

The effect of explicit corrective feedback on phonological intelligibility

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Abstract: The effect of explicit instruction on pronunciation has been a scarcely studied area in the field of Second Language teaching. Thus, whether to correct errors or not to correct errors was strictly based on the intuitive notions of facilitators due to the lack of research and guidance on error correction. During the 19th century, L2 researchers began to study the impact of Corrective Feedback on pronunciation and discovered a discernible effect of explicit instruction on pronunciation on the basis of ‘Uptake’ (Moley, 1994; Light & Spada, 1999; Kazuya, 2013 & Baker, 2016). Uptake, as defined by Lyster & Ranta (1997), is ‘a student’s utterance that immediately follows a teacher’s feedback and that constitutes a reaction in some way to the teacher’s intention to draw attention (...)’. However, whether immediate uptake is an indicator of acquisition has stirred doubts in the field of L2 research. This study is thereby conducted in view of bridging an existing research gap by examining the sustained effect of explicit instruction on improving phonological ‘Intelligibility’. A sample of six students was polarized into two groups: the feedback group and the control group. The fivefold framework for teaching pronunciation communicatively proposed by Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin (1996) was used to provide CF. The feedback group was exposed to explicit feedback while they were engaging in ten pre-determined tasks over a period of one week. The control group was deprived of output production and explicit feedback. Data gathered from the post and the delayed posttests were analyzed. The findings exhibit that phonological instruction has a positive effect on controlled speech, however, in order to internalize and produce the target from accurately at discourse level continuous practice followed by explicit feedback is recommended.

Keywords: Explicit corrective feedback, phonological accuracy, phonological fluency

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I. INTRODUCTION

For decades, error correction has been a long debated area in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) due to the controversial nature of error correction. Error correction has oscillated between accuracy and fluency over the decades with the advent of different teaching methods. During the period of the Audio-lingual Method, (ALM) pronunciation played a pivotal role. The aim of the ALM was to produce soldiers who could converse in foreign languages within a short span of time. However, this method was abandoned over CLT as attaining native-like pronunciation is an unreasonable goal to realize. Munro and Derwing (1995) and Derwing, Munro, Wiebe (1998) shifted the aim of pronunciation teaching from attaining native-like accent to intelligible pronunciation which is an attainable target. However, practicing oral skills is overlooked worldwide as it requires constant practice and one to one provision of feedback which is extremely time-consuming (Ehsani and Knodt, 1998). Therefore, pronunciation was neglected in teacher training programs (Baker and Murphy, 2011) and in the field of L2 research. As a result research on the acquisition of pronunciation largely lags behind research on the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary. (Light and Spada, 2006; Derwing and Munro, 2005). Teachers abandoned pronunciation teaching considering it as a supplementary component of language (Derwing and Roister, 2006). According to Marks (2006) ‘‘Pronunciation appears at the end of a unit, in the bottom right-hand corner of a page, which only serves to reinforce its lowly status as the thing most likely to be omitted if time is short.’’

However, the impetus to be given to pronunciation teaching is highlighted in a plethora of research. Levis (2005) mentioned that pronunciation should not be ‘‘banned to irrelevance’’ since accurate pronunciation is an inherent component of communication. Light and Spada (1999) points out, fossilization occurs due to the absence of correction in the long run. Commenting on pronunciation instruction, Morley (1994) mentions instruction on pronunciation is vital as it hones oral language skills. Murphy (1991) mentions that ‘‘pronunciation is ‘‘a subset of speaking and listening,’’ which are major skill areas of interpersonal communication (p. 51). (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996) asserts that pronunciation is imperative for language

learning and thus cannot be isolated from other language skills. Morley (1994) brings into focus that unintelligible speech patterns may place learners “at serious risk educationally, occupationally, professionally, and socially” (p. 69) due to communication breakdown. Communication breakdown occurs when a listener hears a sound that s/he does not expect to hear. For example deviations of vowels and consonants could lead to communication breakdown (Rogers & Dalby, 2005). Since vowel and consonant have a great impact on learners’ intelligibility, facilitators should attempt to find the best means of conveying these features to learners in order to facilitate their pronunciation and help them acquire new phonological sounds. Against this backdrop, the aim of this study is to explore the effect of the immediate and the sustained effect of explicit instruction on pronunciation errors in controlled speech as well as in free speech.

1.1 Objective

The objective of the study is to find out the effect of CF on improving phonological intelligibility.

1.2 Hypotheses

The following null and alternative hypotheses were set to test the effect of explicit instruction on phonological intelligibility.

