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Corrective Feedback, Teacher Strategies and Learner Beliefs: Effects on Noticing and Retention

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Abstract:

Research on the efficacy of Corrective Feedback (CF) has continued to reveal conflicting and inconclusive results over the last two decades. Lack of supportive evidence for the positive effects of CF is attributed to the fact that previous work has not taken into account the impact of contextual and individual factors, which might affect how learners process the various types of feedback they receive. Drawing on SLA research on the impact of individual differences on L2 development (e.g. Ellis, 2001, 2010; Dorney, 2005; Kartchava, 2012, and Profozik, 2012), this study attempts: 1) to investigate the effects of teachers' corrective strategies on learners' noticing of gaps in their erroneous output 2) to see whether noticing results in uptake in the long run, and 3) to determine whether, and the extent to which, learner beliefs about feedback, mediate noticing and retention of the correct form in a Moroccan EFL Classroom context. The study involves two^{1st} Year Baccalaureate classes (64 in number), randomly assigned to explicit and implicit feedback groups. To measure learners' noticing capacity, Immediate Recall Protocols (Meyer, 1975) were administered during class activities. Learner perceptions about feedback were assessed using a belief- questionnaire. To measure learning outcomes (retention and uptake), a quasi-experimental research, with a pre/post-test design was used.

Keywords: oral feedback, individual differences, learner beliefs, teacher strategies, noticing, retention

1. Introduction

CF has intrigued ongoing debate in SLA over the last two decades. This being so, the issue has received attention from different theoretical stances, including linguistic, interactionist, and sociocultural theories, as well as approaches based in cognitive psychology, and language pedagogy. The value attributed to the practice of CF varies according to the tenets of different theories, a state of affairs that has resulted in an impressive array of research that is generally plagued by controversy (Storch and Wigglesworth, 2010). Disagreement concerns not only the merits of CF; differences in opinion, supported by research evidence, also exist as to the type of feedback used (Ellis, 1999). Whereas most theoretical and empirical studies conducted within Focus-on Form and interactionist paradigms (Long, 1996; Long and Robinson, 1998) have advanced arguments in favor of CF and negative evidence, advocates of communicative approaches deny it any use in an instruction that is primarily meaning focused (Krashen, 1981, 1982; Savignon, 1988; and Swain, 1980). This lack of definitive results is probably not surprising, as empirical studies investigating the merits of CF relied predominantly on comparing the efficacy of different corrective strategies, (see for instance Lyster and Ranta, 1997; Lyster, 2004; Sheen, 2008; Lyster and Mori, 2006), while cognitive and affective dimensions of feedback remained under researched.

Evidence began to accrue from recent work indicating the centrality of individual difference factors to the study of CF; Ellis (2010) for instance, contends that "the vast bulk of CF studies have ignored learner factors, focusing instead on the relationship between specific CF strategies and learning outcomes" (p. 339). A similar view is held by Ferris (2010), who argues that the lack of sufficient research on these aspects is "one of the most surprising oversights in CF research" (p. 196), and calls for further research that controls for learners' contextual and individual differences.

Prior to Ellis' (2010) call to investigate the efficacy of this pedagogical practice in relation to individual learner characteristics and contextual factors, no attempt has been made to consider these aspects. In SLA literature, individual learner differences and cognitive factors such as working memory, noticing ability, and motivation, as well as learning style, aptitude, attitudes and beliefs about language conventions have been considered the most consistent predictors of L2 development (Breen, 2001; Dornyei, 2005; Fox, 1993; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992). These variables, coupled with a host of contextual and affective factors such as anxiety, concern with face and self-esteem are thought to mediate both the noticeability and retention of feedback in an L2 classroom. CF works as a noticing facilitator that helps learners' notice the gaps between their utterances and the target-like form. However, for feedback to be effective, learners need to recognize its focus and its corrective intent (Carroll, 1997; Kartchava and Ammar, 2014). Thus, it makes sense to question whether individual difference factors influence the noticeability and retention of teachers' feedback.

1.1. Objectives and Rationale

In the light of the above work, this study attempts to investigate whether learner beliefs about feedback have an impact on their noticing and retention of teachers' corrective moves. It endeavors to determine whether, and the extent to which, these factors mediate noticing and predict retention of the correct form in a Moroccan EFL Classroom context.

The study is driven by a three-fold motivation; first, interest in learner factors and individual differences is precipitated by the lack of conclusive results in the literature which might be due to the fact that the designs adopted neglected the cognitive and affective factors. Second, the adoption of the so-called communicative approaches has restrained teachers' choice of feedback. Practitioners who claim adherence to the principles of CLT resort to implicit correction and often struggle to provide feedback in response to certain linguistic targets overlooking the rest (Nicolas et al. 2001). Others, on the other hand, tend to avoid error correction altogether, citing the fear of interrupting the communicative flow or evoking detrimental effects as anxiety and decrease in motivation as a reason (Krashen, 1981, 1982).

