The Effects of Teacher Indirect Feedback and Collaborative Revision Activity
on Grammatical Accuracy of Thai College Students' Writing

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Abstract

This study investigated the effects of indirect feedback together with collaborative revision on the accuracy improvement of the target grammatical features found in narrative paragraph. This study was a quasi-experimental design with a pretest and immediate posttest structure using one experimental group and one control group. The participants of the study were two intact classes of second-year undergraduate students majoring in Business English at Loei Rajabhat University, Thailand These students enrolled in a Basic English Writing course offered in the first semester of the academic year 2014. After the errors of the target grammatical features in three narrative paragraphs were underlined by the teacher, one group of the students (N=30), an experimental group, corrected the errors with their partner whose English language ability level was either the same or different from theirs, and the other group of students (N=27), the control group, edited their errors individually. Research instruments were a passage correction test and a narrative writing test. The findings showed that 1) The post-test scores of both groups were not significantly different from their pre-test scores, 2) The post-test scores of the experimental group and of the control group were not significantly different from each other, and 3) The students with different levels of English proficiency seemed to benefit differently from the collaborative revision activity. The findings of this study suggested that self-revision and collaborative revision activities which were done after the errors of the target grammatical features on the pieces of writing were detected in the form of underlining resulted in neither positive nor negative effects on the grammatical accuracy of the students in this study. These findings may suggest that the students' learning backgrounds and levels of English proficiency should be brought into consideration when the teacher plans to implement the teacher indirect feedback and collaborative revision activity to improve grammatical accuracy in a writing classroom.

Keywords: Indirect Feedback, Collaborative Revision Activity, Grammatical Accuracy Improvement

Introduction

The ability to write effectively in L2 writing is a subset of communicative competence for learners (Ferris, 2010), and one crucial type of knowledge needed to write successfully in English is grammatical competence (Hyland, 2003). Studies on EFL writing have shown that incorrect use of grammatical features is generally observed in texts produced by EFL writers. Thai learners are also another group of EFL students who have problems with grammatical accuracy in their writing (i.e. Khaourai, 2002; Sattayatham & Honsa, 2008; Sersen, 2011). Thai students, even at the university level, had problems producing basic sentences of writing (Sersen, 2011), and the errors that they frequently made were grammatical errors such as articles, tense, verb forms, syntax and lexicon (e.g., Bennui, 2008; Khaourai, 2002; Lush, 2002; Intratat, 2004; Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013).

One of the tools used by writing instructors to help improve EFL writing accuracy is corrective feedback. According to a number of studies on the effects of direct and indirect feedback on grammatical accuracy improvement, a number of studies not only found that indirect feedback was more effective than direct feedback in promoting grammatical accuracy (e.g. Chandler, 2003; Erel & Bulut, 2007), but they also found that indirect feedback led to either greater or similar levels

of accuracy over time (e.g., Chandler, 2003; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008).

Even though many studies show that indirect feedback is more effective than direct feedback in promoting grammatical accuracy, not all students can benefit from this type of feedback. One factor that is considered a main limitation of indirect feedback is the learners' low level of language proficiency (e.g., Ferris, 2002; Chandler, 2003). These scholars assert that students with a low level of language proficiency may not find indirect feedback beneficial for language improvement since they cannot recognize the errors they have made, have no idea how to deal with any detected errors, and ultimately, may not know if their revision or correction is accurate. Special learning activities that facilitate revision ability, thus, should be provided in the classroom when indirect feedback is implemented, and one of such learning activities can be collaborative revision.

Collaborative learning, in general, is an approach adopted by L2 practitioners to help improve L2 learning. It highlights the roles of learners' interaction, which can happen not only between an expert and novice but also between the learners (Donato, 1994), in improving L2 learning. When students collaborate with each other, they use their existing knowledge to develop what they have not yet mastered independently (e.g., Nassaji & Swain, 2000). The dialogue also helps students to attend to a wide range of language items on a grammar-focused task (Storch, 2008).

Because of the beneficial effects of the collaborative learning approach in facilitating L2 learning, collaborative activities have been adopted into revision, which is another stage of the writing process, to promote writing accuracy. When learners talk to each other, they use language as both communicative and cognitive tools when they solve linguistic problems collaboratively (Swain & Lapkin, 1998). A collaborative dialogue helps students to notice errors and have chances to reflect on the quality of language being used (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006), solve grammatical

problems and trigger their learning of particular grammatical items (Swain & Lapkin, 1998), reflect upon aspects of language, gain control of the use of language, and develop their ability to perform the task (Brooks, Donato, & McGlonem, 1997). In addition, they internalize the revision strategy to a greater degree (Englert et al., 2006).

