

International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies

ISSN: 2308-5460



A Comparative Study of Reformulation and Elicitation Feedback Types in Teaching English Verb Tense

[PP: 107-114]

Massoud Zoghi

Department of ELT, Ahar Branch, Islamic Azad University
Ahar, Iran

Shabnam Ettehad

Department of Foreign Languages, Firoozkooh Branch, Islamic Azad University
Firoozkooh, Iran

ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of two different kinds of corrective feedback, i.e. reformulation and elicitation on Iranian EFL learners' use of verbs in different present tenses. Thirty-eight intermediate learners took part in this study. They were randomly divided into the reformulation group and the elicitation group. The treatment sessions lasted four weeks with two sessions in each week. Students in the reformulation treatment condition obtained higher significant mean scores than those who received elicitation corrective feedback. Results of this article indicated that feedback in the form of reformulation is more effective than elicitation and it had a potential importance on the outcome of learning English tenses.

Keywords: Reformulation, Corrective feedback, Inductive learning

ARTICLE INFO | The paper received on: 19/02/2016 | Reviewed on: 12/03/2016 | Accepted after revisions on: 17/05/2016

Suggested citation:

Zoghi, Massoud. & Ettehad, Shabnam. (2016). A Comparative Study of Reformulation and Elicitation Feedback Types in Teaching English Verb Tense. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*. 4(2), 107-114. Retrieved From <http://www.eltjournal.org>

1. Introduction

Corrective feedback as one of the significant tools has a crucial role in enhancing English language learning and teaching as well as facilitating acquisition of L2 forms. Both teachers and students view feedback as important part of writing instruction. Corrective feedback (CF) has been defined as 'responses to learner utterances containing an error' (Ellis, 2006, p.28).

As "writing is a central element of language, any reading and language arts program must consider the multidimensional nature of writing in instructional practices, assessment procedures, and language development." (Suleiman, 2000, p.155). Research has shown that students in Iran lack the necessary writing skills needed for successful communication both during their studies and after their graduation.



Therefore, one of the EFL teachers' roles is to encourage learners to improve their writing skill. To this end, the present study was conducted to investigate the impact of two types of feedback, i.e. reformulation and elicitation and their relationship with the learners' achievement in the correct use of tenses in English language.

Current SLA theories assume that L2 learners need exposure to both positive and negative evidence in order to acquire an L2 (Nassaji, 2007). Positive evidence consists of descriptive information about a form or an utterance. It refers to actually occurring sequences, i.e. sentences of the language. Learners can simply be asked to listen to or read texts that have been provided. It can also be accompanied by some kind of meaning-focused activity that incidentally assists learners to focus their attention on the target feature (White, 1987). Negative evidence, on the other hand, consists of information about the impossibility and ungrammaticality of a form or an utterance, i.e. explanations, explicit grammar teachings, and corrections of wrong sequences or ungrammatical sentences how what may not be done (Cook & Newson, 1996; Spada & Lightbown, 2002; Mackey, Gass, & McDonough, 2000).

Feedback helps learners experience the effect of what they have produced as a guide to their future output (Brown 1988). Feedback is "information provided by an agent regarding some aspects of one's task performance" (Hattie & Timperely, 2007, p.81).

Feedback can support learning in different ways: feedback stimulates response rate and/ or accuracy, feedback can act as an incentive that automatically connects responses to prior stimuli, feedback can be regarded as information that learners can use to validate or change a

previous response, and feedback can provide scaffolds to help students construct internal schemata and consequently analysis their learning processes (Mory, 2003).

Interactional feedback is based on two important factors including Long's Interaction Hypothesis and *negotiation* in interlanguage development (Long, 1996). Interactional feedback is beneficial for L2 development because it both provides opportunities for pushed output and facilitates L2 learning (Swain, 1993, 1995). Interactional negotiation such as clarification requests provide opportunities for pushed output through forcing learners to modify their original non-target like output and consequently produce accurate or appropriate utterances in response to feedback (Lyster, 2004; McDonough, 2005).