Whether teachers' choices and preferences correspond to learners' expectations or not is usually disregarded. Such practices often lead to a mismatch between teachers' feedback and student capacity to notice the corrective intent of the intervention (Cartchava, 2014; Horwitz, 1990; Schulz, 1996). Although this claim has not been empirically tested, particularly in the Moroccan EFL context, research on learner factors and individual differences provide ample evidence that such variables as motivation, learning style, beliefs and other cognitive factors have great effects on second language development, and have the potential to mediate and even to predict what is learned and retained in the language classroom (Kartchava and Ammar 2014). This dearth of empirical investigations penetrates a need for further research that seeks to explore the efficacy of CF in relation to cognitive and affective factors.

1.2. Individual Differences in CF Research

Research on second language acquisition has shown that the success of L2 learning or lack thereof might be rendered to a number of factors that relate to learner characteristics such as learning style, motivation, strategies, beliefs, and aptitude. These factors; often referred to in SLA research as Individual Differences (IDs), have generated the most consistent predictors of L2 learning (Dorney, 2005). These areas have started to be integrated into other research areas such as CF where IDs began to gain ground in more recent work.

The need to investigate the efficacy of feedback in relation to individual differences is justified by a number of factors. First, a number of studies called for the need for such research in SLA, (e.g. Russell & Spada 2006; Lyster and Saito, 2010; and Ellis, 2010). Second, it is assumed that how learning takes place is better understood when some attention is given to the "cognitive domain" (Bloom, 1959), rather than considering external factors such as context, pedagogy, teachers' choices and so on. In an attempt to make up for the gap in previous research designs which neglected the cognitive dimension, recent work on the efficacy of feedback considers both learner factors and contextual factors. One of the first attempts that has sought to identify potential variables that need to be explored in this area was Ellis's (2010) framework which describes how individual learner variables and contextual factors contribute to learners' response to, and engagement with, CF. As Ellis (2010, p. 338) suggests, these factors "mediate between the CF that learners receive and their engagement with the CF, thereby influencing learning outcomes." Adopting this framework, Storch and Wigglesworth (2010) have shown that CF uptake was highly dependent on the depth of engagement with errors. Their findings also showed that affective factors such as beliefs about language use and attitudes towards the form of feedback contributed to feedback retention.

Interest in the study of learner factors and individual differences was also precipitated by a need to understand why some feedback strategies were proven more effective than others (Lyster and Ranta, 1997; Lyster, 2004; Lyster and Mori, 2006), and why some feedback is noticed and subsequently retained, while some goes unnoticed. This interest continued to be expressed in more recent studies, particularly those associated with Profzik (2012), Kartchava (2012) and Rahimi (2015). Characteristics studied in these investigations were based on learners' linguistic knowledge of L2 (proficiency level) and such cognitive abilities such as working memory, attention control, analytical ability and processing speed though they have neglected affective factors that are equally important to the study of CF such as self-esteem, and anxiety which are thought to have important theoretical and practical potential (Dorney, 2005). As for proficiency, studies have shown that high-level learners tend to notice and benefit from recasts more readily than low-proficiency learners (Ammar and Spada, 2006; Philp, 2003). Phonological memory and working memory were found to affect students' noticing of recasts and prompts it has been demonstrated that learners with (Mackey et al., 2002; Ammar & Sato, 2010).

Among the affective variables, only two factors were investigated in relation to the effectiveness of CF and not to its noticeability, mainly anxiety and learner attitudes in (Sheen, 2008 & 2011). The results of these studies indicate that although these factors mediated the effectiveness of different types of CF, their impact depended on the mode in which the feedback was delivered as well as on the specific CF type. While these variables received attention from both theorists and researchers, little is known about the impact of learners' beliefs and perceptions of what CF is. Although learner beliefs have been claimed to underlie many aspects of learner behavior and learning outcomes, this concept was allotted secondary importance in CF research (see for example Loewen et al. 2009). In a recent study, Kartchava and Ammar, (2014) tried to establish a link between learner beliefs about feedback and their noticing of feedback as well as their learning of target language norms. Beliefs about the necessity of feedback and its negative consequences were found to affect noticing while there were no significant correlations between beliefs and learning outcomes. This implies that while learner beliefs and perceptions about CF and its effectiveness predict how much feedback is noticed, they do not necessarily predict learning (op. cit).

