Chapter 3
The Empirical Evidence of the Effect of Written Corrective Feedback From Information Processing Perspective

ABSTRACT

The theoretical perspectives reviewed in the previous chapter have led many in the field to believe that written CF can have a positive effect on L2 learning. The recent written CF studies reviewed in this chapter confirmed the theoretical expectation. However, it needs to be noted that although more explicit written CF types, such as metalinguistic explanation, direct correction, and direct correction plus metalinguistic explanation were proved to facilitate the learning of English articles and past tense for students of different proficiency levels, more research is needed to find out the correlation between the complexity and written CF type. Furthermore, whether these types of written CF could facilitate the learning of more complex language features needs to be examined. Last but not least, learner’s factors, including affective factors, learning aptitude, motivation, and so on need to be investigated regarding the extent to which they may have an impact on the effect of written CF.

INTRODUCTION

The theoretical perspectives reviewed in the previous chapter have led many in the field to believe that written CF can have a positive effect on L2 learning. Cognitively, written CF as input may be processed and manifested immediately in output; or later after more practice written CF as declarative knowledge has the potential to be proceduralized and become automatized. Besides, a

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number of factors, including the explicitness of the written CF, the number and complexity of targeted linguistic forms, the learner’s L2 proficiency level, language aptitude and even the learner’s affective factors may have an impact on the effect of written CF. Therefore, this chapter will review the studies which fit into the cognitive framework, which L2 development is operationalized as improved accuracy in output after written CF. These cognitively-oriented studies fall into four groups. The first group of studies which will be reviewed examined whether written CF has the potential to be effective in the improvement of accuracy. Some of the studies looked at improved accuracy on revisions, but more recent studies have based their conclusions on improved accuracy in new written texts, especially over time. The second group of studies has explored how explicit written CF needs to be by comparing various types of written CF which have often been used in pedagogy. The third group of studies looked at whether different error types are equally treatable with written CF by comparing the effect of different written CF types on a number of error types. The last group of the studies, which are very few, have begun to explore the possible mediating factors on the effect of written CF, including contextual factors (international or migrant learners), cognitive factors (learner’s language aptitude) and affective factors (learner’s attitude toward written CF and anxiety).

STUDIES ON WHETHER WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK CAN FACILITATE L2 DEVELOPMENT

Over the last 20 years, written CF researchers have been dedicated to proving written CF is able to facilitate L2 development by looking at accuracy improvement after written CF was provided. Some of the studies looked at accuracy improvement in revisions and some in new written texts. Having found convincing evidence regarding the effect of written CF on improved accuracy in both revisions and subsequent written texts, recent studies have started investigating whether and to what extent the improved accuracy could be retained over time. However, among these studies, some included a wide range of error types, from linguistic forms to spelling and punctuation; while others only focused on one or a few linguistic forms. This section will first review the revision studies, and then move on to new text studies, which include focused and unfocused studies, and the studies which compared the focused and unfocused approach.
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