback, focusing on their preferences and comprehension of feedback mechanisms. The participants included 30 Grade 8 students from a public school in Rizhao City, Shandong Province, China. The instruments for collecting data included a pre-test, post-test, and interview questions. The quantitative results of the two-way repeated-measures ANOVA revealed that the differences between the two types of feedback are insignificant. The interview results revealed that students preferred metalinguistic corrective feedback because it was easier to understand. The research highlights the value of providing different types of corrective feedback to students. Teachers can tailor their feedback based on individual student needs and preferences.

Keywords: written corrective feedback, indirect corrective feedback, metalinguistic corrective feedback, writing ability

Introduction

The role of English in China has become increasingly important following globalization. The National English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (Ministry of Education, 2017) state that one of the most important aspects of the curriculum is the development of students' basic literacy. Writing, one of the four basic language skills, plays a vital role in English teaching. However, of the four English learning skills, writing is the most challenging (Nunan, 1991). Therefore, cultivating students writing abilities in English teaching is indispensable.

Errors are unavoidable during the process of second language learning. Moreover, teachers in lower secondary schools must respond to the errors students make during language production, whether in oral or written form, to improve writing accuracy (Li & He, 2017). According to Sheen (2007), corrective feedback refers to the responses offered by individuals to language users, indicating instances where their language usage is deemed incorrect. In A Typology of Written Corrective Feedback (Ellis, 2008), various types of written corrective feedback, widely recognized by linguistic scholars, were presented. Ellis categorized the feedback into three primary groups: direct, metalinguistic, and indirect. Ellis (2008) stated that “indirect written corrective feedback referred to demonstrating the existence of the error by circling, underlining, or otherwise highlighting the error without providing further information about the nature of the error”. He stated metalinguistic corrective feedback refers to providing students with hints or clues about the nature of their error. This could involve giving a brief description, such as "use the present perfect," or using an error code like "T" to indicate a tense-related mistake. In this study, indirect corrective feedback is the way that

teachers underline and circle the errors without further explanation. while metalinguistic corrective feedback is the way that teachers give students the error codes and brief descriptions by reminding them where and what the error is.

The efficacy of written corrective feedback (WCF) for learning and developing second language acquisition has been controversial on a theoretical level (Ferris, 1999, 2004; Truscott, 1996, 1999, 2007).

Truscott (1996) argues that corrective feedback (CF) on L2 students' written output was not only unnecessary and ineffective, but also counterproductive. Several researchers have begun agreeing on the effectiveness of WCF (Abdulloh, 2021; Ene & Upton, 2018; Knoch, 2008; Mao & Lee, 2021; Sheen, 2007; Zhang et al., 2021). Few studies have examined the effect of various types of WCF. Bitchener et al. (2005) compare the effects of direct correction only and direct correction with metalinguistic explanations and find that learners who received direct feedback with metalinguistic explanations significantly outperformed those who received direct feedback only. Bitcherner (2008) found that the effectiveness of different types of CF is the extent to which direct or indirect feedback facilitates improved accuracy. Studies have commonly categorized feedback types into two categories: direct and indirect feedback (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012:65). Researchers favoring direct feedback argue that it facilitates improved accuracy (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Van Beuningen et al., 2008, 2011). Based on the various classifications of WCF, direct CF includes metalinguistic feedback. Révész (2015) suggest that explicit direct CF, which includes both direct corrections and metalinguistic explanations, significantly enhances students' awareness and comprehension. Most research has compared direct CF and indirect CF without considering metalinguistic CF. While it may be tempting to conclude that direct CF is more effective than indirect feedback, it is premature to take this position. Currently, there is uncertainty regarding which specific types of linguistic errors are more responsive to particular types of CF. Further research is needed to determine the most effective approach for addressing different types of errors in second language acquisition.

The identification of research gaps pertaining to previous investigations on WCF serves as a foundation for conducting this new study. Many recent studies have examined and compared not only the effectiveness of feedback in general, but also whether these effects vary across different types of feedback. Two major types of feedback have received significant attention: direct and indirect feedback (Ferris 2002, 2006; Ferris & Roberts, 2001). Furthermore, the research participants in previous studies (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Mao & Lee, 2021; Sheen, 2007; Zhang et al., 2021) were adults or university students. Hence, it is necessary to consider different participants within the context of English as a foreign language. The students in this study were lower secondary students, unlike previous studies.

Additionally, academic investigations in China have focused on the impacts of WCF specifically targeting English writing accuracy or concentrating on a particular linguistic aspect, such as verb tense (Tian, 2019; Zhu, 2022). This empirical research investigates the distinct outcomes resulting from the application of indirect and metalinguistic CF on the English writing ability of Chinese lower secondary students.

