

The Immediate and Delayed Effects of Explicit and Implicit Corrective Feedback Types on EFL Learners' Phonological Errors

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ABSTRACT

Error treatment is one of the crucial factors in successful language learning; however, it is an important question if the feedback for error treatment should be provided implicitly or explicitly. The existing problems in the students' pronunciation motivated the researchers to compare two types of corrective feedback, explicit vs. implicit, in treating learners' phonological errors in terms of their immediate and delayed effects. For this purpose, the researchers selected 32 female participants in the upper-intermediate level English classes in Talash language institute located in Ghir out of 50 students through administration of The Certificate of Proficiency in English Speaking Test. The selected participants were randomly assigned into two groups. Both groups took a pronunciation pre-test and then one of the groups received explicit feedback; whereas the other group got implicit feedback. The participants' probable progress was measured immediately after the treatment and

one more time after a four-week delay. The collected data were analyzed by running independent samples t-tests on the pre-test and post-test scores. The results of the data analysis revealed that corrective feedback types, explicit and implicit, differ from each other in terms of their immediate and delayed effects on treating the participants' phonological errors in favor of the explicit one. The results of this study could help language teachers, EFL learners, and also material developers in providing better

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conditions through selecting the best type of feedback on errors for learning English pronunciation and treating phonological errors.

Keywords: Corrective feedback, delayed effect, immediate effect, phonological errors

INTRODUCTION

Error treatment is among the major factors necessary for providing a successful learning atmosphere especially in a communicatively oriented classroom. In fact, learners' errors should not be considered as sins but rather treated as developmental signals. Regarding this issue, errors can be classified into three major types as grammatical, lexical, and phonological. In the case of treating these errors despite their great importance, phonological errors are the least attractive ones for the teachers and the roots of such attitude toward phonological errors lie in the fact that low level of stress is always put on this skill (Dalton, 1997).

To Engwall (2006), in traditional teaching methods based on behavioral theories, like audiolingual method, errors were corrected immediately since these methods followed the idea that individuals were totally receptive animals, whose activities were found by inside or outside forces to gain reward or avoid punishment.

Nowadays, within academic settings, English is extensively used for different purposes (Kashefian-Naeeni, et al., 2018) in different international conferences, in tertiary education and for internet education (Mousavi & Kashefian-Naeeni, 2011).

People from different social and economic classes or from different age groups and with different educational backgrounds are intended to take some English courses as their evening classes. There is one common fever among all these different groups of learners: becoming a fluent and a fast speaker of English with a native-like accent, as soon as possible. And exactly because of this fever, language teachers observe somehow exaggerated forms of pronunciation in their classes by these enthusiastic learners. Sometimes this kind of pronunciation can totally hinder the perception of the meaning of the utterance and intention of the speaker.

Despite the importance of treating the grammatical and lexical errors that cannot be denied, it seems that one of the main obstacles in oral communication on the way of understanding and being understood is mispronunciation. Sometimes the learners are not able to produce the correct form of the words, nor to receive it. Thus, this failure causes lots of problems in listening comprehension. Applying an efficient method for treating such errors is inevitable, so one of the most important duties of the teachers is to implement acceptable methods of error treatment in response to these phonological errors which are efficient enough, not offensive though.

Two major categories of corrective feedback in the area of second or foreign language learning are implicit and explicit, and the efficiency of each one of these corrective feedbacks can be observed through learners' uptakes. To present a

critical analysis of the effectiveness of each type of these corrective feedbacks, learners' uptakes can be controlled in both immediate and delayed context of error correction. By delayed uptake, one can study the efficiency of the corrective feedbacks in the long-term. Learners are more probable to use true target language forms in contexts and conditions that need a careful style (i.e., reading aloud a list of isolated words), and more probable to apply convertible learning forms in their local style (i.e., reading aloud the same words in another context such as a paragraph or within a conversation).

