

Effectiveness of Instructors' and Peers' Oral Feedback on the Accuracy of English Writing: A Study of Pakistani ESL Undergraduate Learners

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Abstract

The objective of the current research is to investigate the effect of instructors and peers' oral feedback on the written English accuracy of ESL learners. In this quasi-experimental study, 90 participants are assessed on three distinct forms of feedback (i.e., instructor's oral metalinguistic feedback along with indirect written feedback, peers' oral interaction along with indirect written feedback and no feedback) for writing errors of three types (i.e., verb tense, preposition, and articles). The participants are assessed three times; pre-test, an immediate post-test and delayed post-test. ANOVA demonstrates that learners receiving instructors' oral metalinguistic feedback along with indirect written feedback outperform those who receive peers' oral interaction along with indirect written feedback and no feedback in two out of three linguistic forms in subsequent writing. The findings of the study suggest that employing oral metalinguistic instructors' feedback along with written feedback in the Pakistani language learning context can help learners improve their English language learning. Consequently, language efficiency may improve overall academic performance and success ratio in academia.

Keywords: oral metalinguistic feedback, indirect written feedback, written accuracy

1. Introduction

English in Pakistan no longer confined to the domain of English World, has blended with the local languages and evolved into what is known as Pakistani English (PakE) (Mesthrie, 2006). As a result, nativization occurs due to less contact with the native speaker community, consequently lacking acculturation of native language norms (Schumann, 1978). This results in a broad spectrum of English usage all over Pakistan in the form of different varieties, like Anglicized, Acrolect, Mesolect and Basilect variety, primarily based on the speakers' socio-economic status (Mansoor, 2002). Thus, PakE deviates from the standard variety of British English which ultimately affects the writing process of Pakistani learners in universities.

Learners in Pakistani universities show resistance to corrective feedback on written assignments because the English language they are employed is quite different from the language of instruction (Siddique, 2007). In Pakistan, instructors'-dominated feedback that favours the product-oriented approach compared to process-oriented approach has been generally considered as a valuable tool of developing learners' target competency in their English writing (Haider, 2012). Moreover, Pakistani educational set-up erects upon Grammar Translation Method (GTM) where time-consuming instructors' written feedback is provided in overcrowded classrooms to produce standard variety of English.

Keeping in view the importance of instructors' oral feedback and in an attempt to help Pakistani University learners in improving their written accuracy, the present study aimed to utilize instructors' and peers' oral feedback in context of writing accuracy.

Many writing instructors consider instructor-student conferences based interaction to be more effective than written feedback because they render opportunity for clarification, instruction, and negotiation (Ferris, 2002; Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998). However, because of social and cultural inhibitions, some second language (L2) learners are hesitant to question their instructors, and/or reluctant to argue in one-on-one conferences, hindering the full possibility of incorporation of instructors' advice and suggestions into their work (Goldstein & Conrad, 1990).

In a comparison of different oral feedback by instructors, Williams (2004) found that learners followed instructors' oral feedback more when they were actively engaged; negotiated in conferences; and when suggestions were explicit and direct. He found these results in the case of revisions, rather than in new pieces of writing. However, when taking the effect of feedback on improvement in writing ability into consideration, one needs to determine its effect on subsequent instances of writing, rather than on subsequent drafts of the same writing (Bitchener, 2008). For this purpose, only few studies encounter empirical evidence able to demonstrate the effectiveness of instructors-learners conferencing and examine this phenomenon from various directions (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009a; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010b). Therefore, the current study has included many of the important and diverse findings from these studies in order to extend past observations and adding the unique local perspective.

Bitchener, Young, and Cameron (2005) investigated 53 post-intermediate learners over three months as they were assigned to different feedback options: direct written feedback only; student-instructor's five-minute oral conference combined with direct written feedback; and no corrective feedback as control group. Finding from their research illustrated greater accuracy concerning past simple tense and the definite article in a new pieces of writing, however, this was not the case with the untreatable error category of prepositions.

In another research of Bitchener (2008) the same findings were supplemented when the duration of instructors-learners oral meta-linguistic feedback was extended to thirty minutes. In this case, the influence of this feedback option was investigated for a longer duration (e.g., over two months) for the accuracy of two functional uses of the English article. The above study was further extended by another subsequent study, study by Bitchener and Knoch (2008), in which 144 low-intermediate ESL learners were assessed. The study was designed on the same pattern i.e., treatment group along with a pre-test, an immediate test, and a delayed post-test research design. The study revealed significant differences between the control group and all other treatment groups. However, none of the feedback options was any more effective than the other. Moreover, time factor enhances the accuracy of written and oral feedback. Same results were observed when Bitchener and Knoch (2009a) examined 39 low-intermediate university learners by introducing two changes i.e., two rather than one delayed post-tests and no control group.