The literature reviewed above shows some benefits of indirect feedback and collaborative activities in improving grammatical accuracy. As a result, it was appropriate to conduct a study that investigated the effects of integrating these two learning activities in improving grammatical accuracy in L2 writing. This study, therefore, intended to answer the following questions:

1. Was there any significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the students who participated in the collaborative revision activity and of those who did self-revision?

2. After receiving the teacher indirect feedback, did the students who participated in collaborative revision activity and those who did self-revision significantly improve their grammatical accuracy?

3. Did the students who participated in the collaborative revision activity and worked with a partner with the same or different levels of English proficiency perform differently in their revision?

Participants

The participants of the study were two intact groups of second-year undergraduate students majoring in Business English at Loei Rajabhat University who enrolled in a Basic English Writing course. This course was chosen using convenient sampling because the both groups of participants were taught by the researcher when the data was collected. Not only that, one of the objectives of this course was to develop the learners' writing accuracy at both sentence and paragraph levels. This course was, therefore, considered suitable for the study. The participants had learnt English as a foreign

language for at least 9 years in Thai schools as a compulsory subject. They followed the same study plan, and they had completed ten English courses by the end of their first year. In order to make sure that these two groups were at the same level of English proficiency at the outset of the study, their grade point average (GPA) of English courses they had taken in the previous two semesters were compared using t-test. Their pre-test scores were also compared. Table 1 shows that the GPA, the passage correction pretest scores and the writing pretest scores of both groups were not significantly different ($p. > .05$). These two groups of participants were randomly assigned to an experimental group (N=30) where the students edited their errors in pair and a control group (N=27) where the students edited their errors individually. After that, the participants in the experimental group were purposively assigned into three sub-groups of high, mid, and low according to their English GPA. The students in these three groups, then, were further assigned into six different dyadic patterns where the members of each dyad had either the same or different levels of language proficiency namely, high-high, high-mid, high-low, mid-mid, mid-low, and low-low to do collaborative revision.

Table 1   Comparison of GPA, Passage Correction Pretest and Writing Pretest Scores between Experimental and Control Groups

Measures	Scores		t	p
	Control Group (N = 27)	Experimental Group (N = 30)		
English GPA	2.93	2.70	1.30	.20
Passage Correction Pretest	5.85	6.75	-1.37	.18
Writing Pretest	56.49	55.38	.38	.70

Research Instruments and Materials

The writing genre used in this study was a narrative. The narrative was chosen because it had been one of the major themes in humanistic and social thought since the mid-twentieth century, and this type of paragraph was thought to be the most universal genre (Hatch, 1992). Not only that, because every culture has a storytelling tradition, it was the genre known in every culture, and the template of it is also universal (Schiffrin, Tannen, & Hamilton, 2006; Hatch, 1992). A narrative was assumed to be familiar to the participants, and it was, therefore, justifiably an important genre for students to learn and to practice to write. The target grammatical features were limited to those usually found in a narrative paragraph namely definite and indefinite articles, copula 'be', past tense form of the verbs excluding auxiliary verbs, temporal and locative prepositions, and cohesive ties which included pronoun references, conjunctions, and conjunctive adverbs (Sheen, Wright, & Moldawa, 2009; Hatch, 1992; Holiday & Hansan, 1976 as cited in Johnstone, 2009). To assess the effects of indirect feedback and collaborative revision activity on grammatical accuracy two measurements, a passage correction test and a paragraph writing test, were used.

A passage correction test was used as a pretest and a posttest because it is considered an effective exercise to develop attention on error detection and correction in writing classes and can help students to learn to edit their own papers (Odlin, 1986). To develop a passage correction test, the narrative text was taken from Shiro (2002). To ensure that the vocabulary in the test would not hinder the participants from their real grammatical performance, that the level of difficulty of vocabulary of the text was suitable for the learners' language proficiency, that the content of the paragraph was familiar to the students and that the passage was comprehensible for the students, ten students who majored in Business