A more comprehensive view is provided by Storch and Wigglesworth (2010), who stipulate that the importance attributed to learner beliefs in explaining how they process feedback is in line with sociocultural theoretical perspectives on learning. Sociocultural

theorists view learners as intentional agents in their language learning who assign relevance and significance to certain events and whose behavior is guided by their own goals (Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001; Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). These beliefs and goals may affect what learners notice, whether they accept or reject the feedback provided, and how much of the feedback they retain.

Though the evidence these studies provide is intriguing, no conclusions have been made as to the factors that determine the noticeability or efficacy of feedback, hence, obviating the need for more research on the subject in order to probe the complex relationship between learning and individual differences.

1.3. The role of Noticing in L2 Development

Noticing or attention is “a process that encodes input, keeps it active in working and short term memory and retrieves it from long term memory” (Robinson, 2003: 631). The vocables “noticing”, “awareness”, “attention”, and “memory” have received ample consideration in SLA literature, so much so that any discussion of L2 acquisition makes reference to one or all of these. In his Noticing Hypothesis, Schmidt (1995) proposes that noticing is a necessary and sufficient “condition” for converting input into output. Other researchers like Bastone (1996), defines noticing as “the intake of grammar as a result of learners paying attention to the output” (p.173). Supporting the previous view, Rediford (2006) asserts that noticing is of vital importance in L2 as it allows for uptake when learners recognize a given language feature (op.cit. Cited in Barnawi, 2010:210). A similar view is held by Ellis (1991), who adds that learners go through stages to notice a gap between the supplied structure and their own version of the same feature; they compare the two and finally incorporate the feature into their own language. Similarly, Qi and Lapkin see noticing as “awareness” of a short-term memory-oriented stimulus referring to anything that calls for learners’ attention to language input or output (op.cit. 2001). While all of the above views support Schmidt’s noticing hypothesis, his opponents advance the view that noticing is necessary but it is “not” the only condition for L2 to take place, and that there are other factors that affect learning and retention of different language targets (see for instance Ellis. N 2002; Gass, 1997). The Implicit Tallying Hypothesis introduced by Ellis (2002) better illustrates this view. In the same line of thought, Robinson (1995) claims that noticing is a necessary condition for language learning so long as it involves awareness and rehearsal of input in the short-term memory. These definitions seem to agree that noticing is an intentional process by which learners allocate attentional resources to certain aspects of the language.

The importance of corrective feedback from the perspective of the Noticing Hypothesis lies in its ability to draw learners’ attention to the presence of errors in their output. Gass (1988, 1990, and 1991) asserts that corrective feedback functions as an attention getting device. She further argues that without direct or frequent corrective feedback on the input which would permit learners to detect discrepancies between their language and the target language, fossilization might occur. The view put forward by Gass (op.cit) entails a reservation concerning the corrective feedback strategies used by teachers for error treatment, as the latter is often limited to one particular type of feedback or limited in frequency of feedback itself.

2. Methodology

As stated earlier, this study attempts to investigate the impact of learner beliefs on the noticeability and retention of teachers’ feedback. The study adopts a quasi-experimental research design, with a pre-test, treatment, and post-test. Two groups were randomly assigned to explicit and implicit feedback groups. Feedback was provided in the form of reformulations in one class and metalinguistic feedback in the other. Students’ noticing of correct form was measured by means of Immediate Recall Protocols while learner beliefs were measured using a questionnaire. Learning outcomes (i.e. retention and uptake) were measured using a post-test comprising two research tasks; a sentence correction and a sentence completion task.

2.1. Context and Participants

The study was conducted at Ibn Sina High School in the Delegation of Nador, Morocco. Two First Year Bacallaureate students, 64 in number, took part in this study. The two groups were randomly assigned to explicit and implicit feedback groups. The two classes were instructed over a period of five weeks during the second half of the last semester, before the examinations. The groups were instructed using reformulations with one group, and metalinguistic feedback with another.

2.2. Instructional Intervention and Feedback Type

During the treatment period, the participants took grammar, speaking and reading courses. These aspects of the curriculum were considered more relevant as they target both form and meaning. The two groups were assigned to two error treatment conditions. One group was instructed with reformulations, which is an input providing strategy, operationalized as teacher’s partial or full reformulation of students’ erroneous utterances. The second group received feedback in the form of direct correction supplied with metalinguistic information on correctness. The latter strategy is considered an output prompting technique that consists in pushing the learner to self-correct and providing additional information on form and correctness.

CF was provided on different linguistic targets; including present, past, and future tenses, the passive, tag-questions, reported speech and language functions. The example below illustrates the two feedback strategies employed:

1. Reformulations: (implicit/input providing)

S: I go to the supermarket yesterday.

T: You went, you went to the supermarket. Did you go alone?

S: No, I go...I went with Kate.