Bitchener and Knoch (2010a) further extended the duration to ten months and involved 52 low intermediate ESL learners assigned to the same treatment groups that were assessed in earlier and a control group included first time. Three delayed post-tests were administered after 7, 24, and 40 weeks respectively. Like the earlier reported studies (e.g., Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008) this study also revealed that the provision of written feedback is just as effective as the additional provision of oral meta-linguistic explanation to improve the accuracy of the English article system. Moreover, all treatment groups outperformed the control group.

Besides above mentioned findings of extending duration of feedback, efficacy of feedback was also assessed by minimizing the duration from 30 to 15 minutes (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010b). This strategy was applied to 63 advanced L2 university learners over ten weeks. The study findings concluded that the oral feedback group outperformed the control group overtime and found the superior longitudinal effect of providing learners with oral feedback in the form of oral instructors-learner meta-linguistic explanation along with written feedback. However, in the same study, oral feedback along with written feedback is most likely to be compared with written feedback or in a few cases with written meta-linguistic feedback.

1.1 Theoretical Background of Study

Along with empirical research, some theoretical perspectives have also focused on the need for oral feedback. Truscott (1996) claimed that any knowledge that learners gain through receiving feedback is transient and superficial knowledge which stands contrary to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory that suggests that interlanguage development occurs gradually over a long period of time (e.g., Gass, 2003). In addition to this, Long's revised version of interaction hypothesis (1996) is based on the claim that interaction facilitates SLA because through interactions learners get opportunities to receive implicit or explicit feedback, which ultimately draws their attention to the problem and encourages them to produce modified output (Gass & Mackey, 2015).

Proponents of the interaction hypothesis also argue that student interaction with instructors and peers encourages learners to notice the mismatches between their own output and the target language forms to promote language learning (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2013). Therefore, the extent to which the learners notice the linguistic forms during meaningful interactions results in the internalization of input by the learners (Gass, 2013; Swain, 2005).

Moreover, in terms of the socio-cultural perspective, interaction between an expert (i.e., instructor or high proficient learner) and a novice (learner) in the form of oral feedback can shift learners from the

inter-psychological (social) to intra-psychological (individual) level when they produce new, accurate pieces of written texts successfully after internalizing oral feedback from an expert (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994).

1.2 Rationale of the Study

Previous research studies (Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992; Miao, Richard, & Yu, 2006; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Wu, 2006; Zhao, 2010) compared instructors' and peers' oral feedback and look for the improvement on subsequent drafts of the same writing, while the longitudinal effect of these types of feedback is non-existent. Hence the current study will focus on the longitudinal research design which compares the effect of instructors' and peers' oral feedback.

Concerning peers' oral feedback, Allaei and Connor (1990) found learners' culture a significant factor impacting the effectiveness of peer feedback groups. Carson and Nelson (1996), and Hyland (2000) pointed out that in Asian culture this factor creates problems because learners may feel apprehensive about hurting their peers while providing and receiving feedback. Ultimately this makes peer connection unsustainable (Nelson & Murphy, 1992). Peer feedback, therefore, becomes less valuable in Asian culture (such as Pakistan) where learners are taught to give high respect to their instructors as they are considered to have more knowledge and authority (Nelson, 1997). All these problematic behaviours and attitudes, which work against productive collaboration, can hinder the effectiveness of peer review as a pedagogical practice. As this study is conducted in a Pakistani context, therefore, while studying efficacy of peer groups, such behaviours and attitudes of learners in Asian culture need to be focused on.

Past studies (e.g., Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009a, 2010a) assessed English article system as the only treatable category whose efficacy in English writing is focused which highlights the need to explore how the feedback affects other treatable and untreatable categories such as past tense and prepositions respectively. Furthermore, it would also be significant to know the importance of instructors' oral plus written feedback by comparing it to any other type of oral feedback. Keeping this gap in mind, the current study thus compares the effectiveness of instructors' oral meta-linguistic plus written feedback to instructors' written plus peers oral feedback. In addition to this, current study also included both treatable (article and simple past tense) and untreatable (prepositions) error categories.

1.3 Hypotheses of Study

The present study intended to test following hypothesis:

- 1) Oral instructors' and peers' feedback along with written indirect feedback likely to increase grammatical accuracy on ESL graduate learners' writing in Pakistan as compared to the control group.
- 2) Oral instructors' and peers' feedback along with written indirect feedback likely to increase the grammatical accuracy of treatable errors categories in the ESL graduate learners' writing in Pakistan as compared to untreatable error categories.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

In the current study, a pre-post-test quasi-experimental design was implemented as the main aim of the study was to compare the effect of instructors' and peers' oral feedback on learners' learning of L2 linguistic forms at three points in time (pre-test, post-test and delayed post-test).

2.2 Participants

The study included 100 adult ESL university learners from postgraduate level enrolled in four domains; Psychology (n = 27), Economics (n = 23), History (n = 24), and Islamic studies (n = 26). The participants' age ranged from 20 to 25 years (M = 21.1, SD = 1.19), 82% of study participants were females (n = 82), and 18% were males (n = 18).