English and enrolled in a composition class at Loei Rajabhat University were asked to rate the difficulty level of vocabulary using the Likert scale (Vagias, 2006). In order to prevent students from getting confused on the scale items, the scale was converted (i.e., 5-extremely difficult....., 1- not difficult at all). Students were also asked to rate the level of familiarity to vocabulary and the level of overall comprehension of the text (i.e. 5-extremely familiar,...1- not familiar at all). The data from two pilot tests showed that the level of difficulty of vocabulary was 2.8 and 2.5 respectively. The levels of 3.3 and 3.6 were reported when they were asked if they were familiar with the content of the passage and their report on the level of comprehension of the tests were 3.1 and 3.9 respectively. The data obtained showed that the vocabulary used in the test was not too difficult for students to understand, and it was acceptable. The test was also considered familiar to students, and they could comprehend the test. After the test was drafted, three experienced English teachers were asked to rate the level of Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC). According to Brown (1996), the entire test items had the value of IOC higher than 0.5, so they were kept as such. After that, the test was piloted with 30 English major students who enrolled in a writing course and had similar characteristics to the target participants at Loei Rajabhat University. The quality of each particular item was analyzed in terms of item difficulty and item discrimination. Base on Brown (2005), the item that has an item facility that falls in the range between .30 and .70 are usually acceptable. Two items were deleted because they were out of the range. After that, 30 test items with an item of discrimination index between .30 and 100 were selected because they were considered to have reasonably good to very good items (Ebel, 1979 as cited in Brown, 2005). The test items were chosen with equal numbers of each target grammatical features limited for the study. The test's reliability was calculated with the real participants of the study. However, since it was impractical to have the participants take the test twice in a normal classroom context, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Brown, 2004) was used to measure the internal consistency of the test. The coefficient obtained from the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .88, which showed that the scoring was highly consistent and trustworthy.

L2 teachers insisted that the grammar should not only be learned, but be applied to different linguistic or communicative purposes where they combine sentences, correct errors, write paragraphs, and so forth (e.g., Purpura, 2004; Richards, 2006). In order to assess the knowledge of grammar when students apply grammatical rules to real communication, a paragraph writing test was used as a pretest and a posttest. The picture composition task adopted from Fawbush (2010) entitled "Catching a Thief", was used as a writing prompt. To ensure that the participants understood the picture series and to determine the appropriate length of time for completing the test, the test was piloted with ten English major students who enrolled in a writing course and had similar characteristics to the target participants at Loei Rajabhat University. These students were asked to tell the story based on the picture series in Thai, and all of them could tell the story correctly. This ensured that the picture series was understandable for the participants of the study. The students spent 54 minutes to finish the test, so 60 minutes were given to the participants to finish the test. To ensure the consistency in making judgments of the researcher on the target grammatical features in writing tests, the intra-rater techniques were employed. The degree of agreement between the first rating and the second rating, which were two-weeks apart, was 96%, which is considered very high. This indicated that the researcher was adequately consistent in scoring the tests. In addition, the inter-rater technique was used. In order to do this, the tests were scored by another rater, an English native speaker with at least 5 years of L2 teaching experience, and his rating was compared with the researcher's rating. The agreement between the two raters on a writing pretest of the experimental group was 95.44 %, which

was considered very high, indicating that the rating was reliable. In order to avoid scoring bias, the participants' names and surnames were concealed in every piece of writing while scoring so that the raters could not see the writers' names and the students' ID numbers were used instead.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted in the first seven weeks of a normal classroom schedule. The students were scheduled to meet once a week in their regular learning schedule. During the first week, the participants were given a pretest. Over the course of the following four weeks, the participants received paragraph writing instruction, and three narrative writing prompts, developed by the researcher, were given as in-class assignments. Because the participants made errors on both the target and non-target grammatical features, and they had a tendency to ignore errors that were not underlined, direct corrections were made to errors related to non-

target forms. This was done in an effort to avoid any misunderstanding the students may have had between the use of the grammatical and target features. After the participants received their paragraph back, the students in the control group revised their work by themselves while those in the experimental group revised their writing piece collaboratively with a randomly-assigned partner with either similar or different levels of English proficiency. During the seventh week the participants were asked to do the post-test.

Findings

1. Grammatical Accuracy Improvement

In order to find out if both the control group and the experimental group improved their grammatical accuracy, their posttest scores from the passage correction test and from the paragraph writing test were compared with the pre-test scores.

Table 2 Comparison of Pretest and Posttest scores of Passage Correction Test and Paragraph Writing Test

Group	Test	Pretest M	Pretest SD	Posttest M	Posttest SD	t	f	p
Control Group (N=27)	Passage Correction	5.85	1.91	6.28	3.37	-.75	26	.46
	Paragraph Writing	63.57	11.55	66.92	14.36	-1.13	26	.27
Experimental Group (N=30)	Passage Correction	6.75	2.97	5.70	2.79	2.55	29	.02*
	Paragraph Writing	55.38	13.92	60.84	18.86	-1.42	29	.17

As seen in Table 2, the paired t-test shows that, for the control group, the scores of the paragraph correct posttest and the paragraph writing posttest were not significantly different from those of the pretests (p >.05). Unexpectedly, for the experimental group, the mean score of the passage correction posttest decreased significantly from the pretest (p <.05) while the mean score of the paragraph writing posttest was higher than that of the pretest, but no significant difference was found (p > .05).