Lyster and Ranta (1997) identified six different corrective feedback (CF) types and classified them into two broad CF categories: reformulations and prompts. Reformulations include recasts and explicit correction, both these moves supply learners with target reformulations of their non-target output. Recast is defined as 'teacher's reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance, minus the error' (Lyster & Ranta 1997, p. 46). Ellis and Sheen (2006) divided recasts into various types including corrective recasts, corrective/non-corrective recasts, full/partial recasts, single/multiple recasts, single utterance/extended utterance recasts, and simple/complex recasts.

Explicit feedback is characterized by an overt and clear indication of the existence of an error and the provision of the target-like reformulation. In explicit correction, the teacher provides both positive and negative evidence by clearly

saying that what the learner has produced is erroneous" (Lyster&Ranta, 1997, p.47) .

Prompts refer to a variety of signals other than reformulations that push learners to self-repair including elicitation, metalinguistic clues, clarification requests, and repetition (Ranta & Lyster 2007).

Elicitation prompts the learner to self-correct (Panova & Lyster, 2002) and can be accomplished in three ways during face-to-face interaction, i.e. request for reformulations of an ill-formed utterance, use of open questions, and strategic pauses to allow a learner to complete an utterance. Lyster and Ranta categorize metalinguistic feedback as "comments, information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the student's utterance, without explicitly providing the correct form" (1997, p. 4). Clarification requests is a type of feedback that carries questions indicating that the utterance has been ill-formed or misunderstood and that a reformulation or a repetition is required. Another approach to provide corrective feedback is repetition. This feedback is simply the teachers or interlocutors' repetition "of the ill-formed part of the student's utterance, usually with a change in intonation" (Panova & Lyster, 2002, p.584).

According to Doughty and Gass (2001), both reformulations and elicitations might have significant impact on language acquisition. When the teacher or an interlocutor reformulates the learner's erroneous utterance, the feedback provides the learner with the correct model of the target language (i.e., positive evidence) and shift his or her attention from the message to the form by signaling to the learner that the utterance contains an error and the interlocutor is correcting that error (i.e., negative feedback).

There is now a considerable volume of literature on profound influence of

feedback on different aspects of language (Carroll & Swain, 1993; Lyster&Ranta, 1997; Panova & Lyster, 2002). Nassaji (2007) investigated the usefulness of two major types of interactional feedback (elicitation and reformulation) in dyadic interaction. The participants were 42 adult intermediate English as second language learners. Analysis of data on output accuracy following feedback showed that both reformulation and elicitation resulted in higher rates of accurate repair when they were combined with explicit intonational or verbal prompts compared with less explicit prompts or no prompts.

Doughty and Varela (1998) investigated the impact of recasts on English past tense in two content-based science classes with students at an intermediate ESL level. The experimental group, received corrective feedback in the form of recasts, and the control group, received no corrective recasts. The researchers found that the group who received corrective recasts outperformed in both accuracy and use of the targeted form those who did not receive such recasts.

Ammar and Spada (2006) examined the usefulness recasts and prompts on the acquisition of possessive determiners by French-speaking ESL learners. Both groups outperformed the control group, the group receiving prompts significantly indicated superior performance in comparison with the recast group on written and oral posttests.

Ellis (2007), studied the effects of recasts and metalinguistic explanations on regular past tense *-ed* and comparative *-er* with ESL learners in New Zealand. It was believed that comparative *-er* was more difficult than past *-ed*, because it occurs less frequently and the rule is more complex. In his study the group receiving metalinguistic explanations showed greater improvement



on-*er* than -*ed*, while the recast group did not show any significant improvement over the control group on any of the measures.

1.2 Research Questions

For this study, two different types of corrective feedback, elicitation and reformulation- were employed to improve EFL learners' grammar knowledge in general and acquiring different types of present tenses in particular. For this study the design of quasi-experimental was used with two experimental groups. The independent variables were two different types of corrective feedbacks, elicitation and reformulation, and the dependent variable was learning present tense verbs in English. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What is the effect of reformulation feedback on improving Iranian EFL learners' knowledge of producing verbs in different present tenses?
2. What is the effect of elicitation feedback on improving Iranian EFL learners' knowledge of producing verbs in different present tenses?
3. Is there any statistically significant difference between two different types of corrective feedbacks (reformulation and elicitation) in producing verbs in different present tenses?