1.2.1 Null Hypothesis

HO one: Segmental instruction improves pronunciation. (The level of the Feedback group is not equal to the level of the control group)

HO two: Segmental instruction on pronunciation does not lead to a sustained uptake in controlled speech (Difference in performances on the delayed posttest and the posttest in controlled speech level is not greater than or equals to zero)

HO three: Segmental instruction on pronunciation does not improve pronunciation in free speech (Difference in performances on the delayed posttest and the posttest at free speech level is not greater than or equals to zero)

1.2.2 Alternative Hypotheses

H1 one: Segmental instruction does not improve pronunciation. (The level of the feedback group is equal to the level of the control group)

H1 two: Segmental instruction on pronunciation lead to a sustained uptake in controlled speech (The difference in performances on the delayed posttest and posttest is greater than or not equals to zero)

H1 three: Segmental instruction on pronunciation improves pronunciation in free speech. (The difference in performances on the delayed posttest and the posttest in free speech level is greater than or not equal to zero)

1.3 Research Questions

The study was carried out in view of investigating to what extent does explicit instruction on fossilized pronunciation lead to a sustained uptake in controlled speech and in free speech situations?

1.4 Literature Review

There has been a revived interest in the field of L2 research during the last decade to study the effect of explicit instruction on pronunciation. This section is an account of the findings of the empirical research on pronunciation which conceals the fact that literature has witnessed various stances pertaining to the effectiveness of CF on pronunciation.

Demirezen (2005) viewed that the substitution of the /v/ for /w/ by the Turkish learners is a serious problem that hampers communication. In a similar vein of research, Dermirezem (2006) studied the acquisition of /æ/ and /ɛ/ vowel sounds of the English language which are neutralized by language teachers of English in Turkey with /ɛ/. Demirezen (2017) discussed the difficulty encountered by Turkish English majors, and teachers-on-the-job phonetic in discriminating English [æ] and [ɑ] sounds. According to him, the Turkish English majors suffer severe articulation and pronunciation problems in their speech that may impede their professional development. However, rehabilitation of pronunciation errors up to a threshold level is surmountable through instruction.

Saito’s (2011) study on “Examining the Role of Explicit Phonetic Instruction in Native-Like and Comprehensible Pronunciation Development: An Instructed SLA Approach to L2 Phonology,” confirmed that explicit instruction develops learners’ comprehensibility at controlled speech level however at free speech level there was only an average improvement in comprehensibility with a considerable variance between participants.

Saito (2012) reviewed 15 studies on the effect of instruction on accent and reported that only five studies, out of the fifteen studies were tested at spontaneous speech level. Based on these five studies, Saito reported that instruction played a positive role only in two studies: Derwing, Murno & Wiebe (1998) and Saito & Lyster (2012a). Derwing, Murno & Wiebe (1998) study (as cited in Saito, 2012a) on “Instruction on Global

Aspects of Pronunciation (speaking rate, intonation, rhythm, projection, word stress and sentence stress, instruction) demonstrated that instruction improved fluency and comprehensibility and direct segmental instruction on individual sounds had no positive effect on spontaneous speech. In the second study, Saito & Lyster (2012a) confirmed that instruction on pronunciation has a ceiling impact when the focus is only on one aspect and provides not just instruction but also correction.

Derwing and Munro (2005) claimed that L2 learners benefit from being explicitly taught phonological forms to help them notice the difference between their own productions and those of proficient speakers in L2 community'. In conducting their quasi-experimental classroom study, they divided 48 ESL learners from various backgrounds into three groups: segmental, suprasegmental and control. After the pre and the posttests which consisted of controlled speech tasks and free speech tasks, Derwing and Munro produced significant results: (1) Participants in both segmental and suprasegmental groups improved pronunciation whereas those in the control group did not; and (2) a fine-grained examination disclosed that suprasegmental training enhanced pronunciation in free speech while segmental training enhanced pronunciation in controlled speech. Similarly, Venkatagiri and Levis (2007) also divulged that explicit instruction is an inherent part of phonological awareness and L2 speech intelligibility. In a similar vein of research, Gordon, J., Darcy, I., & Ewert, D. (2013) on *'Pronunciation Teaching and Learning: Effects of Explicit Phonetic Instruction in the L2 Classroom* prompted that explicit phonetic instruction provides L2 learners with scaffold help for the development of comprehensible speech. Kazuya (2013) investigated the impact of form-focused instruction on L2 pronunciation development. The results of an ANOVA showed that (a) the Form-Focused Instruction (FFI) only group demonstrated average improvement (b) the FFI+EI (Explicit Information) group not only showed considerable improvement but also generalized the instructional gains to unfamiliar lexical contexts beyond the instructional materials.