According to Richards and Renandya (2002), pronunciation (also going by the name of phonology) involves features at the segmental level, like sounds and sound segments, in addition to suprasegmental features like stress, rhythm, and intonation. Holm and Dodd (1999) asserted that pronunciation errors originated from the interference between second- and native-language phoneme sets. To Peterson (1997, as cited in Kevin & Walker, 2002), weak pronunciation could lead to severe problems for learners, including communication failures, anxiety, discrimination, and stereotyping. For example, mispronunciation can result in some difficulties in oral communication. L2 learners often talk about their unsavory experiences, of having a conversation with a foreigner and complaining about being unable to convey their message fluently not because of lack of grammatical or lexical knowledge but just because of bad pronunciation. On the other hand, they are displeased at their failure to

receive the intended message from a native speaker or original movies because of his fast pace – in fact, because of the disability in recognizing functional words which are mostly reduced and unstressed in native accents.

On one hand, as a result of mispronunciation teachers are not able to get the learners' question or message and just after checking the spelling of that specific word they understand the question. Thus, neglecting such errors gradually will result in fossilization and those mispronunciations will be untreatable. On the other hand, as Dalton (1997) described pronunciation was "the Cinderella of language teaching". By this, he referred to the usual low level of stress put on this very significant language skill. He believed that teachers did not face any problem in teaching listening, reading, writing and to a large extent, general oral skills, but regarding pronunciation, they usually did not have the primary knowledge of articulatory phonetics to provide their learners something more than repetitive and often not useful advice like, "it sounds like this; uuuh" (Dalton, 1997).

According to Engwall (2006), in some cases, mispronunciation can give another meaning to the word, so the learners require to be reminded of attributes that they are usually not aware of. Despite the fundamental role of feedback, not many studies have been performed on its usefulness for the learning of L2 phonology (Neri et al., 2002).

Zohrabi and Ehsani (2014) studied 60 Iranian pre-intermediate learners through a

quasi-experimental research. They divided the learners into implicit and explicit groups. They asked the learners to write English equivalent of simple present and simple past Persian sentences. The aim was to identify the effects of different feedback types on learners' grammar accuracy and their awareness. The results showed that accuracy and awareness improved in both groups although explicit group outperformed the implicit one significantly. In another study, an experimental study, Hosseiny (2014) divided 60 Iranian pre-intermediate learners in Ardabil, Iran into three groups including direct, indirect, and control group. TOEFL tests of definite and indefinite articles were materials used in the study. One-way ANOVA showed that both direct and indirect groups outperformed the control group while indirect feedback type was found more effective than the direct one.

As it was seen, the studies showed different results about the effectiveness of different types of corrective feedback; however, most of the studies reviewed by the researcher showed that both types significantly improve and speed up the learning for the learners (Cepti, 2016; Fazilatfar et al., 2014; Hosseiny, 2014; Marzban & Arabahmadi, 2013; Zohrabi & Ehsani, 2014).

It is necessary to mention that most of the previous studies only explored the short-term effect of corrective feedback and in this study, a part of attention will be concentrated on the long-term effectiveness of such feedbacks. Thus, the goal of the present study is to compare two types of corrective

feedback, explicit vs. implicit, in treating learners' phonological errors in terms of their immediate and delayed effects.

Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions were proposed; a) Is there any significant difference between the immediate effects of explicit and implicit corrective feedback types on EFL learners' phonological errors? b) Is there any significant difference between the delayed effects of explicit and implicit corrective feedback types on EFL learners' phonological errors?

According to the above-stated research questions the following research hypotheses were formulated: a) There is not any significant difference between the immediate effects of explicit and implicit corrective feedback types on EFL learners' phonological errors; b) There is not any significant difference between the delayed effects of explicit and implicit corrective feedback types on EFL learners' phonological errors.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Design

The design of the study was quasi-experimental. The students were divided into two groups, one of them was randomly chosen as Explicit Group (EFG) in which explicit feedback types were applied for correcting the learners' phonological errors, while in the other group, Implicit Group (IFG), the participants' phonological errors were treated using implicit corrective feedback. So, the independent variables in the present study were explicit and implicit

corrective feedback types whereas the dependent variables were the immediate and delayed uptake of the learners.