Objectives

1. To compare the effects of indirect corrective feedback and metalinguistic CF on the improvement of English writing ability among Chinese lower secondary school students.

2. To investigate students' opinions regarding indirect and metalinguistic CF after receiving treatment.

Methodology

1. Research Design

This study was conducted in a public school in Rizhao City, Shandong Province, China, using a quasi-experimental repeated-measures design with two experimental groups. White and Sabarwal (2014) note that quasi-experimental studies are more interested in finding the difference between an outcome evaluated in two treatments that use different teaching techniques or methods. Ellis (1999) states that repeated-measures research designs require each participant to provide more than one set of data (e.g., participants exposed to more than one treatment or evaluated on more than one occasion).

In this design, each participant received both types of CF; writing quality was further evaluated after receiving each type of CF.

2. Context and Participants

Thirty students studying in a public lower secondary school located in the developmental zone of Rizhao City, Shandong Province, China, participated in the study. These students had undergone mandatory English education for at least three years during their elementary schooling, although there were noticeable differences in their levels of English proficiency. Verbal consent was obtained from both the director of the 8th grade and the students' parents. Convenience sampling was employed to select participants. The researcher randomly chose one of the five classes that she taught. Students were divided into two experimental groups namely group A (N=15) and group B (N=15).

3. Research Instrument

Three research instruments were used in this study:(1) lesson plan;(2) a writing test;(3) semi-structured interview questions.

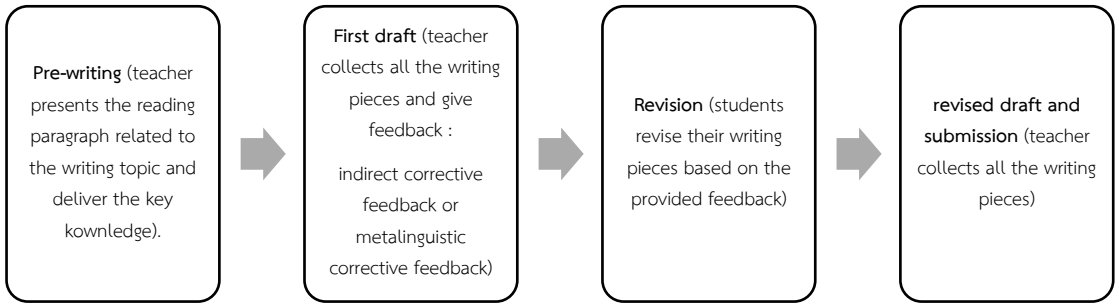
1) Lesson Plan

Lesson plans for this study were developed using a process-based approach. There are four stages of process-based writing instruction. In the first step, teachers present background knowledge, useful sentences, and keywords related to the topic, and students brainstorm the information they will use in the writing piece. In the second step, students use the language form and key vocabularies that were presented in the first step and construct the first draft. In the third step, teachers provide students with two types of

feedback based on the different phases of the study. The students are given time to revise their drafts. In the fourth step, the students submit the revised drafts.

Figure 1

Steps of the lesson plan based on process-based approach



2) Writing Test

The study included writing tests and eight writing tasks. The English writing test was provided as a pre-test to evaluate students' writing ability before and after the treatment. Brown (2001) adopted a scoring rubric to evaluate writing pieces. Each writing task and test was graded following four criteria: wording and spelling, grammar, content, and structure. All writing tasks were chosen carefully from the English compositions in lower secondary school exams and were performed in parallel. Before the main study, three experts validated the writing tests.

3) Semi-structured Interview Questions

Interview questions were adapted from Lee's (2005) questionnaires. They aimed to investigate the students' opinions regarding indirect and metalinguistic CF at the end of the experiment. All interview questions were translated into Chinese based on the students' proficiency.

4. Data Collection

This study progressed in three stages: pre-experiment, experiment, and post-experiment. In the pre-experiment phase, all students were divided into two groups and took a pre-test. Regarding the experiment phase, the students in group A received indirect CF for four weeks, took post-test 1, and further received metalinguistic feedback for four weeks. Students in group B received metalinguistic CF for four weeks, followed by post-test 1, and further received indirect CF for four weeks. Regarding the post-experiment phase, both groups received post-test 2 and focused group semi-structured interviews.

5. Data Analysis

The data in this study involves both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were collected to answer the first research question. Paired sample t-tests were used to compare the scores of the pre-test and two post-tests to determine if there were any differences in the students' writing ability. A two-way repeated-measures ANOVA was used to ascertain whether there were any

differences when students received indirect and metalinguistic CF. Statistical significance was set at p <.05.

Qualitative data were further collected through semi-structured interviews, to answer the second research question. The researcher interviewed six students to determine their understanding of and preferences toward the two types of CF.