To control the confounding effect, certain inclusion and exclusion criterion were established. Only those participants were selected who have completed 14 years (graduation) of education without missing or repeating any grades, have been in both English as well as Urdu medium of instructions, haven't any exposure of foreign education or specialization, not been referred for any counselling or therapeutic sessions, or not having any mental illness or physical disability.

The contents of this language course include EAP (English for Academic Purpose), Communication and Language skills, and Functional English. The English language course contents during the period of this study were kept nearly identical. The EAP language course ran parallel to their academic course schedule, in which

they received three credit hours of English language instruction two days per week. Product-oriented approach was used to teach English writing at the start of this EAP language course where different grammatical exercises were practised by learners. Mostly Instructor-centred feedback in the form of direct written feedback was used to respond learners' writings.

2.3 Instruments

The provision of feedback and assessment of learners' learning took place in two phases:

2.3.1 Assessment of Learning

Three sets of picture prompts for narrative writing taken from Fletcher and Birt (1983), were used to prompt the learners to produce a sample of written text before administering any of the three interventions (i.e., no feedback, instructors' oral feedback, peers' oral feedback) at three different point in time. The three picture prompts consisted of a series of pictures presenting a story. The learners were required to explain what was going on in the pictures and then write a story based on these prompts with a minimum of 100 words in 20 minutes. Accurate use of three linguistic forms (i.e., articles including the use of 'a' and 'the', prepositions like the use of *on*, *in*, *at*, *to*, and verb tense in terms of *regular and irregular simple past tense form*) was measured over a period of three months by employing a pre-test, an immediate post-test and a delayed post-test using the three sets of picture prompts. These errors were made the focus of this study because these were found to be the most frequently occurring errors in pre-test writing, exhibiting a percentage of 19%, 17%, and 12% respectively.

2.3.2 Instructors' Feedback

This study used a quasi-experimental research design where learners were assigned to two experimental groups and one control group. Among the three groups, Experimental Group one (Group 1 henceforth) received instructors' oral meta-linguistic feedback prior to indirect written feedback from the instructor; the second group (Group 2) received indirect written feedback from the instructor prior to peers' oral feedback; and the third group (Group 3) received no feedback. Following Bitchener, Young, and Cameron (2005), and Bitchener (2008), the instructor gave an oral meta-linguistic explanation to Group 1, which took the form of a 15–20 minute lesson where the researcher explained the rules and gave examples of the targeted errors learners made in their texts with additional examples. The Instructor used learners' incorrect sentences as models to explain the grammatical rules with examples.

On the other hand, learners in Group 2 were given instructions on how to properly employ Instructors' written feedback when helping classmates to correct errors, and could make maximum self-corrections before asking for help, or negotiating mistakes. In addition a similar number of five high and low language competency learners were put in a group on the basis of their performance for grammar exercises undertaken at the start of the course. They were given 10–12 minutes for this process of negotiation about their mistakes with their peers, during which the researcher monitored their discussions. The learners were allowed to use their native language, Urdu, to provide oral feedback so that they could "*more fully participate in developing their ideas for writing*" (Pennington & Yue, 1996, p. 243).

2.4 Procedure

This study was begun in the ninth week of the EAP course. The language institute agreed to the learners' participation in it. One week before administering the pre-test, the learners and Instructors of the three classes were provided with background questionnaires (to know about their personal detail), a consent form, and a written description of the entire process along with a list of all the error codes and symbols. Learners were ensured that neither their names nor their writings would be taken for any other purpose except for this research and their participation would have no effect on their regular exams. In order to privatise their identity, they were assigned an ID (identity) number.

The pre-test was carried out in the first week of the experiment and before correcting their pre-test writing, all of their writings were photocopied twice: one set was given to a language Instructor to mark errors while the other was marked by the researcher to produce a reliability check. Throughout the whole procedure the same Instructor-researcher marked all three sets of writing. In the second week, the marking of all the errors was completed. The frequency of each error category was counted and the most frequent error category was collected as the main focus of this study.

In the third week, pre-test writing was returned to those in Group 1 and 2 with indirect written feedback provided on the three error categories according to those most recurrent to self-correct their errors. Learners in Group 3 were asked to correct their errors by themselves without any feedback (apart from general comments relevant to the content, provided by the Instructor). The second piece of writing for all groups, based on the picture prompt,

occurred in the following week (week 4) to obtain subsequent (new) writings to check for improvement in accuracy of the three targeted error types on basis of the type of feedback received. The writings with indirect written feedback were then returned to participants in Groups 1 and 2 after a week. To explore whether feedback was effective over time, a delayed post-intervention was administered five weeks later. During the interim period, normal instructions continued.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data was produced at three different times (i.e., the pre-test in week 1, an immediate post-test in week 4, and delayed post-test in week 12). There was a between-participant factor: feedback at three levels (written only, written and oral conferencing, and none). For each combination, learners were focused on a dependent variable: accurate performance measured as an error ratio or an error rate per type over three pieces of writing. Since learners' compositions could vary in the number of words used to control this, the error rate was calculated as the total number of errors/total number of words \times 100.