2. Metalinguistic feedback: (explicit/output prompting)

S: I go to the supermarket yesterday

T: You need the simple past.

S: I goed...

T: You...?

S: I went

T: good

S: I went to the supermarket yesterday.

While metalinguistic feedback is a time-consuming strategy, its saliency is more promising for both noticing and retention. The noticeability of reformulations on the other hand might depend on learners' proficiency level. While a reformulation of the erroneous output might easily be understood as feedback by high proficiency learners, its corrective intent might go unnoticed by learners with a lower proficiency level.

2.3. Data Collection Methods

To investigate the impact of learner beliefs and motivation on students noticing of teachers' corrective feedback and their overall effects on L2 development, the study opted for complementary research instruments to measure different aspects of the research. Prior to the treatment, a pre-test was administered to both groups. To measure students' noticing of the corrective force of two feedback strategies, the researcher used Immediate Recall Protocols. On the other hand, a questionnaire was employed to see if there is a link between students' beliefs about feedback and their retention of the correct form. Eventually, to measure short and long term learning outcomes, a post test was administered after the intervention.

2.4. Immediate Recall Protocols

The term "Immediate Recall Protocol" is often associated with Meyer (1975) and Bernhardt (1983, 1986) who conducted research into reading processes in the field of second language learning, they both made considerable contribution to the development of this measure as a research instrument which is now used in other research areas such as CF. Recall protocols are often used in research studies that seek to explore students' thoughts either during a session or after watching video-taped episodes of a previous lesson (stimulated recalls). In the present study, recall protocols were administered during classroom tasks, and the students were asked to write their own comments on every feedback episode or other classroom events to see whether the participants have recognized the teachers' moves as 'feedback on errors' or as mere repetitions of their utterances, and whether they have noticed the corrective intent of the feedback strategies used for different linguistic items.

2.5. Beliefs Questionnaire

To see whether a link exists between learner beliefs about feedback, and their noticing capacity, participants from both groups completed a questionnaire. The latter was administered to elicit students' beliefs about feedback. The questionnaire included statements about the importance and the merits of feedback, the mode and suitable timing for the correction episodes, the effectiveness of different feedback strategies, and the mode of feedback. These statements were formulated in ten Likert-scale questions, three open ended and three multiple choice questions.

2.6. Post-Test

While noticing recalls measure short-term effects of feedback, long term gains in accuracy are usually evident in learner uptake and retention of the corrected items in the long run. In order to measure learning outcomes after CF interventions, two research tasks were used: a sentence correction task and a sentence completion task. The two tasks included frequent errors sampled prior to the intervention, and corrected during the treatment.

2.7. Procedure

Two groups were instructed using two different types of feedback. With the first group, the teacher used metalinguistic feedback as a corrective strategy, whereas the second group was instructed using reformulations. The teacher relied on immediate recall protocols to measure learners' noticing of the correct form in every teaching session. The recalls were administered during classroom tasks in the form of lesson reflection sheets. Eventually, the students were asked to write down their comments and reflections on what was happening, based on what they understood from every student-teacher or teacher-student move.

However, given the proficiency level of the participants involved, the recalls were triggered by three guiding questions to help them reflect on classroom events. Hence, the teacher's instructions were as follows: "Every time the teacher reacts to a student's utterance write down what you understood from the episode", the guiding questions were:

- i. What was the nature of the classroom event? (i.e. question/answer; error/feedback; answer/praise, clarification request/explanation...?)
- ii. What was the nature of the teacher's response/intervention?
- iii. How did the student/students react to the teachers' intervention?

The recalls allow the teacher to see whether the participants, in both groups notice the corrective intent of the two feedback techniques. A comparison of the recall scores for each group will help in drawing conclusions as to the noticeability of the two feedback strategies.

To see whether, and the extent to which, learner beliefs about feedback mediate what is noticed, the participants from both groups completed a beliefs questionnaire. A sentence completion and a sentence correction task were used to measure uptake and retention.

3. Data Analysis

This study attempts to investigate the impact of learner beliefs about feedback on their noticing ability as well as their retention of the correct form. The data collection instruments used were contrived to meet the three research objectives set earlier in this study. The first research objective was to see whether teachers' CF strategies affect learners' noticing of gaps between their erroneous output and the target-like form. To measure learners' noticing of gaps the study used immediate recall protocols administered during class activities. The second objective of this study was to see whether noticing results in learning in subsequent sessions, i.e. whether what is noticed as a result of CF, is eventually retained, hence converted into uptake in the long run. To meet this objective, the study used pre/post feedback tests before and after a two-week intervention. The third objective set for this study was to test whether, and the extent to which, learner beliefs about feedback influence their noticing and retention. Data on learner beliefs were collected through a questionnaire. Ultimately, the objectives set would help us reach conclusions concerning the efficacy of feedback. It would also help us understand whether this efficacy is contingent on the CF strategy or on learner beliefs and expectations.