(Darabad, 2014 on *'Corrective Feedback Interventions and EFL Learners' Pronunciation: A Case of -s or -es Ending Words*) which investigated the impact of recasts and prompts on students' performance in pronunciation related activities points out that the effect of recasts was greater than that of prompts for improving accuracy of final English -s and -es endings pronunciation, i.e. /s/ /z/ and /ɪz/ which are difficult aspects of pronunciation for Iranian learners who are bilingual in Azari -Turkish and Persian. Baker and Burri (2016) on *'Feedback on Second Language Pronunciation: A Case Study of EAP Teachers' Beliefs and Practices* examined a case of five experienced English instructors who strove to provide feedback on specific features of pronunciation that negatively affect students' comprehensibility. The result of the above study is in line with Saito & Lyster, (2012a) which claimed that Form-Focused Instruction coupled with CF has a powerful influence on the successful development of learner pronunciation.

Karami, M. & Darani, L. H. (2018) probed the effectiveness of CF on /teaching θ/ and /ð/ sounds which are absent in Persian to Iranian EFL learners. This experimental study employed a pretest-posttest treatment design. The findings emerging from the study substantiated that recast is an effective method in teaching both sounds to Iranian EFL learners.

Naima, A., Saeidi, M., et al (2018) sought to explore whether uptake can reflect language learning and retention via measuring the effectiveness of oral corrective feedback on Iranian EFL learners phonological errors. According to the study, the most frequent phonological errors were recorded as 1) the incorrect pronunciation of the sound [w], as in „well“ pronounced as [v], 2) mispronunciation of the lax vowel [ɪ] as in „thin“ pronounced as [i:], and 3) mispronunciation of consonant clusters as in „street“ pronounced with an added vowel. The study suggests that EFL learners' immediate reactions to teachers' input-providing or output-prompting correction could not be a plausible measure of language development as the learners who had a higher score in the uptake of recast, elicitation and metalinguistic feedback could not perform better in the immediate and delayed post-tests.

Naziri & Haghverdi (2014) and Flores 2011 (as cited in Naziri and Haghverdi, 2014 p.930) asserted that pronunciation teaching should be implemented at an early stage of language learning as the study indicated that phonological instruction has a small effect size on adult learners' pronunciation, thereby inviting teachers and researchers to think of novel approaches to address the issue.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The Output Hypothesis suggested by Swain (1985) claims that in order to master a language, production of output in response to input is indispensable. When learners receive feedback on their attempts to communicate, they reformulate their initial utterances which promote language development and acquisition as it directly linked with four cognitive processes, such as noticing, hypothesis testing, syntactic processing, and metalinguistic reflection.

II. METHODOLOGY

The section below explains and justifies the methodology adopted for the study.

2.1 Sample Population

The research population selected for the study consisted of both female and male Sinhala students of 20-22 years age group pursuing the National Diploma in Technology (NDT) program in English medium at the Institute of Technology, University of Moratuwa. Prior to the study, the population had attended a month-long full-time intensive English course.

2.2 Data Collection Method

Pre – posttest design was used to collect data. A pretest was which designed based on the most common phonemic deviation from the Standard Sri Lankan English was administered to the sample population and a sample of six students who assimilated the two vowel sounds, /o/ and /ɔ/ on the pretest was filtered. The sample was divided into two groups of three participants: the Feedback Group and the control group. Fivefold Framework of Teaching Pronunciation Communicatively: Description and analysis, listening discrimination, controlled practice, guided practice and communicative practice proposed by Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin (1996) was used as the teaching approach. A one -hour brief introductory session on phonetics, a discussion on the disparity between /ɔ/ and /o/ with regard to the characteristics of each phoneme was conducted for the Feedback group and the control group. Subsequently, a series of ten controlled, guided and communicative practice tasks were conducted for students in the Feedback Group. The Feedback Group received explicit feedback on the production of /o/ and /ɔ/ while they were engaging in tasks which lasted approximately six hours. The entire process spanned over one week. The control group neither received feedback nor an opportunity to produce the problematic sound which they perceived to be similar to /o/ in the L1. Immediately after the tasks and feedback session was over, a posttest was conducted. After a period of four weeks, a delayed posttest was conducted in order to gauge their retention and the existence of sustained uptake.