Participants

The data needed for this study was gained through convenience sampling from English classes in Talash language institute located in Ghir, Fars province, Iran. The participants of the study were 50 students in the upper-intermediate level who were reduced to 32 through the administration of The Certificate of Proficiency in English Speaking Test (CPE Speaking Test) to ensure the homogeneity of the participants of the study. The students of these classes were all female due to sex segregation in language institutes. Their age range was between 15 and 26, and most of them were high school students from different majors and fields. As one of the researchers was both the owner of and a teacher in Talash language institute, she had an exact familiarity with all the students and knew that the intended participants were sociable enough to communicate in the classroom and because of their economic status they had access to newly-developed educational and communicative technologies.

Instruments

Seven instruments were used to carry out the present study. The first instrument was the Certificate of Proficiency in English Speaking Test (CPE Speaking Test). The researchers used it to select a homogeneous sample for the study while two independent raters scores it and the average of the

scores was considered as each participant's score. According to the manual of CPE, the raters took grammar, vocabulary, discourse management, pronunciation, and interactive communication as the points to be considered. The second instrument was a voice recorder to record the feedback sessions. In addition, it was used in recording the students' voice while they were taking pronunciation pre-test, immediate post-test, and delayed post-test while reading them aloud.

The third instrument was a self-made pronunciation test which was used three times as a pre-test, immediate posttest, and delayed post-test to test the pronunciation level of the participants before and after the treatment. Through the pilot study as elucidated in Procedure section, 40 most common mispronounced content words were extracted and listed. Then 40 sentences including 40 most common mispronounced words were constructed. These sentences were used as pronunciation tests and the researchers checked how the learners pronounced the words based on stress, accent, and intonation. For example, one of the most common mispronounced words was 'aroma' so the sentence 'I love the aroma of the fresh coffee' was formulated. The reliability of the test was checked through the KR-21 formula and returned the reliability index of 0.81 that is considered acceptable. The validity of the test was consulted with two experienced teachers of the field. The teachers provided some oral advice that was applied and the final test was made.

The fourth instrument was routine classroom materials that were used in the implicit group. The fifth one was a handout including separate charts for consonants, vowels, and diphthongs with familiar examples for each sound. Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary and its CD-ROM including the audio program for pronouncing the words with both American and British accents were other useful instruments that were used for helping the learners with the correct pronunciation of the words. The last instruments were Whiteboard and colorful markers for giving the students clear and focused information about different phonemes, their sound, phonetic symbol, word stress, etc.

Procedure

The first step of this study was choosing two homogeneous groups of language learners who had almost the same proficiency level in their pronunciation skill. For meeting this condition, since the focus of the study was on phonological errors, a speaking proficiency test named Certificate of Proficiency in English Speaking Test (CPE Speaking Test) was administered to the students in two upper-intermediate classes, and the scale accompanied the test itself was applied to calculate their pronunciation proficiency score. The students who gained scores within the range of one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected and randomly divided into two groups.

Having chosen two homogenous groups, the researchers randomly labeled the classes as explicit feedback group

(EFG) and implicit feedback group (IFG). For the sake of eliciting as natural data as possible, the students in both groups were not told about the purpose of the study. Then, a four-session pilot study preceded the treatments in order to provide a valid pre-test. Thus, for the first four sessions, two classes followed their normal instructional program (i.e., no treatment was provided for correcting learners' phonological errors). Through listening to the recording of these four sessions, most common mispronounced words were selected and pre-test was developed and validated as explained earlier.

Before starting the treatments, students were asked to take the pre-test exam by reading aloud the sentences and words while their voices were being recorded. For eliminating students' anxiety and of course for preventing their pronunciation from being affected by others' pronunciation, they were asked to take the test one by one in an empty classroom in which just the teacher attended. It should be mentioned that throughout this study, all given pronunciation tests were rated by two scorers. The mean of the two scores was taken as each student's score on that test.