The data collection instruments used yielded varied sets of data, which were subjected to statistical analyses. The data collected through recall protocols and the post-test were analyzed using the *SPSS*. The analysis was conducted at three levels. For evidence of noticing, the recall protocols of the two feedback groups were compared by means of an Independent Samples *t*-test. Likewise, a comparative analysis of test scores was run to see whether learners in the two feedback groups performed differently in the post test. To see whether differences exist between noticing and retention results for each group, a comparison of recall and test scores was deemed necessary.

In section (1) below, the results of the *t*-test comparing the recall protocols of the metalinguistic and reformulations group are presented. The comparison of the recalls and post-test of each group are presented in section (2). The results of the questionnaire are presented in section (3).

3.1. Noticing

To see whether teachers' choice of feedback has an effect on students' noticing ability, immediate recall protocols were administered during class activities. The noticing recalls were assigned numerical values and analyzed using the *SPSS*. An independent samples *t*-test was run to account for differences in the recall reports of the two groups. The table below indicates Mean distribution among groups.

	Feedback Type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Recall Protocols	Metalinguistic Feedback	29	9.7586	3.32367	.61719
	Reformulations	29	7.4375	3.00470	.53116

Table 1: Group Statistics: Noticing Recalls among the two groups

The means summarized in the table above provide descriptive statistics concerning the performance of the two groups considered. A cursory glance at the table reveals that there exists a difference between the two groups in the number of recalls that each made following feedback episodes. The tendency displayed in the table also indicates that the metalinguistic group outnumbered the reformulations group where recalls are concerned. In order to see whether the mean difference shown in the table is any significant, recourse to inferential statistics is necessary.

	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Recall	.101	.752	2.865 2.851	59 56.7	.006 .006	81020

Table 2: The results of the Independent Samples *t* test: A comparison of the recall protocols

As the results in the table indicate, the mean of the metalinguistic group is higher than that of the reformulations group; (M=9.4) against (M=7.4) respectively. The comparison of the recalls of the two groups reveals that differences exist where noticing is concerned. The value indicated under (sig.2 tailed) above is (p=.006), which is inferior to (P<.05) implying that there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups. This is indication of the fact that the more explicit the strategy is, the higher is the noticing ability of the students. Differences were also shown in terms of the noticing ability that varies according to the target/focus of the lesson, recalls on different linguistic targets show that feedback on grammatical errors was noticed more than speaking and lexicon.

3.2. Uptake and Retention

To trace for evidence of uptake and retention, i.e. to see whether the instances of feedback noticed in the recall protocols, are converted into uptake. Participants in both groups completed a post-test comprising a sentence correction and a sentence completion task after the treatment. The data obtained were coded and analyzed using the independent samples *t*-test to see whether the two groups perform differently in the post test. Table (4) below presents the results of the post test.

	F	Sig.	T	Df.	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Post test	.859	.358	4.597 4.542	59 53.06	.000 .000	4.494

Table 3: Retention among the two groups

The tendency displayed in table (4) above represents differences in the performance of the two groups in the post test. The output of the independent samples t test shows that the assumed variance between the two groups in terms of retention of feedback is salient. The metalinguistic group scored higher in the post test, which is indication of the efficacy of the type of feedback they received. The t test displayed a high level of significance indicated under (sig=.00), which is inferior to ($p < .05$). This significant difference implies that the metalinguistic group and reformulations are different in the way they interact with the instances of CF they received.

Recall scores were compared to pre-test scores to see whether there is a difference between learners' performance prior to and after the intervention. The comparison also shows whether there is progress from pre-test to post test in the first place, prior to digging into the factors that affect this improvement. The same analysis was run for a comparison of recall and post test results.

To see how much feedback is up-taken after the treatment, the results of the test were compared to those of the recalls for each group. The table below displays the results of the paired samples t test.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Recall Post test	.96721	.32593	1.418	60	.161

Table 4: Uptake among groups: a comparison of the recalls and the post test

The data exhibited in the table show that the performance of the two groups in the test varies from that of the recalls. This makes sense because the recalls represent the immediate/short term effect of feedback, while retention represents long term effects. Hence, while the saliency of metalinguistic feedback results in more uptake in the long run, reformulations, though sometimes understood as feedback by learners with a high proficiency level, remain the least noticed of feedback strategies, hence result in less uptake in the long run.