Results

Research objective 1: To compare the effects of these two types of feedback on the improvement of English writing ability among Chinese lower secondary school students.

To determine the differences in the effects of indirect and metalinguistic CF, a two-way repeated-measures ANOVA was used. Table 1 presents the results.

Table 1

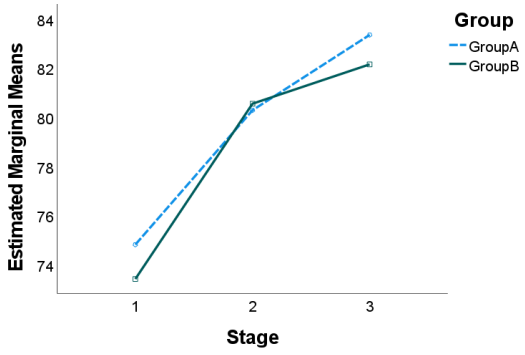
Two-way repeated-measures ANOVA

Stage	Group	
	Group A	Group B
Pre-test	74.8±7.32	73.4±7.37
Posttest1	80.27±6.8	80.53±4.03
Posttest2	83.33±6.16	82.13±3.94
Tests of Within-Subjects Effects	F	P
Stage	73.231	0.00*
Stage×Group	0.760	0.429

*$p < .05$ n=15

Figure 2

Estimated marginal means score



A two-factor repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted to compare between-group and within-group differences in scores after participants from groups A and B received the two stages of teaching.

Within-Subjects Effects:

Stage: An F-value of 73.231 indicated a significant effect of the stage (time) variable on the scores ($p < 0.001$). This suggests a significant difference in the scores between the pre-test and post-test.

Stage × group: An F-value of 0.760 indicated no significant interaction effect between the stage and group variables ($p = 0.429$). This implies that the change in scores between groups A and B differed insignificantly over time.

Group Comparisons:

Pre-test: Group A had a mean score of 74.8 (±7.32), while group B had a mean score of 73.4 (±7.37) at the pre-test stage.

Post-test 1: Group A had a mean score of 80.27 (±6.8), while group B had a mean score of 80.53 (±4.03) at the first post-test stage.

Post-test 2: Group A had a mean score of 83.33 (±6.16), while group B had a mean score of 82.13 (±3.94) at the second post-test stage.

Based on these results, it is safe to conclude that there was a significant improvement in scores from the pre-test to both post-test stages (stage effect). The score changes between groups A and B differed insignificantly (no significant stage × group interaction).

These findings suggest that providing two different types of CF insignificantly affected score changes as the scores showed similar patterns of improvement in both groups.

In summary, this also indicates that there was no difference between indirect CF and metalinguistic CF on students' writing ability.

Research objective 2: To investigate students' opinions regarding indirect and metalinguistic CF after receiving treatment.

The researcher investigated students' opinions on indirect and metalinguistic CF using semi-structured interviews with six students who voluntarily participated. The students answered the interview questions in Chinese, after which their answers were translated into English. The data were qualitatively analyzed based on their responses. These were illustrated in two aspects: students' preferences toward indirect and metalinguistic CF, and students' understanding of both types.

1) Students' preferences

The participants' responses revealed that most students (five out of six) preferred metalinguistic CF. The most common reason for their preferences was that metalinguistic CF could tell them the exact error that they had made.

Student 1: “Sometimes when the teacher underlined the sentence, I don’t know how to fix it, so I tend to delete the whole sentence. However, the total number of words will not be sufficient to meet these requirements. If the teacher provides the error code, I can immediately correct it based on the feedback.”

Student 2: “I prefer the one that with the error code. When the teacher provides corrections by underlining the word, I have to figure out whether it is a misspelling or wrong word usage.”

Student 3: “I can correct the error when it is underlined, but when I write the second draft, I forget about the error I made earlier. When the teacher gives the error code, I have a deeper memory of the error and will pay more attention to it when I rewrite.”

In summary, most students preferred metalinguistic CF because it provides better clarification for revising the draft. They generally believed that metalinguistic CF was more understandable. However, one student thought that indirect CF was better in terms of inspiring them to reflect on and rethink the errors.

2) Students’ understanding of both types of CF

When the researcher asked the question, “Which type of CF do you understand?” All students gave a similar response. They believe that metalinguistic CF can be easily understood.

Student 1: “I think it is easy for me to understand when the teacher provides the error code.”

Student 2: “I think the second type (referred to as metalinguistic CF) is easy for me to understand.”

Student 3: “I understand the type that provides the error code more than the one that simply underlined the error.”

In conclusion, almost all students considered metalinguistic CF more understandable. They believed that with the error code, they had a better understanding of how to fix errors and revise the draft.