2. Method

2.1 Participants

A sample of thirty-eight participants was chosen from among fifty- three students based on their levels of proficiency scores. The proficiency test used in this study was Nelson test and those who scored 70-95 out of 100 were chosen to take part in the study. The students were studying English as a foreign language at Islamic Azad University, Malard branch. They were at intermediate level and their age range was 19-27.

2.2 Instruments

First, a standardized general proficiency test known as Nelson test, was given to the students to determine their level of proficiency. Then the subjects were proposed to give a pretest which was a multiple choice test with 36 items measuring their knowledge of different present tense verbs. Teaching materials on different verb tenses were selected from a grammar book - Modern English (part I). After the treatment, a posttest was used to measure the students' amount of learning. Similar to the pretest, the posttest was in multiple choice form with 36 items.

2.3 Procedure

In the first phase, the students were asked to take a Nelson proficiency test to evaluate their level of proficiency. Based on their test scores, thirty eight students were selected from among fifty three subjects. Before treatment sessions, they were asked to take a pretest to measure their knowledge of verbs in different present tenses. Then, the participants were told that the aim of the study was to investigate the role of student-teacher interaction in language learning. Therefore, they were assigned into two experimental groups who received two different types of corrective feedbacks. The treatment sessions lasted four weeks with two sessions in each week. For every group, the teacher taught different types of present tense (simple present, continues present, perfect present, and perfect continues present) inductively. But their received corrective feedbacks varied according to different types of treatments. In the elicitation group, the students' erroneous utterances were corrected through elicitation, which is the teacher didn't provide the correct form but, instead, directed the learner to reformulate the error. In the reformulation group, the students' received corrective feedback as reformulation. In this condition, the teacher

rephrased the learners' non-target like utterances into a target like forms. Thus, she mentioned t the correct forms to the learners. Finally, the students were supposed to take a posttest, which was in multiple choice form and the students were asked to choose the correct answer from among four given choices. The collected data were submitted to SPSS for windows to be analyzed.

3. Results

As mentioned before, the major goal of the present study was to examine the effect of two different types of corrective feedbacks, reformulation and elicitation, on the EFL learners' improvement in different types of the present tense. To answer the research questions, first, the descriptive data for the scores of the groups on the pre-test and the post-test was calculated. Then, the scores were analyzed through a paired-sample *t*-test to find out if there were any statistically significant differences among the groups. In answering the first research question, which intends to examine the effect of using elicitation corrective feedback in acquiring present tense verbs, the scores of the scores of the pre-test and post-test for each class were analyzed by the paired-sample *t*-test. The results of this analysis are shown in the following tables.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Pre-test and Post-test for the Elicitation (E1) Group

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Pair 1 Pretest E1	19	11.5200	2.58392	.51678
Posttest E1	19	11.8400	2.64071	.52814

Table 2: Paired Samples *t*-test Analysis of the Pre-test and Post-test for the Elicitation (E1) Group

Paired Sample Test	Paired Differences					
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest E1 Pair 1 Posttest E1	-.32000	1.46401	.29280	-1.093	24	.285

As shown in Table 1, there is not a significant difference between the mean

scores of the pre-test and post-test in the elicitation group. The results of Table 2 confirms the results of Table 1, because the Sig. ratio in paired sample test for the control group is ($p=0.285$) and it is higher than the Sig. criteria (0.05). Therefore, it is insignificant.