2.3 Test Instruments

A posttest which comprised of two tasks was designed to obtain two types of spoken production samples; i.e. a standard sample and a free speech sample to measure improvement after the treatment session. The first task was to read aloud ten sentences specially designed for the purpose while it was being video recorded. The participants were given time to read and clarify any doubts before the recording started. The main objectives of these initial steps were to prevent any “unnatural flows, awkward pauses or stumbling over words, and restarts” (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

As the second task participants were instructed to describe a picture. This task too was video recorded. The video clip was later analyzed and the words produced were categorized into the phonemes, /o/ or /ɔ/. According to Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin (1996), the rationale behind gathering two types of spoken production samples: a standard sample of the learner reading aloud and a sample of the learners’ free speech is to assess participants’ explicit knowledge of the target features in the second language which can be achieved through a standard sample and to provide the most natural evidence of a speaker’s pronunciation (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).

A delayed posttest which was composed of two tasks: a reading aloud task taken from (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996) and a picture description task was conducted four weeks after the post-test. The rationale behind conducting a delayed posttest can be elaborated as follows. Mackey & Phillip (1998) argues that immediate uptake cannot be considered as a measurement of uptake which is incongruent with Lyster and Ranta (1997) which reports that “immediate response to recast may not be a predictor of whether that learner will subsequently make use of recast” (p.48) which is in line with (Ruselle, 2009) that questions the validity of using uptake as an outcome measure as immediate uptake of a recast does not equate to L2 learning.

2.4 Method of Data Analysis

Scores of the post and the delayed posttests at controlled and free speech tasks were fed into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Scores obtained by the Feedback group and the control group at controlled speech tasks were compared using an Independent Samples Test to probe any statistically significant difference between the performances of the two groups. Scores of the post and the delayed posttests of controlled speech tasks of the Feedback group was statistically analyzed using a Paired Samples Test to examine the presence of sustained uptake. The scores of the post and the delayed of free speech tasks were compared to examine the presence of acquisition of the new vowel category at free speech level.

III. RESULTS

The section below documents the data analyzed through SPSS. Results are presented in terms of the hypotheses presented in section 1.3.

Null and alternative Hypotheses were set as follows to probe the presence of immediate uptake.

Null Hypothesis 1: Segmental instruction improve pronunciation. (The level of the Feedback group is not equal to the level of the control group)

Alternative Hypothesis1: Segmental instruction does not improve pronunciation (The level of the Feedback group is equal to the level of the control group)

Table one:Tests of Normality

	Tests of Normality					
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
posttest score	.210	6	.200*	.841	6	.132

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

A Shapiro –Wilk test was run to test the normality of dispersion of the scores of the Feedback group and the control group. As the significance value is greater than 0.05 (0.132> 0.05) an Interdependent Samples Test was conducted to determine whether the difference between the two groups is statically significant. The P value was set at 0.001.

Table two:Results of the Independent Samples Test

Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
								Lower	Upper	
posttest score	Equal variances assumed	1.231	.329	6.102	4	.004	7.333	1.202	3.996	10.670
	Equal variances not assumed			6.102	3.485	.006	7.333	1.202	3.792	10.874

As depicted in table two,theP value is greater than the significant value, therefore, we do not have sufficient statistical data to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, it can be concluded that the performances of the Feedback group and the control group are not at the same level which means that segmental instruction is instrumental in improving pronunciation.

Table three: Group Statistics

Group Statistics

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
posttest score	Feedback group	3	8.00	1.732	1.000
	Control group	3	.67	1.155	.667

As shown in table three, the mean score of the Feedback group (8) is higher than the mean score of the control group (0.67). Thus, it can be postulated that the Feedback group has outperformed the control group and segmental instruction and feedback have a positive effect on pronunciation at controlled speech level.

Null and Alternative hypotheses were set as follows to examine the presence of sustained uptake at controlled speech level.

Null Hypothesis 2: Segmental instruction on pronunciation does not lead to sustained uptake at controlled speech level (Difference of performances on the delayed posttest and the posttest at controlled speech level is not greater zero)

Alternative Hypothesis 2: Segmental instruction on pronunciation lead to sustained uptake at controlled speech level (The difference in performances on the delayed posttest and posttest is greater than zero)

Table four: Tests of Normality

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
controlled speech	.253	3	.	.964	3	.637
controlled speech	.385	3	.	.750	3	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

A Shapiro- Wilk test of normality was run to probe the normality of dispersion of the scores of the post and delayed posttests at controlled speech level. As the significance value (0.637) is greater than 0.05, data is normally distributed. A Paired Samples Test was conducted to examine the presence of a statistical significance in the performances on the post and the delayed posttests.