After administrating the pre-test, the treatment started in the 5th session. Teaching material in both implicit and explicit group was Top Notch 1A series that is used for upper-intermediate learners. The communicative approach was used in teaching Top Notch, so the students involved in teaching and learning process and were motivated to participate in oral discussions and questions and answers. The treatment

in the implicit feedback group (IFG) was in the form of the recast for learners' phonological errors. It means that the teacher reformulated each student's errors implicitly without directly indicating that his/her utterance is incorrect. In the present study, after encountering a phonological error, the teacher repeated the same utterance providing the correct pronunciation of the mispronounced word.

In the explicit feedback group (EFG), the learners' phonological errors were corrected using explicit corrective feedback. Providing the corrective feedback in reaction to learners' pronunciation errors were postponed for the sake of not interrupting the smooth flow of the communication. In this group, one of the responsibilities of the teacher was observing the learners' activities during completing a task and of course taking notes about their errors in order to treat them later on through giving explicit explanations about.

Different techniques were used in the EFG. For example, in some cases, students were directed to consult their dictionaries for comparing their own pronunciation with the one in dictionaries and eliciting the correct pronunciation. Another supplementary device was the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary's CD-ROM which was used when students still had problems in producing the word even after checking them in their dictionaries.

At the end of the treatment sessions, the same pronunciation test was given to the participants in both groups two times; one immediately after finishing the treatment

period and the other with a four-week delay. As the interval between different administrations of the test was more than two weeks, the practical effect of taking the same test several times was ignored (Dornyei, 2007).

Data Analysis. Data analysis was done by SPSS 17 software. At the first stage, descriptive statistics (i.e., mean and standard deviation), as well as an independent samples t-test, was run to examine the homogeneity of the two classes. Having been ensured of the homogeneity of the two classes, after treatment, the researchers ran two other independent samples t-tests to compare the post-test scores of the two groups in order to find possible significant differences in terms of both immediate and delayed effects of explicit and implicit feedback.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Homogeneity of Two Groups Before Treatment

Before answering the questions, the researchers ran an independent sample t-test to double check homogeneity of two groups by considering their performance in pretest as follows:

In Table 1, as the *Sig.* value in the Levene's test for equality of variances is greater than the level of significance selected for the present study ($0.811 > \alpha = 0.05$), variability in the two conditions is not significantly different. Hence, the results in the first row of the table should be

considered. By looking to the first row of the *Sig. (2-tailed)* column, it becomes clear that the means for the two groups were not statistically different ($p=0.881 > \alpha=0.05$) and they were relatively the same at the outset of the study.

The Results Regarding the First Research Question

The first research hypothesis addressed the comparison of the immediate effects of explicit and implicit corrective feedback types on the EFL learners' phonological errors. The researchers performed descriptive statistics and independent samples t-test on the immediate post-test scores of the participants in the two groups to investigate this hypothesis. Table 1 and Table 2 display the results of this analysis.

As depicted in Table 2, the immediate effect of explicit feedback (Mean=29.44)

is greater than implicit feedback (mean=23.75). To ensure this difference is statistically significant, independent sample t-test was run as follows:

In Table 3, as the *Sig.* value in the Levene's test for equality of variances is greater than the level of significance selected for the present study ($0.164 > \alpha=0.05$), variability in the two conditions is not significantly different. Therefore, the results in the first row of the table should be taken into account. The first row of the *Sig. (2-tailed)* column indicates that the means for the two groups were significantly different ($0.000 < \alpha=0.05$).

Accordingly, the first null hypothesis of the study was rejected and it was concluded that the explicit and implicit corrective feedback types had a significantly different immediate effect on the phonological

Table 1

The participants' pretest scores differences in the two groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for equality of means		
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	SD Error differences
Equal variances assumed	0.58	0.811	0.151	30	0.88	0.063	0.414
Equal variances not assumed			0.151	29.95	0.88	0.063	0.414

Table 2

The immediate effect of implicit and explicit feedback

Feedback type	N	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	SD
Implicit	16	23.75	19	32	3.35
Explicit	16	29.44	24	37	4.01

Table 3
The participants' immediate post-test scores in the two groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for equality of means		
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	SD Error differences
Equal variances assumed	2.04	0.164	4.34	30	0.000	5.68	1.30
Equal variances not assumed			4.34	29.08	0.000	5.68	1.30

errors of the EFL learners. The comparison of the immediate test mean scores in the two groups reveals that explicit feedback had a better immediate effect than implicit feedback on the phonological errors of the EFL learners.