Each occurrence of an incorrect, omitted or unnecessary usage was counted as an error. Descriptive statistics in terms of the mean and standard deviation of the three targeted forms in each of the three pieces of writing were calculated for the three intervention groups. Statistical significance was assessed through a one-way and a two-way repeated measure. One-way ANOVAs with Tukey's post hoc pair-wise comparison was performed to isolate the exact points in time when differences between the groups occurred. For this purpose, SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) datasets were used.

A reliability of .84 was gained for the categorization and identification of errors in the pre-test writing. A second rater marked 15% of the writing from the immediate post-test and delayed post-test. The same language Instructor also counted the number of targeted errors in the three writing tests from all the groups. By using three targeted errors, correlation coefficients (r) of 0.80 and 0.79 respectively, were obtained for error counting in the samples written soon after the pre-test and those written after two months, correlation coefficients were 0.91 and 0.90, respectively, for error assignment/marking in the second and third writing samples respectively.

3. Results

A summary of descriptive statistics concerning all the three targeted linguistic forms is shown in Table 1. This is followed by Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4 which graphically represents the means of the three groups concerning each of the three targeted linguistic forms over time.

Table 1. Mean scores for writing errors across different groups

Treatment Groups	Use of Articles			Use of Prepositions			Use of Past Simple Tense			Total Errors		
	Pre-test	Immediate Post-test	Delayed Post-test	Pre-test	Immediate Post-test	Delayed Post-test	Pre-test	Immediate Post-test	Delayed Post-test	Pre-test	Immediate Post-test	Delayed Post-test
	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>
Group 1	2.04(.61)	1.48(.51)	1.28(.68)	1.96(.79)	1.92(.49)	2.04(.61)	1.60(.96)	1(.50)	.68(.56)	5.64(1.35)	4.40(.87)	4(.91)
Group 2	2(.71)	1.92(.86)	1.84(.75)	1.92(.57)	2.16(.47)	1.96(.61)	1.52(.82)	.96(.61)	.88(.67)	5.48(1.12)	5(.91)	4.68(.90)
Group 3	2(.50)	2.20(.58)	1.92(.57)	1.96(.68)	2.12(.73)	2.16(.55)	1.36(.57)	1.40(1)	1.64(1)	5.32(.85)	5.84(1.03)	5.64(1.08)

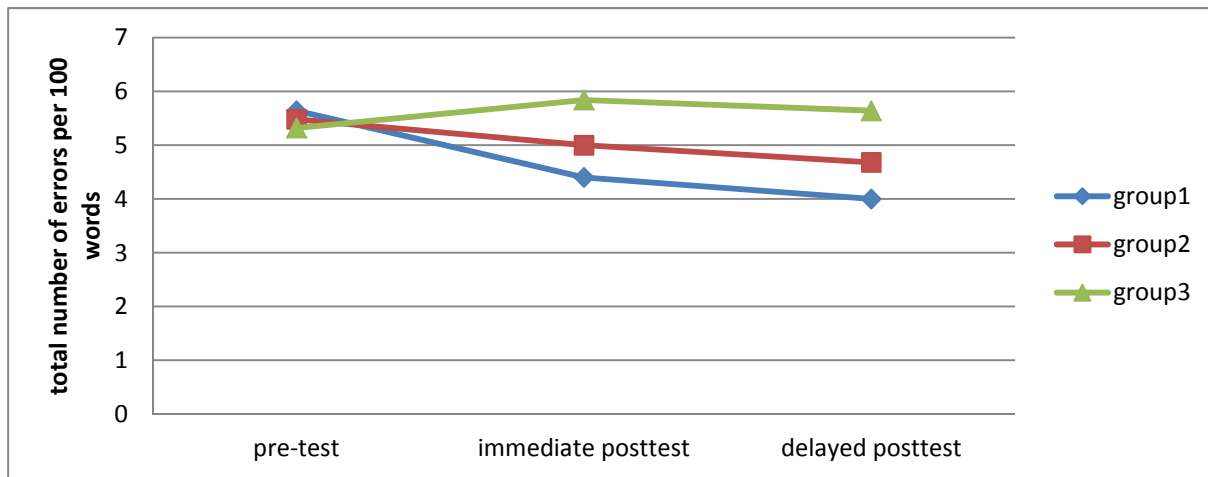


Figure 1. Group means for the use of the three linguistic forms across four treatment groups over time