To answer the second research question which is about the effectiveness of reformulation corrective feedback, the obtained data from the experimental group 2 (E2) were analyzed by the use of paired sample *t*-test, and the results are reported in tables 3 and 4:

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of the Pre-test and Post-test for the Reformulation (E2) Group Pa

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Pair 1 Pretest E2	19	11.3600	3.90384	.78077
Posttest E2	19	13.7200	3.31059	.66212

Table 4: Paired Samples *t*-test Analysis of the Pre-test and Post-test for the Reformulation (E2) Group

Paired Sample Test	Paired Differences					
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest E2 Pair 1 Posttest E2	-2.36000	1.89033	.37807	-6.242	24	.000

As Table 3 shows, there is a significant difference between the performance of the subjects of the experimental group 2 in the pre-test and the post-test. As, the mean score for the students in the post-test is (13.72) which is higher than the mean score for the students in the pre-test (11.36). Therefore, it can be said that the students in the post-test seem to have performed better than in the pre-test. Table 4 shows that the difference between the performances of the students in the experimental group 2 in both pre-test and post-test is significant, since the Sig. Ratio is ($p=0.000$). Consequently, we can conclude that the reformulation corrective feedback has a positive effect on improving Iranian EFL learners' acquisition of different types of present tense verbs. Considering the third research



questions, we analyzed the data collected from the posttests of both groups were quantitatively. The following tables show the results.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of the Post-test of the E1 and E2 Groups

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PosttestE1	11.8400	19	2.64071	.52814
	Posttest E2	13.7200	19	3.31059	.66212

Table 6: Paired Samples t-test Analysis of the Pre-test and Post-test for the E1 and E2 Groups

	Paired Differences					
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Posttest E1						
Pair 1	-4.90000	1.95869	.56366	-5.729	24	.000
Posttest E2						

As indicated in Table 5, the mean score for the subjects in the experimental group 2 is 13.72 and the mean score for the subjects in the experimental group 1 is 11.84. Hence, it can be concluded that the subjects in the experimental group 2 performed better than those in the experimental group 1. The result of table 6 is in line with the results of table 5, and indicates that the difference between the performances of the subjects in both E1 and E2 is statistically significant. Accordingly, it is concluded that the students who treated with corrective feedback as reformulation performed better than those who received elicitation corrective feedback in posttest.

4. Discussion

The present study tried to answer the question of what type of feedback, i.e. elicitation or reformulation is more effective in terms of the use of English language tenses. Results of this study indicated that feedback in the form of reformulation is more effective than elicitation and it had an impact on the outcome of learning English tenses. Reformulation is the opposite of the traditional models of instruction, which moves from accuracy to fluency and is

consistent with fluency-to-accuracy, or the task-based model of instruction that "encourages learners to make the best use of whatever language they have. It assumes that learners will find ways of encoding the meanings they have in order to achieve the outcome"(Willis, 1990, p. 128). According to Johnson (1998), learners follow an initial trial after getting reformulation, and is in turn followed by a re-trial, into which noticed features of the reformulated behavior may be incorporated in full operating conditions: "Reformulation provides a model of what the behavior should look like; and though its clearest use is for writing, there is no reason why spoken language should not be reformulated"(Johnson, 1998, p. 92). Teachers must be sensitive to the learner's errors and draw learners' attention to the target forms and they might want to consider the whole range of techniques they have at their disposal rather than relying so extensively on recasts' (Lyster & Ranta's, 1997. p. 56). To achieve this end, teachers should make choices in accordance with linguistic targets, interactional contexts, students' age and proficiency, and course objectives.

The present study favors the use of reformulation feedback over elicitation. The results of this study confirm the role of reformulation as an important factor in enhancing learners' tense knowledge. It is recommended that this type of feedback to be incorporated in the instruction of grammar in language classrooms since it can enhance noticing and encoding of information in memory. One of the shortcomings of this study was that the result is based on a relatively small database from the low sample size. Future studies should increase sample size in order to add validation to the present findings.

5. Conclusions

The findings in this article show that feedback in the form of reformulation has the potential to lead to more correction than the corrective feedback in the form of elicitation for language learners. It is believed that reformulation has higher occurrence in language classes and recasts are more dominant than other types of corrective feedback (Ellis et al., 2001; Lyster & Ranta 1997; Panova & Lyster, 2002). The higher occurrence of reformulation let the conversation proceed smoothly and as a result keeping the learner's attention on content (Lyster, 1998b) because they usually do not break the flow of communication (Ellis et al., 2001). However, one of the most important points that must be taken into consideration is that learners' attitudes towards corrective feedback. Learners who constantly receive negative comments and feedback from teachers seem to have more negative attitudes towards language learning than those who receive positive feedback.