The Results Regarding the Second Research Question

The second research question attempted to compare the delayed effects of explicit and implicit corrective feedback types on the EFL learners' phonological errors. For this purpose, the mean score of delayed effect of implicit and explicit feedback was measured through descriptive statistics as shown in the following table.

As shown in Table 4, the delayed effect of explicit feedback (Mean=28.13) is greater

than implicit feedback (Mean=22.75). To ensure this difference is statistically significant, independent sample t-test was run as follows:

In Table 5, as the *Sig.* value in the Levene's test for equality of variances is greater than the level of significance selected for the present study ($0.539 > \alpha = 0.05$), variability in the two conditions is not significantly different. It means that the results in the first row of the table should be considered. The first row of the *Sig. (2-tailed)* column displays that the means for the two groups in the delayed post-test were significantly different ($0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). Therefore, the second null hypothesis of the study was also rejected and it was concluded that the explicit and implicit corrective feedback types had a significantly different

Table 4
The delayed effect of implicit and explicit feedback

Feedback type	N	Mean	Maximum	Minimum	SD
Implicit	16	22.75	18	30	3.51
Explicit	16	28.13	22	34	3.79

Table 5

The participants' delayed post-test scores in the two groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for equality of means		
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	SD Error differences
Equal variances assumed	0.38	0.53	4.16	30	0.000	5.37	1.29
Equal variances not assumed			4.16	29.82	0.000	5.37	1.29

delayed effect on the phonological errors of the EFL learners. Comparison of the delayed test mean scores in the two groups reveals that explicit feedback had a better-delayed effect than implicit feedback on the phonological errors of the EFL learners.

Discussion

The present study compared the efficiency of two different corrective feedback types – explicit and implicit – in dealing with learners' pronunciation errors, considering their immediate and the delayed learning and retention. The first research question asked how learners' immediate learning was influenced by the provision of different corrective feedback types. The results of the data analysis indicated that the group that underwent the explicit corrective feedback outperformed the implicit group.

This finding can be interpreted by means of some theories proposed by different researchers defending the consciousness-raising dimension of the explicit corrective feedback in comparison to implicit corrections. According to Ellis (2002), consciousness-raising likely

results in delayed acquisition as well as an immediate effect. He also mentioned that consciousness-raising helped the learner understand a specific linguistic feature to develop its declarative knowledge, which is considered as the main necessity for reaching the procedural level. The learners' mind, after receiving an explicit piece of information about a language feature, gets busy using that information for noticing and afterward bridging the gap between his/her own interlanguage and the target form. Therefore, instead of simply repeating the already provided correct linguistic feature in the form of the recast, he/she will experience a challenge for correcting that error which will result in needs-repair uptake rather than completely repaired uptake.

The results may propose that a simple correction of the wrongly pronounced utterance immediately after the error may be adequate to prosperously correct it (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the most studies only explored the short-term impacts of corrective feedback and almost completely neglected their delayed effects on the

learners' interlanguage construction and progress (Neri et al., 2002). Hence, the second research question of the current study addressed the delayed effects of explicit and implicit corrective feedback types on learners' phonological errors.

The results of the present study were in line with the findings of Lightbown and Spada (1990) who indicated that explicit corrective feedback enhanced linguistic preciseness both immediately after the treatment and with a five-week delay after finishing the treatment period. In a more general perspective, the study is congruent with a couple of studies done by other researchers who claimed that self-awareness of the most effective and applicable techniques, methods, and strategies in language learning and teaching can help both learners and teachers in gaining the utmost outcome (Jafari & Kafipour, 2013; Yazdi & Kafipour, 2014). On the other hand, the findings of the present study were in strict contrast with the results of the study carried out by Soleimani et al. (2014) in the context of Iran. They investigated the impacts of two major kinds of corrective feedback namely explicit and implicit ones on the phonological accuracy of learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and found that the implicit group had a significantly better performance than the explicit and control groups on the post-test. This contradiction between the results may be due to the differences in the levels of the participants (intermediate vs. upper-intermediate) or even the teachers' personal characteristics in the two studies.