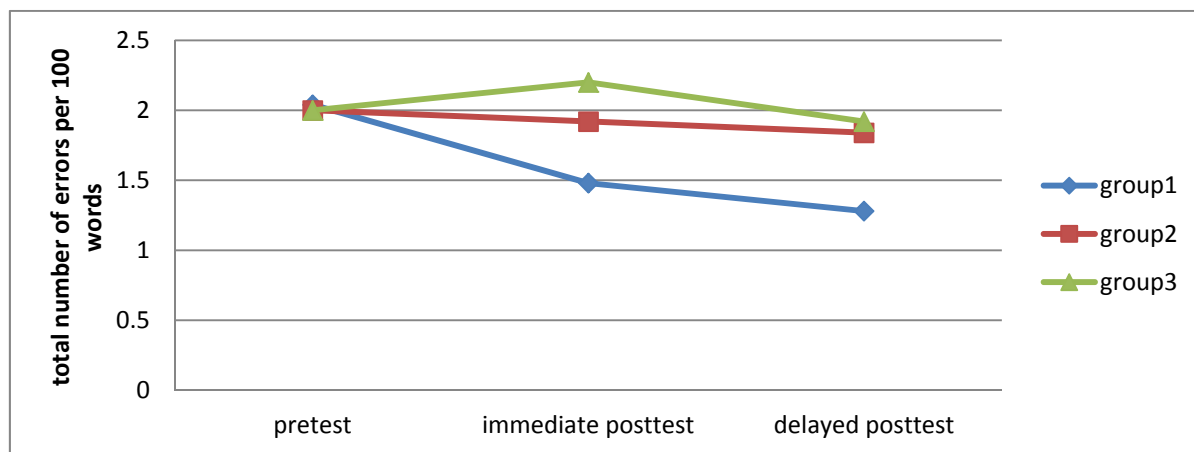


Figure 2. Group means for the use of article errors across the four treatment groups over time

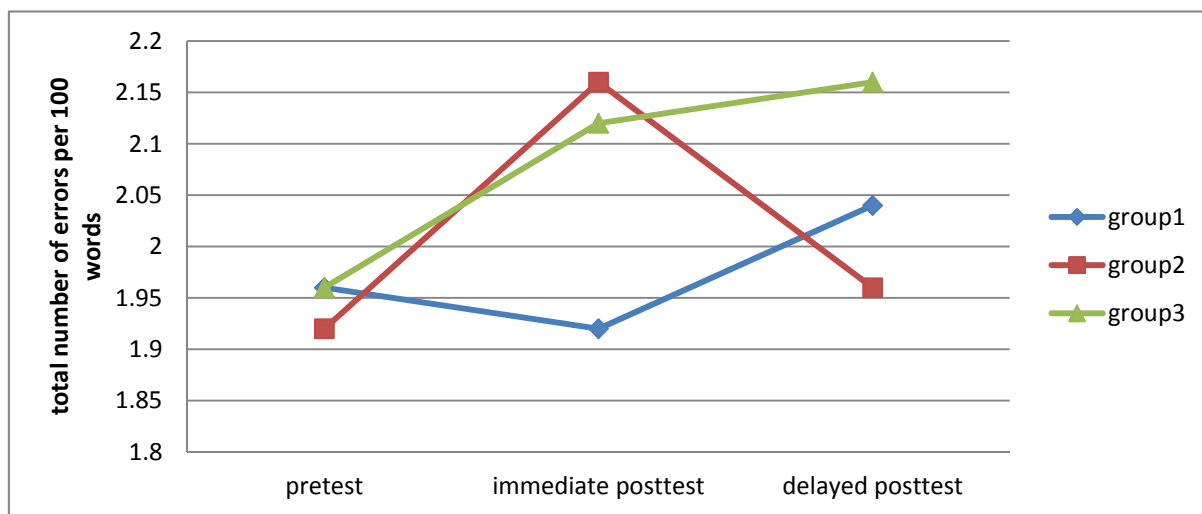


Figure 3. Group means for the use of preposition errors across the four treatment groups over time