In order to know if there was any significant difference in the grammatical accuracy scores between the students who participated in collaborative revision and those who did self-revision after they received the teacher indirect feedback, the scores obtained from the passage correction posttest and from the paragraph writing posttest of the control and of the experimental groups were compared using an independent t-test.

Table 3   Comparison of the Passage Correction Posttest Scores and of the Paragraph Writing Posttest Scores between Groups

| Test | Control Group (n=27) | | Experimental Group (n=30) | | *t* | df | *p* |
	M	SD	M	SD			
Passage Correction Posttest	6.28	3.37	5.70	2.79	71	55	48
Paragraph Writing Posttest	66.92	14.36	60.84	18.86	.36	55	18

Table 3 shows that the mean scores of both the passage correction posttest and the paragraph writing posttest of the control group were higher than those of the experimental group. However, the difference was not significant (p.>.05). It can be concluded that collaborative revision did not lead to higher accuracy of target grammatical features of the experimental group.

2. Grammatical Accuracy of the Students Working with a Partner with Different Levels of English Proficiency

To investigate if students who collaboratively edited their errors with their partner with similar or different levels of English proficiency performed differently in revising their grammatical mistakes, the paragraph writing scores of the students in different dyadic patterns in the experimental group were compared. However, because the passage correction posttest score of the students in the experimental group reduced significantly, the passage correction posttest scores of different dyadic patterns were not looked into.

The participants in the experimental group (N=30) were divided into six different dyadic patterns by their GPA in English. These dyadic patterns included 2 pairs of high-high (H-H), 3 pairs of high-mid (H-M), 3 pairs of high-low (H-L), 2 pairs of mid-mid (M-M), 3 pairs of mid-low (M-L), and 2 pairs of low-low (L-L) students. Table 4 shows the improvement of the paragraph writing test, obtained from a comparison between a pretest score and a posttest score as categorized by dyadic patterns. The data obtained show that the students in different dyadic patterns seemed to perform differently in improving grammatical mistakes in their writing after participating in the collaborative revision activity. The data also show that the mid-mid and the high-low dyads seemed to perform better in the paragraph writing posttest scores than the other dyadic patterns; three out of four members of the mid-mid dyadic pattern, and five out of six members of the high-low dyadic patterns higher posttest scores.

Table 4   Improvement of Paragraph Writing Tests of Experimental Group as Categorized by Dyadic Patterns

Dyadic Pattern		Improvement	Dyadic Pattern		Improvement	Dyadic Pattern		Improvement
H-H	Pair 1	H 3.38	H-M	Pair 1	H 23.31	H-L	Pair 1	H 16.16
		H -1.18			M 27			L 2.04
	Pair 2	H 12.21		Pair 2	H -9.83		Pair 2	H 19.83
		H -3.22			M -15.86			L 28.88
-	-	-		Pair 3	H 31.66		Pair 3	H 4.04
-	-	-			M -4.55			L -10.43
M-M	Pair 1	M -0.14	M-L	Pair 1	M 4.17	L-L	Pair 1	L -22.39
		M 58			L 13.02			L -31.75
	Pair 2	M 10.1		Pair 2	M -7.28		Pair 2	L 21.15
		M 20.54			L 37.5			L 2.83
-	-	-		Pair 3	M -45.91	-	-	-
-	-	-			L -7.69	-	-	-

L = Low, M = Middle, H = High

The data also shows that the students with a high level of English proficiency seemed to improve better in their paragraph writing posttest when they worked with a partner with a low level of language proficiency than when they worked with a partner with either a high or middle level of language proficiency. The middle-level students who worked with a partner with the same language level seemed to score better in their paragraph writing posttest than when they worked with a partner with either a high or low level of English proficiency. For the students with a low level of language proficiency, they seemed to perform better in their paragraph writing posttest when they worked with the partner who had a higher level of language proficiency than theirs.

Discussion

This study revealed that self-revision and the collaborative revision activity which were done after errors in the learners' pieces of writing were underlined by the teacher did not have any significant effect on promoting grammatical accuracy. The findings of this study were different from the results of other previous studies (e.g. Abadikhah & Ashoori, 2012; Kassim & Ng, 2014; Storch, 2007) which investigated the effects of collaborative work after the students received the teacher indirect feedback.