As table (3) indicates, the comparison of the recalls and the test of the reformulations group reveals that the performance of learners in the recalls is not very different from that of the test. The results reveal a significant difference of ($P = .006$). Assuming that the feedback condition for both groups was totally different, this significant difference is evidence of the fact that the results of the recalls were higher than those of the test. Since learners' attention was not explicitly drawn to form in the reformulations group, it was expected that some of the errors would go unnoticed; in the reports, learners have shown a tendency to take reformulations as reinforcement or repetition (which did not seem to entail any correction), hence, the same errors corrected during classroom tasks occurred in the tests. However, a glance at the results of the recall and test of the reformulations group shows that there was more recall than uptake, implying that while some of the feedback is noticed, this noticing remains a short-term effect which resulted in no uptake in the retention test.

The aforementioned finding can be explained in two ways. First, students generally do not expect feedback on speaking errors unless it is direct and overt as is the case of the metalinguistic groups. Second, students expect the feedback (when given) to be explicit and to point directly to the error. Hence, though some feedback was noticed, its noticing was short term, and resulted in no retention.

The claim can be retained with confidence, as the results of the metalinguistic group in table 2 confirm this tendency. The results yield an insignificant difference between recalls and retention test scores. This insignificance is indicated at level of (.161), implying that the scores of the recalls and the retention test were not varied, and that most of what has been recalled is subsequently retained. Presumably, this is so because learners have obviously scored higher in recalls than in retention test.

The results bring to the fore the centrality of consciousness raising to feedback. Unless correction is provided in a way conducive to helping students notice the corrective intent, errors often go unnoticed, hence, leading to no uptake.

3.3. Learner Beliefs

During the course of the study, investigating learner beliefs was necessary to see whether learners' noticing capacity and its ability to lead to better retention is contingent on the type of feedback used or on other factors that relate to learners. Basically, this procedure would illustrate how learners process the feedback they receive. For a clearer view on how learners process feedback, and why it is sometimes noticed and not retained, a beliefs questionnaire was administered during the treatment. The questionnaire items revolved around four central issues that Ellis (2009) identified as key issues to any discussion of feedback: (1) whether feedback is necessary and helpful or useless and detrimental, (2) whether feedback should be direct/overt or indirect/implicit, (3) which type of feedback is the most effective (4) whether feedback should immediate or delayed. These issues generally relate to the type of feedback, the timing, the focus and the context.

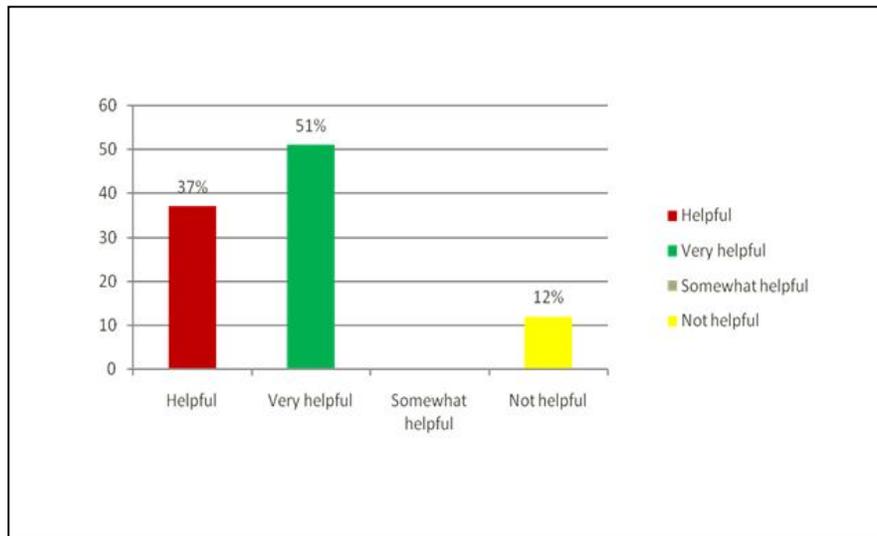


Figure 1: Do you think teachers' feedback on your errors is helpful?

In response to this item of the questionnaire, 88% of the respondents think that teachers' feedback is helpful whereas only 12% said it was not of help. In particular, this result indicates that teachers' feedback on language errors is generally valued, regardless of its focus, type or mode. This echoes the general consensus among SLA researchers that learners generally favor feedback on errors in the classroom (see Cathcart & Olsen, 1976; Chenoweth et al., 1983; Rahimi, 2011; Schulz, 1996,2001). This also implies that learners expect to receive feedback on their language errors.