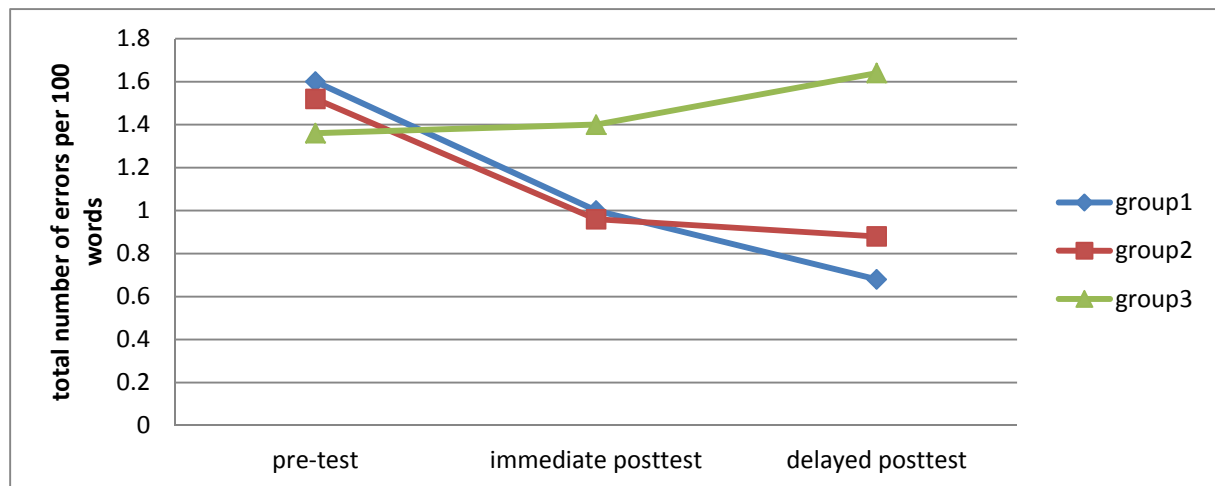


Figure 4. Group means for the use of past tense errors across the four treatment groups over time

As shown in Table 1, the total number of errors decreased both at immediate and delayed post-test in case of Groups 1 and 2. However, that was not the case for the control group where an increase in the number of errors can be seen over time. In order to find out if these differences were significant between the groups, a one-way ANOVA was run that revealed significant differences in the mean number of errors for the three groups ($F = 8.34$; $p = .000$) and these differences lay between the control group and those of Group 1 ($p = .000$) and 2 ($p = .006$). Tukey's pairwise comparisons further revealed significant differences between the control group and those of Group 1 ($p = .000$) and 2 ($p = .015$) in the immediate post-test and between the control group and Group 1 ($p = .000$) and 2 ($p = .005$) in the delayed post-test.

As shown in Table 1, the number of errors concerning articles and simple past tense decreased at immediate and delayed post-test in case of Groups 1 and 2 however that was not the case for the control group. On the other hand, the numbers of preposition errors were not affected by any of the treatment groups. A one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences in the mean number of article ($F = 4.49$; $p = .001$) and past simple tense errors ($F = 3.9$; $p = .01$) but not in the case of preposition errors ($F = .34$; $p = .81$) for all the three treatment groups. Tukey's pairwise comparisons further revealed that differences were found between the control group and Group 1 ($p = .02$) and 2 ($p = .04$) in the case of past simple tense errors; however, for article errors differences were only found between the control group and Group 1 ($p = .001$). The ANOVA test found the two experimental groups (Groups 1 & 2) significantly differ from each other ($F = 5.30$; $p = .02$) in terms of producing the number of article errors where Group 1 outperformed Group 2 ($p = .021$), but this could not happen in the case of past simple tense ($F = .03$; $p = .96$) and preposition errors ($F = .1$; $p = .94$). A one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences in the delayed post-test for article errors ($F = 4.43$; $p = .000$) and past tense errors ($F = 9.50$; $p = .000$) for the three groups. The pairwise comparisons further revealed significant differences only between the control group and treatment Group 1 in the case of article errors at the immediate ($p = .002$) and delayed post-test ($p = .007$). For past simple tense errors, differences were found between the control group and Group 1 ($p = .000$) and 2 ($p = .000$) only in the delayed post-test. In the case of preposition errors, no significant differences were found for the three groups neither in the delayed ($F = .84$; $p = .51$) nor in the immediate post-test ($F = .84$; $p = .41$).

4. Discussion

The present study was designed to assess the efficacy of various feedback types in learning English. findings are discussed in two sections; the first sections examines the efficacy of different feedback options concerning the three linguistic forms (taken as a whole) over the three testing times whereas the second sections repeats the same process with the addition of examining each linguistic form individually.

In the first part, findings indicate that groups receiving indirect written feedback along with oral-metalinguistic feedback, and groups receiving written feedback with peers' oral feedback resulted in significantly greater accuracy of all three linguistic forms in new pieces of writing. The results recommend that these types of examination are more facilitative because they acknowledge the fact that different linguistic categories represent separate domains of knowledge, and that they are acquired through different stages and processes (Ferris, 2011; Truscott, 1996).

Considering this idea, analysis of individual categories showed that in the case of past simple tense errors, two feedback treatment groups significantly improved their accuracy compared to the control group in the delayed post-test. Whereas in case of the articles, only Group 1 outperformed the control group when considering new written submissions. However, that was not the case with the use of preposition errors where both experimental groups and the control group showed no significant changes over the three testing occasions.

It is evident from the findings that the two more treatable categories (past tense and articles) were amenable to the combination of written and oral (Instructor's meta-linguistic explanation) feedback. This reveals that providing two opportunities (before the immediate and delayed post-tests) to learners for discussion of errors, clarification of rules, including the illustration of them with additional examples, helped learners match their errors and notice the relevant feedback they received. Consequently, learners' attention was drawn to the grammatical forms; they reflected on their language use and produced more accurate texts concerning these forms. Noticing such differences is now widely accepted in the SLA literature as a crucial means to uptake as well as for long-term acquisition (Schmidt, 1994). This finding also enhances the argument of Truscott (1999), that a single form of correction does not suffice in helping learners acquire knowledge of different linguistic forms because it requires understanding of meaning and use, in relation to other words, along with the form.