Moreover, the current study is in line with another study conducted by Nguyen et al. (2012). They investigated the effectiveness of implicit and explicit feedback on the development of Vietnamese L2 pragmatic competence. They found out that both groups, which received implicit and explicit feedback, outperformed the control group. In regard to the immediate and delayed effect. The higher immediate and delayed effect of explicit corrective feedback over implicit one is not surprising. It is believed that learners who discuss and hear the grammatical rules related to their errors can process the input quicker and deeper than those who will not hear any explanation about the rules and their errors (Takimoto, 2009). On the other hand, only noticing happens in the implicit group while the explicit group will engage in noticing and understanding at the same time since an explanation about the source of error and grammatical rules will be provided. Consequently, explicit correction might attract more attention to problematic forms and meaning in comparison with implicit correction, which may not be able to recognize the source of errors, particularly the errors happened due to differences between L1 and L2. Another study conducted by Ajabshir (2014) also confirmed that explicit group outperformed the implicit one in using all subcomponents of polite refusal strategy.

In line with the current study, Zohrabi and Ehsani (2014) found out that explicit and implicit corrective feedback were effective in increasing Iranian EFL learners'

awareness and their accuracy in English grammar; however, the explicit group outperformed the implicit one. They justified that one reason might be the reduction of learners' confusion about the errors and how the errors are corrected when explicit feedback is provided. However, some other studies (Hosseiny, 2014) found that implicit corrective feedback leads to long-term learning because it engages the learners in guided learning and problem-solving. Motlagh (2015) also found that teachers preferred implicit corrective feedback. Guenette (2007) stated that such different results might be due to problems in research design and methodology.

CONCLUSION

As stated earlier, the main objective of the current study was to find the appropriate way of solving the EFL students' phonological errors. In language learning process, dealing with learners' phonological errors is considered as one of the most challenging tasks for both teachers and students; however, training language users with acceptable pronunciation is one of the most important responsibilities of language teachers (Hebert, 2002).

Among all issues concerning the above-mentioned problem, being aware of the possible sources of the learners' phonological errors is of great importance since it would help the teachers to predict the potential phonological problems of their learners; as a result, they will be able to include suitable feedback types for treating each error in their lesson plan. The nature

and the purpose of the applied tasks in the classrooms have a crucial role in deciding on the type of feedback. Recast can be freely used in all stages of the teaching and learning due to its non-interrupting feature (Chung, 2005). Nevertheless, the outcome of the present study revealed that recast as a type of implicit corrective feedback was not adequately powerful in order to influence the learners' interlanguage.

Instead, the results of this study showed that explicit feedback types targeting the learners' phonological errors could enhance the learners' interlanguage in a positive manner. By postponing the provision of such corrective feedback types until finishing the task, they could even be benefitted in the classrooms in which the main purpose of the instruction was focused on fluency and the teachers were not willing to interrupt the smooth flow of communication for the sake of correcting the learners' errors. In this study, delayed uptake of the learners was considered which gave a clearer image of the efficiency of implicit and explicit corrective feedback types targeting learners' phonological errors compared to their immediate uptake. Results of this study revealed that although implicit corrective feedback in the form of the recast, based on the pre-test and post-test mean differences, resulted in some amount of progress in treating the participants' pronunciation errors, the explicit corrective feedback, in comparison to immediate feedback, demonstrated a noticeable development in both immediate and delayed retention. As the authors

examined female learners' phonological errors, further research including gender-equal sample is required. Moreover, learners' cognitive style satisfaction is one of the key roles in learning (Shahsavari & Tan, 2011); therefore, undertaking further research in this area is recommended.

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