Table five: Results of the Paired Samples Test

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Delayed posttest - posttest	1.6667	14.2156	8.2074	-33.6468	36.9802	.203	2	.858

The P value was set at 0.001. Since the P-value is less than Alpha, the null hypothesis is rejected at 0.01 level of significance. Therefore, it is statistically proved that there is a significant difference between the scores of the delayed posttest and the posttest. As the mean value of the delayed posttest at controlled speech level is greater than the mean value of the posttest as tabulated in table no six, it is highlighted that immediate uptake has led to sustained uptake. It can be thereby attested that pronunciation instruction has a strong impact on immediate uptake and internalization of new vowel categories at controlled speech level.

Table six: Paired Samples Statistics

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Delayed posttest	75.000	3	21.6506	12.5000
	posttest	73.33	3	15.275	8.819

The following null and alternative hypotheses were fixed to observe the presence of sustained uptake at free speech level.

Null Hypothesis 3: Segmental instruction on pronunciation does not improve pronunciation at free speech level (Difference in performances on the delayed posttest and the posttest at free speech level is not greater than zero)

Alternative Hypothesis 3: Segmental instruction on pronunciation improves pronunciation at free speech level. (The difference in performances on the delayed posttest and the posttest at free speech level is greater than or not equal to zero)

The scores of free speech tasks were keyed into SPSS to probe the normality of dispersion. As the significant value is greater than 0.05 as demonstrated in table seven there is enough statistical evidence to exhibit that the data follows a normal distribution. A paired samples Test was conducted to study the presence of a significant difference between the post and the delayed posttest at free speech level. The alpha level was set at 0.001

Table seven: Results of the Tests of Normality

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
difference	.175	3	.	1.000	3	.999

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table eight: Results of the Paired Samples Test

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Delayed free speech - post free speech	55.5533 3	5.55500	3.20718	41.75395	69.35272	17.322	2	.003

As shown in table eight, Alpha value is less than the significant value ($0.01 < 0.03$), thus the null hypothesis is rejected at 0.01 level which concludes that there is a significant statistical difference in performances on the delayed post and the posttests. Table nine below showcases that the mean value of the delayed speech test in free speech is higher than the mean value of the posttest at free speech level which highlights that albeit learners have failed to demonstrate any sign of immediate uptake at free speech level on the immediate posttest, learners have demonstrated a statistically significant uptake on the delayed posttest.

Table nine: Paired Samples Statistics

Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Delayed free speech	61.1067	3	14.69526	8.48431
Post free speech	5.5533	3	9.61866	5.55333

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The most striking finding of the study is that instruction on pronunciation has a positive and an immediate effect in controlled speech and after a considerable amount of practice and feedback sessions L2 learners internalize the new vowel category at the discourse level. In relation to the Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985) in order to master a language, the production of output in response to input is indispensable. When learners receive feedback on their attempts to communicate, they reformulate their initial utterances which promote language acquisition as it allows four cognitive processes: Noticing, hypothesis testing, syntactic processing, and metalinguistic reflection which is mirrored in this study. The group received explicit instruction and outperforms the control group in a controlled speech which highlights the benefit of explicit instruction on pronunciation accuracy.

However, learners have failed to transfer immediately the newly formed phonetic category into free speech. When learners integrate the target sound in long stretches of speech, they fail to produce the sound which shows that the new phonetic category is not registered in their phonological system though they are aware of the existence of the target phoneme. On the contrary, learners were successful when they consciously attempt to frame the new vowel category in controlled speech. This emphasizes the fact that when a new sound category is introduced, learners should be given ample opportunities to produce it followed by explicit feedback to internalize the new vowel category in order to develop phonological fluency which is congruent with Saito (2011) and Saito and Lyster (2012a). Since the test instruments of the study were solely based on the familiar word tokens before generalizing findings it is recommended to replicate the study as the study does not provide sufficient evidence on the capacity of learners to generalize the instructional gains to produce unfamiliar words.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended to introduce the properties of a new phonetic category to students explicitly discuss how it is different from the L1 phoneme which is adjacent to the target sound. Without overwhelming students by integrating the new sound in communicative tasks at the very outset, it is advised to get them to produce isolate words and engage them in controlled speech tasks and guided practice until they internalize the new sound.

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