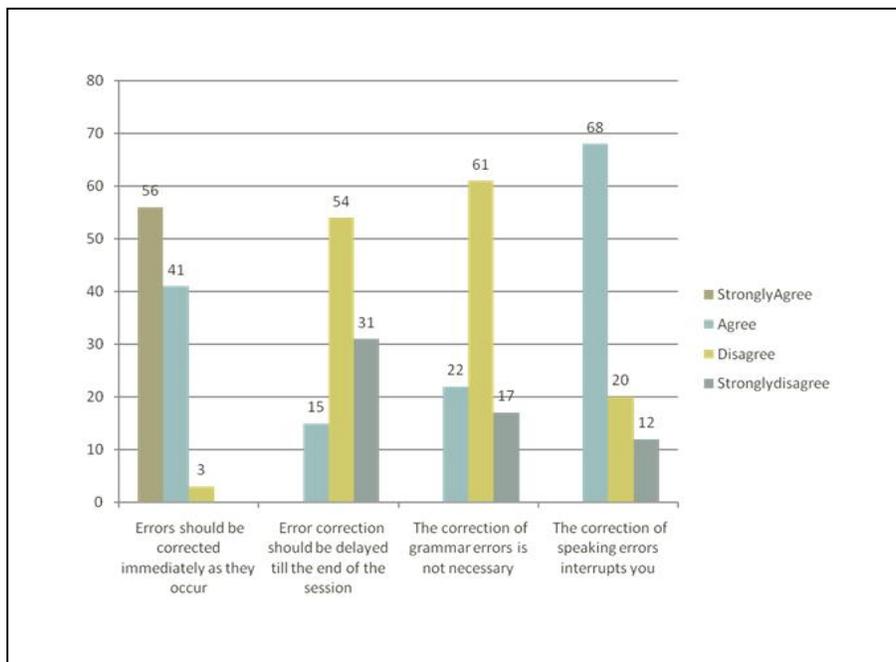


Figure 2

For a better understand learner beliefs, their expectations and preferences regarding CF, the questionnaire included statements about the timing, the mode and the type of feedback. With regards to the importance of correcting grammatical, 78% of the participants think that this type of errors should be treated while 22% disagree. This belief holds only where grammar is concerned as learners generally believe that grammar is the only language course where error correction is more relevant. Equally important are the results yielded by items (1) and (2) which target learner beliefs concerning the timing of feedback. Item (1) states that errors should be treated immediately as they occur while item (2) states that error correction should be delayed. In response to these statements, 97% of the respondents agreed that errors should be treated immediately, while only 15% think that error correction should better be delayed. Although it might seem as a mere expression of preference regarding the timing of feedback, this item, contrary to what is shown in the literature, reveals that although learners' show concern for face during interaction and generally prefer not to be interrupted, they are aware that errors should be treated as they occur.

In response to whether feedback on speaking errors interrupts learners' communicative flow, 68% of the respondents agree while 12% disagree. The results of item four above indicate that the majority of learners agree that the provision of feedback on speaking errors interrupts the flow of communication. These findings come as no surprise, as in most discussions of the place of feedback in a communicative classroom context, it is postulated that feedback should be avoided, citing its likelihood to evoke such detrimental effects as anxiety, low self-esteem, interruption and embarrassment (see for instance Krashen, 1982; Savignon, 1988; Canale and Swain, 1990).