References

- Ammar, A. & N. Spada (2006). One size fits all? Recasts, prompts and L2 learning. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 28.4, 543–574.
- Brown, R. (1988). Classroom pedagogics – a syllabus for the interactive stage? *The Teacher Trainer*, 2(3), 13–17.
- Carroll, S., & Swain, M. (1993). Explicit and implicit negative feedback. An empirical study of the learning of linguistic generalization. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 15, 357–386.
- Cook, V. and Newson, M. (1996). *Chomsky's Universal Grammar*, Oxford, Blackwells.
- Doughty, C. (2001). Cognitive underpinning of focus on form. In P. Robinson (Ed.), *Cognition and second language instruction* (pp. 206–257). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Doughty, C., & Varela, E. (1998). Communicative focus on form. In C. Doughty & J. Williams (Eds.), *Focus on form in classroom second language acquisition* (pp.114–138). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ellis, R., Basturkmen, H., & Loewen, S. (2001). Learner uptake in communicative ESL lessons. *Language Learning*, 51, 281–318.
- Ellis, R. (2006). Researching the effects of form-focused instruction on L2 acquisition. *AILA Review* 19, 18–41.
- Ellis, R. (2007). The differential effects of corrective feedback on two grammatical structures. In A. Mackey (Ed.), *Conversational interaction in second language acquisition* (pp. 339–360). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R., & Sheen, Y. (2006). Re-examining the role of recasts in L2 acquisition. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 28, 575 – 600.
- Gass, S. (2003). Input and interaction. In C. Doughty & M. Long (Eds.), *The handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 224–255). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 1(77), 81–112. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/003465430298487>.
- Johnson, K. 1988. 'Mistake correction'. *ELT Journal* 42/2: 89-96.
- Long, M. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In W. Ritchie & T. Bhatia (Eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 413–468). San Diego: Academic Press.
- Lyster, R. (1998b). Recasts, repetition, and ambiguity in L2 classroom discourse. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 20, 51–81.
- Lyster, R. & L. Ranta (1997). Corrective feedback and learner uptake: Negotiation of form in communicative



- classrooms. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 19.1, 37–66.
- Lyster, R. (2004). Differential effects of prompts and recasts in form-focused instruction. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 26, 399–432.
- Mackey, A., Gass, S. & McDonough, K. (2000) How do learners perceive implicit negative feedback? *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 82, 338-356.
- McDonough, K. (2005). Identifying the impact of negative feedback and learners' responses on ESL question development. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*,
- Mory, E. H. (2003). Feedback research revisited. In D. H. Jonassen (Ed.), *Handbook of research for educational communications and technology* (pp. 745-783). New York Macmillan.
- Nassaji, H.(2007). Elicitation and Reformulation and Their Relationship With Learner Repair in Dyadic Interaction, *Language Learning*, 57(4), pp. 511-548.
- Panova, I., &Lyster, R. (2002). Patterns of corrective feedback and uptake in an adult ESL classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36, 573-595.
- Ranta, L. & R. Lyster (2007). A cognitive approach to improving immersion students' oral language abilities: The Awareness–Practice–Feedback sequence. In R. DeKeyser (ed.), *Practice in a secondlanguage: Perspectives from applied linguistics and cognitive psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 141–160.
- Spada, N. and Lightbown, P.M. (2002) *Second Language Acquisition*, In Schmitt, N. *An Introduction to Applied Linguistics*. London, Arnold.
- Suleiman M.F. (2000).The process and product of writing: Implications for elementary schoolteachers. ERIC Digest, ERIC Identifier ED 442299.
- Swain, M. (1993). The output hypothesis: Just speaking and writing aren't enough. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 50, 158–164.
- Swain, M. (1995). Three functions of output in second language learning. In H. G.
- Widdowson, G. Cook, & B. Seidlhofer (Eds.), *Principle and practice in applied linguistics: Studies in Honour of H. G. Widdowson*(pp. 125–144). Oxford: OxfordUniversity Press.
- Willis, D. 1990. *The Lexical Syllabus*. London: Collins.