The first explanation was probably the low level of English proficiency of the participants in this study. The participants in the studies conducted by Abadikhah and Ashoori (2012) and Kassim and Ng (2014), Storch (2007) seemed to have higher levels of language proficiency than the participants of this study. The participants participating in the these studies were students at a high intermediate level, ESL students at the upper intermediate level in one college in Malaysia, ESL students in one Australian university, and junior or senior students from University of Pittsburgh respectively. In contrast, the participants of this study were Thai EFL who were consider having rather low levels of English proficiency. They had never spent more than a month abroad in any country where English was used as a means of communication, nor had they attended a school where English was used as a medium of instruction. In addition, the English classes they had taken were usually conducted in Thai rather than in English. Scholars on L2 teaching state that some novice writers may not find feedback beneficial when they neither comprehend feedback nor have sufficient level of language proficiency to revise their works. The participants in this study, therefore, may find editing the errors difficult, and they may not be confident that what they had edited was correct when they neither understood the errors nor knew how to edit them.

This study also reveals one surprising result. It shows the scores of the experimental group in the passage correction posttest to be significantly lower than those of the passage correction pretest. An explanation could probably be the difference of the nature of the in-class writing tasks and that of the passage correction test. The passage correction test was used as a tool to measure the learners' ability to identify and correct the errors of the target grammatical features that were put into a paragraph. However, the in-class assignments required the students to write narrative paragraphs and receive feedback on their errors before they edited the errors in pairs. This task was different from what the passage correction test required them to do. The collaborative revision, therefore, may not be able to help students to detect and edit the errors in the passage correction test.

The study revealed that students with different levels of language proficiency benefited differently when they worked with their partners who have either the same or different levels of language proficiency. This finding was consistent with those found by the study of Kim and McDonough (2008), who found that the patterns of interaction were changed when the interlocutors collaborated with interlocutors from different proficiency

levels. The possible explanation could be the different learning techniques or learning styles that the students with different levels of language proficiency had. Scholars on L2 learning stated that with different levels of language proficiency, students may have different learning patterns (e.g., Kim & McDonough, 2008; Storch, 1998; Williams, 2001).

This study also found that the students in the high-low dyad benefited the most from the collaborative revision activity. The explanation was probably that while giving their partner suggestions on error correction, the high proficiency students recalled their grammatical knowledge and learnt from the errors that their partners produced. The more capable learners learnt from their less capable partners as they both gave and received corrective feedback to solve linguistic problems while working on a problem-solving task, and they aslo help a novice to learn by providing step by step scaffolding by calling their attention to the interlanguague they produce (Lee, 2008; Nassaji & Swain, 2000). The students who has limited level of language proficiency learnt better when they interacted with a high-level partner than when they interacted with their friends who had the same level of language proficiency (Kim & McDonough, 2008; Nassaji & Swain, 2000).

This study further found that the middle-level students seemed to perform better when they worked with a partner with the same language level. The reason was probably the equal participation of the pairs in achieving the task goal. Since both of the pair members had somewhat similar levels of language proficiency, they did not feel reluctant or embarrassed to share what they knew about the errors and might feel comfortable to learn from each other. This finding was supported by Storch (1998) and Williams (2001), who found that, in groups where the students were approximately of the same level of proficiency, all members of the group participated in the task.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on the findings reported earlier, it can be concluded that self-revision and collaborative revision done after the errors of the target grammatical features on the pieces of writing were underlined did not have any effects on grammatical accuracy of the students in this study. The findings of this study may suggest to EFL teachers that not every group of students benefits from the integration of the teacher indirect feedback with collaborative revision activity in promoting grammatical accuracy. The learners' learning backgrounds and levels of English proficiency should be brought into consideration when the teacher plans to implement the teacher indirect feedback and collaborative revision activity in a writing classroom. The teachers should provide different types of feedback in class and find out the feedback that is the most suitable for a particular group of students. For the students who may not be familiar with a collaborative revision activity, the teachers may have to negotiate with the students by talking about advantages of this activity and by explaining why the students can benefit from the activity. However, due to the short period of time that the students participated in the study, the students might not become familiar with the teacher indirect feedback and the collaborative revision activity. These limitations may prevent the students from making use of a collaborative revision activity in improving their grammatical accuracy. Therefore, in order to be able to make a more reasonable conclusion about the effects of teacher indirect feedback together with a collaborative revision activity, a study of this similar nature should be replicated using a longer period of time. In addition, the participants of this study were considered to have low levels of English language proficiency, and this was probably the reason why this study resulted in the findings that were different from those of the previous studies. A study of this nature that includes a group of participants with a high level of English language proficiency may result in different findings.

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