The findings are beneficial for the targeted population receiving mostly direct written feedback without any Instructor-student meta-linguistic conferences while attending the EAP course before the start of this study. This situation created a communication gap between the Instructor and student and bridging the gap was impossible without employing oral feedback. These findings thus convincingly demonstrate that written feedback is effective for the treatable error categories only when it was combined with oral meta-linguistic explanation or with peers' oral interaction.

The findings in the cases of articles and past tense could be described by Schmidt's account of the role of awareness in L2 acquisition. Schmidt (2001) distinguishes awareness at the level of noticing, and at the level of understanding. Noticing involves simply attending to exemplars of specific forms in the input (e.g., English has "a" and "the" in sentences); understanding entails knowledge of a rule or principle that governs that aspect of language (e.g., English uses "a" before the first mention of a noun and "the" before the second mention; use of "the" shows the specificity or uniqueness in the context). Thus, it can be argued that the only group to demonstrate awareness with understanding was the one that received indirect feedback plus oral meta-linguistic explanation or peer interaction (i.e., treatment Group 1 and 2). Schmidt further contends that such conscious rule awareness arising from understanding strongly triggers later L2 learning. This is projected by the current study, which found that longer-term accuracy gains favour the oral meta-linguistic group (i.e., treatment Group 1). This view is supported by studies of oral feedback as well. For instance, Carroll and Swain (1993), in a study investigating the acquisition of English dative verbs, found that a group receiving more explicit feedback (i.e., direct meta-linguistic feedback) outperformed groups receiving other types of feedback.

The results also contributed to Long's interaction hypothesis as, in Pakistani ESL context, the feedback group exhibited development of targeted linguistic forms suggesting that such feedback offered opportunities for negotiation and interaction aiding learning. The learners' improvement on errors was observed in the feedback group and these results were in line with the output hypothesis (Swain, 2005) which argues for the developmental benefits of pushed output. The learners' productions and feedback may have helped the reformulation of texts, the monitoring of production, and hence the production of accurate output as new pieces of writing.

The current study supports oral meta-linguistic explanation in the form of a mini-lesson implemented for 15–20 minutes. This mini-lesson was found as equally effective as 30 minute meta-linguistic conferences undertaken in Bitchener (2008), and Bitchener and Knoch's (2008, 2010a) studies; as 5 minute one-to-one student-researcher conferences in Bitchener, Young, and Cameron's study (2005), and as 15 minute sessions in Bitchener and Knoch's (2016b) study. Bitchener, Young, and Cameron pointed to the importance of providing oral meta-linguistic information. The researchers found that written correction in conjunction with meta-linguistic explanation of errors resulted in statistically significant gains in accuracy of two grammatical structures, one of which was the definite article. The superior long-term effect of providing L2 writers with meta-linguistic feedback was also reported by Sheen (2007) in her study of intermediate L2 writers. Sheen compared different types of direct feedback, and, in her delayed post-test writing task, found that L2 writers who received meta-linguistic explanation retained the gains made in their immediate post-test writing task.

However, findings of the current study concerning article errors differed from Bitchener (2008), and Bitchener and Knoch's (2008, 2010a) studies, in the sense that the groups receiving written feedback along with oral

meta-linguistic explanation outperformed the groups which did not receive any feedback. The reason for this is that unlike Bitchener, Young, and Cameron's study and the current study, Bitchener (ibid), and Bitchener and Knoch's (ibid) studies used a more intensive and focused approach solely providing feedback on two functional uses of articles. That is, these studies focused the provision of feedback on just two functional uses of articles, but that was not the case in Bitchener's study and in the current study, where apart from focusing on article errors, feedback was also provided on two other linguistic forms (i.e., preposition, past tense) as well. Thus, learners had to notice the three forms at a time rather than focusing on a single linguistic form to trigger their L2 acquisition.

Among the three treatment groups, only Group 1 made significant changes to article errors but not to preposition and past tense errors. The reason for this could be the inclusion of both regular and irregular past tense forms in the past tense errors. The irregular verbs are item-based features that do not follow any rule. Student writing samples also exhibited that learners produced past tense errors concerning irregular past tense verb form. Thus, among the three forms, learners improved article errors for all the three functions where they were required to follow a rule. This finding of past simple tense errors opposes that of Bitchener, Young and Cameron's study where the group that received both written feedback and oral meta-linguistic information outperformed the group that received written feedback only. This could be a result of a difference in the nature of the written feedback given in both studies; in that study it was direct and explicit whereas in the current study it is implicit and indirect. Hence in that study, the improvement of past tense errors was the result of providing not only a written 'explicit' form of feedback but also the time consuming one-to-one Instructor-student meta-linguistic five-minute conferences.