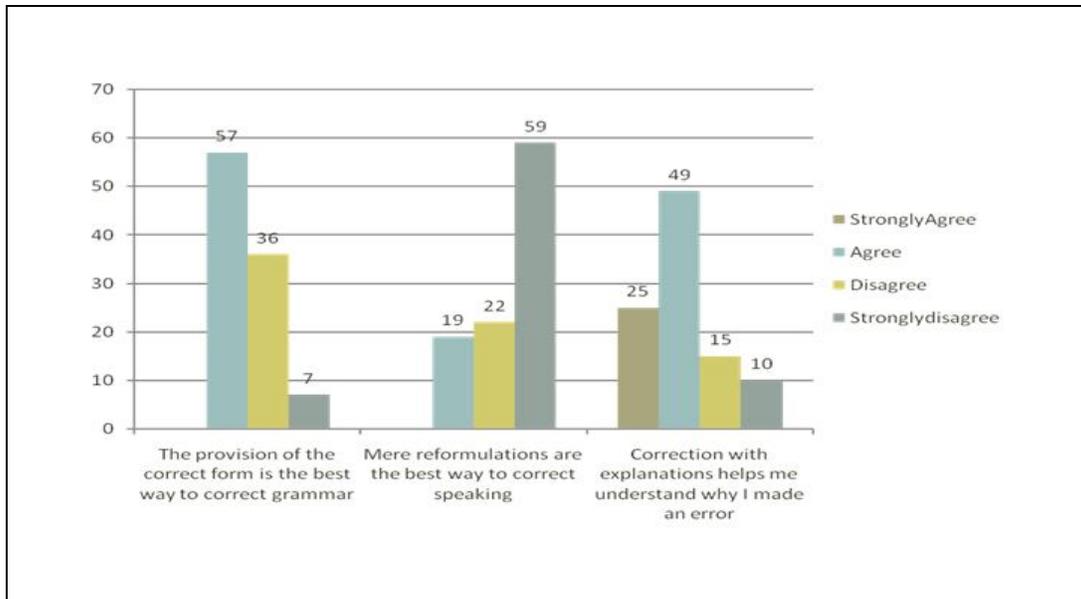


Figure 3: Students' preferences regarding different error correction strategies

With regards to students' preferences, respondents showed a preference for explicit forms of feedback as they help them understand why a given form is more acceptable and target-like. In this respect, 57% showed a tendency to prefer the provision of the correct form, while 19% think that reformulations of speaking errors is the best strategy. Metalinguistic feedback and explanations are favored by 74% of the respondents and rejected by 25%. This is probably not surprising, as while students prefer to receive more feedback on grammar, and less feedback on speaking, it is normal to opt for the least explicit strategy, reformulations in this case, which are likely to keep the communicative flow smooth. While in grammar, direct and explicit correction of an ill-formed utterance seems to be more effective. The results go hand in hand with those of previous research studies (Kern, 1995; Peacock, 1999; Schulz, 1996, 2001) which have associated higher concerns for grammatical accuracy and CF with learners' concern with the effect of fossilization in the absence of feedback on grammar.

4. Discussion of the Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of learner beliefs on their noticing and retention of teachers' feedback. The results of the study show that teachers' choice of feedback affects learners' noticing capacity, which subsequently affects retention of the correct form in the long run. Learner beliefs about feedback were found to mediate and positively affect their attention to the correction, while no conclusions could be drawn as to the relationship between learner beliefs and learning outcomes. These findings are compatible with the results in Kartchava and Ammar (2014) which reported that learner perceptions appear to have affected the noticeability of feedback in general and that of recasts in particular, while they by no means affect learning. The results of the recalls show that the saliency of the feedback provided predicted how much error correction is noticed. While students in the explicit feedback group scored higher both in terms of recasts and test results, this is indication of the fact that metalinguistic feedback which supplies additional information on form and correctness triggered learners' attention to notice the gap between their utterances and the target-like form. Reformulations of erroneous output were less noticeable for learners; the corrective intent of this strategy goes unnoticed and the same errors are likely to prevail in subsequent sessions. These findings confirm the results of studies which have attempted to develop hierarchical taxonomies based on a theoretical view of how CF works (Ellis, 2009). These studies, particularly those associated with Chaudron (1977) and Lyster and Ranta (1997) made a distinction between explicit and implicit feedback strategies, and clearly demonstrate that implicit strategies are less effective than explicit ones, particularly in contexts where attention to both form and meaning is required. This illustrates why only 20% of the feedback received is retained in the reformulations group. While learners' beliefs about the importance and effectiveness of feedback in this study seemed to have positively affected their ability to notice the correct form, differences in learning outcomes were attributed to the nature of feedback rather than to learner beliefs. Similar results were reported in a number of recent studies (e.g. Rahimi, 2010; Ellis, 2010; Ellis, 2012; Hyland and Hyland, 2006; and Dorney, 2005) that have attributed the diversity of L2 learners' uptake and retention of feedback to their individual differences such as, beliefs, and learning style.

5. Conclusion

The present study sought to investigate the relationship between learner beliefs and their noticing and retention of teachers' feedback. The results of the study contribute to the current literature on CF, which seeks to explore the significance of learner factors and individual differences in the study of CF. Though no claim can be made concerning the impact of learner factors on L2 development; the results have a number of implications for classroom practice. By being aware of the role and importance of learner factors and individual differences in the learning process, teachers can adjust their instructional methods to their learner needs. They can also make sound decisions concerning the feedback strategies that their students can benefit from. The results reported in this study might speak to the limitations of the design adopted, which did not include a control group. A true experiment would better determine the accuracy of the findings. On the other hand, the study attempted to examine the relationship between one type of individual learner differences (beliefs), whereas the efficacy of feedback can be affected by a host of cognitive factors such as motivation, proficiency level, working memory and analytical ability. Moreover, the study did not consider the effects of context which might be equally relevant. Current feedback research adopts a sociocultural approach to data collection and analysis (microgenesis) to better understand how such variables as learner individual differences and learning context affect the nature of learner engagement with and processing of feedback.

Though recent work started to consider these factors when investigating the efficacy of feedback, no conclusions have been made as to the factors that predict or mediate interlanguage development, penetrating a need for further research.

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