Discussion

Different effects of indirect and metalinguistic CF

This question determines the different effects of indirect and metalinguistic CF on Chinese lower secondary students’ writing ability. In the pre-test, it was discovered that before the experiment, the groups did not differ. After treatment, the students improved significantly; however, there was no significant difference between the two groups. It is safe to conclude that both, indirect and metalinguistic CF are equally effective in improving the writing abilities of lower secondary Chinese students. The findings of this study validate the conclusions of Ferris and Roberts (2001) regarding the varied effects of indirect and metalinguistic CF. Similarly, their research also indicated that there were no statistically significant differences in accuracy between the two forms of indirect feedback: mere underlining and underlining accompanied by codes. This study’s findings are also consistent with those of Hong (2004), who concluded that the self-correction performance between indirect and metalinguistic CF differed insignificantly.

However, findings on the different effects of indirect and metalinguistic CF contradict those of (Chandler, 2003; Makino, 1993; Saukah et al., 2017). In Chandler's (2003) study, significant improvements in accuracy were observed in groups that received underlining as an indirect feedback method. However, these gains were not evident in the groups that received underlining combined with the codes. The possible differences between this study and Chandler's study are attributable to the measured dependent variables. In Chandler's study, the dependent variable was grammatical and lexical accuracy, whereas the dependent variable in this study was the student's writing ability.

The difference between this study and that conducted by Saukah et al. (2017) lies in their findings regarding the effectiveness of metalinguistic CF compared with indirect CF. Saukah et al. (2017) concluded that students who received metalinguistic CF produced higher quality writing than those who received indirect CF. They believed that metalinguistic CF was particularly effective in improving language use and mechanics. One plausible explanation for this discrepancy could be attributed to the differences in the subjects and the use of feedback in the two studies. Saukah et al. (2017) conducted their experiment with 53 senior high school students, whereas this study involved 30 lower secondary school students. Variations in the student age and academic level may have influenced these results.

Additionally, the feedback provided by Saukah et al. (2017) was short-term and not used as a teaching technique. In summary, differences in student groups, the use of feedback as a teaching technique, and the short-term nature of feedback could contribute to the variation in findings between this study and Saukah et al.'s (2017) study on the effectiveness of metalinguistic and indirect CF.

Students' opinions regarding indirect and metalinguistic CF

The semi-structured interviews showed that the students had a positive attitude toward WCF. This aligns with previous findings on students' willingness to be corrected (Li & He, 2017). Li and He (2017) reported that participants desired WCF from teachers. Most students (five out of six) preferred metalinguistic Cf. They believed that it was more explicit and could help identify errors. This finding is consistent with previous research (Chen et al., 2016; Lee, 2005; Zhang et al., 2021), which revealed that students exhibited a favorable disposition toward explicit WCF and preferred receiving detailed comments that cover both content and grammar in their written compositions. Zhang et al. (2021) found that learners' preferences for WCF are influenced by the nature of the feedback and the type of errors being addressed. Generally, learners tend to favor feedback that is more explicit in their explanations and guidance.

One student mentioned that indirect CF can be confusing. This finding supports those of previous studies (Chandler, 2003; Roberts, 2001; Saragih et al., 2021). Saragih et al. (2021) showed that students generally displayed a lower preference for employing indirect strategies. The researchers asserted that compared with other strategies, the indirect approach was considered

demotivating and less helpful. This finding is consistent with the conclusions of Roberts (2001) and Chandler (2003), who agreed that using an indirect strategy could result in difficulties in gaining knowledge, as it tended to confuse students. Consequently, the unclear and insufficient information provided through this strategy resulted in students struggling to comprehend the material, and feeling demotivated during their learning process.

Another discussion point from the semi-structured interviews is that some students mentioned that the process of correcting errors by themselves when receiving indirect WCF and metalinguistic CF helps them acquire knowledge and avoid making the same mistakes while writing. This finding supports many previous results (Ellis et al., 2008; D. R. Ferris, 2002), which state that indirect WCF can encourage students to self-correct their errors and help develop long-term memory and self-monitoring.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigates the different effects of indirect and metalinguistic CF on Chinese lower secondary students' writing ability and further explores their opinions regarding these two feedback types. The research highlights the value of providing different types of CF to students. Teachers can tailor their feedback based on individual student needs and preferences. It summarizes that student improved after receiving both types of CF. However, the differences between the two types were insignificant. Students tended to prefer more explicit types of CF.

This study had some limitations. First, it only included 30 students. Future studies should include more participants from various schools and grades to ensure reliable results. Second, the study failed to establish a control group. Future studies should include control groups. Third, this study interviewed the students only at the end of the experiment. Future studies should consider conducting interviews after the first phase of the experiment.

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