Written feedback along with peer's oral feedback was not found to be helpful in improving learner accuracy for any one of the three targeted errors in treatment Group 2. There could be different reasons for that. First, Pakistani learners might encounter resistance to provide feedback to classmates when arranged into groups, and this probably affected their correction. Being a collectivist country, learners in Pakistan might fear providing feedback as it is important to sustain group harmony and save others from embarrassment (Nelson, 1997). In this situation, learners may not receive an answer to a query and it was rare for classmates to ask a second time for corrections. In this way, feedback was acknowledged without understanding or knowledge of the reason for errors. As a result, the same error was made repeatedly (Truscott, 1996). If learners encountered an error from any other learner in a group, then, knowing that it was incorrect, they might not argue with them over it.

Learners in this study were at the beginning stage of learning English; therefore, they probably lacked knowledge about the use of different forms. So, they were not competent enough to provide a correct answer with an explanation. In those cases where a learner with a low competency level provided help to another learner, it resulted in a wrong answer. Consequently, noticing errors or mismatches between target language and production was inaccurate, or missed, or avoided by the learners (Schmidt, 2001). Thirdly, learners were not properly trained or were inexperienced, in providing feedback while discussing their errors and Instructors' feedback. Although guidelines were given interactively before providing feedback, more training was needed to make such feedback a success (Nelson & Murphy, 1992).

The preposition errors showed similar patterns of performance in response to all the feedback strategies. In fact, in untreatable errors, even the most explicit form of feedback (i.e., meta-linguistic oral feedback) did not help learners improve the accuracy of prepositions in the new pieces of writing. Ferris, Chaney, Komura, Roberts, and McKee (2000) suggested that for the untreatable error categories, more explicit feedback should be provided. Moreover, such error categories require a considerable amount of time to acquire competency of using these linguistics categories, which in the current study was impossible as learners were initiating their studies.

Furthermore, different results were observed concerning the three linguistic forms when the interactional effect between treatment groups and testing times was examined. Both article and past tense forms showed significant effects between groups and time indicating that all groups performed differently over the three tests. However, this was not the case for preposition errors. Regarding the number of article errors for the immediate (time 2) and delayed post-test (time 3), the treatment Group 1 was found to perform differently from the control group and Group 2. This finding corroborates the findings of previous studies, such as Bitchener's (2008), and Bitchener and Knoch's (2008, 2010b) studies, where the group receiving oral and written meta-linguistic explanation outperformed the control group not receiving any feedback in the delayed post-test.

In the case of past tense errors, treatment Groups 1 and 2 outperformed the control group only in the delayed post-test. This demonstrates that the pattern of improvement over time dissimilar for all the treatment groups. These findings do not support the study of Bitchener, Young, and Cameron's (2005) study where the pattern of

improvement for past tense errors was similar for over 12 weeks across the three treatment groups (including the group receiving written feedback along with oral meta-linguistic explanation and the group receiving no feedback). This difference between these two studies might be due to an additional aspect of revision that was included before writing a new piece of writing. This addition allowed learners to modify their text by knowing the mismatches that existed between their errors and the feedback they received.

5. Conclusion and Limitation

The present study investigated the effectiveness of oral Instructor and peer feedback along with indirect written feedback on the accuracy of three linguistic forms in ESL graduate learners' writings. Results showed that both Instructor and peer feedback were effective, with greater benefits for the Instructor's oral meta-linguistic feedback along with indirect written feedback as compared to the peer's oral interaction group. The present findings underscore the effectiveness of peer's oral interaction feedback as a pedagogical tool in the second language classroom. Due to the intervention of features of Pakistani Asian culture, learners resist in providing feedback to their classmates while working in groups.

As the study focused on partially-known linguistic forms/structures, further research is needed to examine the extent to which it might be able to facilitate the acquisition of those forms for which learners have no previous instruction. Further research is required to determine whether the advantage reported by the present study for meta-linguistic explanation is retained over a more extensive period of investigation, and to determine whether type, frequency, amount, and delivery of meta-linguistic explanation are factors in any difference observed.

In the current study, no effort was made to track individual progress; hence in further research learners could be encouraged to keep logs of their progress. In case of peer feedback, learners in this study had no experience of providing such feedback; hence future research could include learners' training workshops before employing such feedback in actual practice.

The feedback group that received written feedback along with peers' oral feedback was mostly found less effective than the group that received oral meta-linguistic explanation along with written feedback. It was the first time that learners had discussed their errors for which they were provided written feedback. However, there was no proper training for this, which might undermine its effect. It would be significant if such feedback was applied only after training learners in providing feedback on the writing of their classmates.

Language Instructors in the Pakistani context should consistently provide focused feedback on their learners' written production as part of their instructional methods. The provision of feedback would help them identify which types of errors learners are producing, and how they are responding and reacting to the type of feedback they receive. The analysis of errors in the written production of learners would help Instructors accuracy on learning difficulties learners face, and thus inspire reflection on how these challenges could be treated so to help learners improve their accuracy. Language Instructors in Pakistan thus must help learners' language skills flourish through the introduction of these changes to their instructional methods.

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