The Relationship between Gender and Implicit/Explicit Corrective Feedback: A Study of Speaking Collocation Errors by Iranian EFL Learners

1 Elaheh ShojaMoghadam, 2 Narjes Ghafournia*

1 MA in TEFL, Department of English, Neyshabur Branch, Islamic Azad University, Neyshabur, Iran
2 Assistant Professor in TEFL, Department of English, Neyshabur Branch, Islamic Azad University, Neyshabur, Iran

*Corresponding email address
narjesghafournia@yahoo.com

Abstract: This study aimed at investigating the effect of explicit and implicit corrective feedback on the use of collocation across male and female students. This study is based on male and female students, who received three explicit, implicit, and blended corrective feedback. This paper intends to investigate whether there is a relationship between gender and the choice of these strategies. To fulfill the purpose of the study, 90 Iranian EFL learners, who were at the intermediate proficiency level of English, were chosen. Later, they were randomly assigned to four groups, composed of one control group and three experimental groups, receiving oral implicit and explicit corrective feedback on error of collocations. After seven sessions of treatment, a speaking test was taken as the posttest. The findings demonstrated that there is no significant gender difference among the participants of this study in terms of the type of corrective feedback, which they received.

Index Terms: explicit feedback, implicit feedback, blended feedback, collocations, error correction.

1. INTRODUCTION

Collocations, as an indispensible part of speaking, play an important role in every day conversations. Moreover, they are considered as indicators of proficiency for language learners and have been always emphasized in speaking module assessment of international examinations such as IELTS. As collocations vary from one language and culture to the other, this area of language can be problematic for language learners because negative transfer may happen a lot. Consequently, the teacher should be cautious about these errors and try to correct them in an effective way (Larson, 1984).

Error correction has a long history in the fields of second language acquisition. Corrective feedback is essential in the field of education and in learning generally. Many studies have been done on corrective feedback. Corrective feedback, however, is argued to bring some balance to this situation. Lyster and Ranta’s (1997) study is one of the valuable works in corrective feedback, identifying seven major types of feedback. Chaudron (1988) has pointed out that the term “treatment of the error” may refer to “any teacher behavior, following an error that minimally attempts to inform the learner of the fact of error” (p.150).

An increased knowledge of collocation not only allows learners to improve levels of accuracy, but also it aids fluency (Webb & Kagimoto, 2011). Collocations improve learners’ ability in oral communication, listening, and reading skills. From the perspective of pedagogy, collocations help learners to be aware of language chunks, used by native speakers in writing and speaking (Namvar, 2012). The majority of Iranian EFL learners have the knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary to some extent; however, they seem to have serious problems with the use of collocations. For instance; ‘make a mistake’ is an acceptable collocation in the English language. Iranian learners, who speak Persian, say “EshtebahKardan”, which literally means “do a mistake”. However, when they say it in English, they think in their first language and instead
of “make a mistake” they write or say “do a mistake.” Literally, Iranians say "Do a mistake" while English speakers say "Make a mistake".

The present study aims at investigating the role of implicit and explicit corrective feedback on the application of collocations by male and female Iranian intermediate EFL learners. It mainly concerns on the errors committed by the learners doing the collocation tasks, and the implicit and explicit form of corrective feedback given to them by language teachers as well as learners' uptake of this kind of feedback.

Corrective feedback, as one of the effective focus on form and meaning techniques, have long been employed in L2 classrooms. Communication involves two basic types of active cognitive process: 1) To produce a message: it means to convert thoughts to language, 2) To receive a message: it means to convert language to thoughts. Speaking is at the heart of second language learning, but despite its importance in different fields, it has largely been ignored in teaching and testing for a number of reasons. The students should learn to express themselves in a way that is socially and culturally appropriate in each communicative circumstance. Learning requires feedback. Otherwise, the learners have no means of judging the extent and appropriateness of their learning (Chastain, 1998). Finally, Baleighzadeh and Firoozbakht (2009) investigated gender differences in students’ and teachers’ perceptions and beliefs of corrective feedback. They used a questionnaire for 60 male and female intermediate EFL students (30 males and 30 females) and 40 teachers (20 males and 20 females). Data analysis showed that while there was high agreement between students and teachers on the majority of questions, some discrepancies were between students’ and teachers’ beliefs within each gender.

One of the problematic areas for EFL learners is learning collocations. Iranian learners like the other learners face various problems in producing oral collocations, therefore, the necessity to spend more time and energy by learners on mastering collocations is obvious. Using collocations is probably the most important part of turning passive words into active ones; therefore, a central component in the acquisition of a creative language system is collocation (Durrant, 2008).

According to Ramirez (2012, p. 242), "collocation is the way in which words associate with one another and can be defined as word clusters, which are regularly used in spoken and written English." Henriksen (n.d. p. 30) defines collocations as "frequently recurring two-to-three word syntagmatic units, which can include both lexical and grammatical words, e.g. verb + noun (pay tribute), adjective + noun (hot spice), preposition + noun (on guard) and adjective + preposition (immune to)." McCarthy (1990) believed that collocational knowledge comprises a significant part of native speakers’ linguistic competence, which can make difficulties for the learners who are using second language for communication. According to Jinsuk (2001, p. 208), "it makes sense to regard collocations as items frequently occurring together and with some degrees of semantic unpredictability." This justifies the idea that it is important to spend time on collocations to improve fluency. As Bergstrom (2008, p. 5) states "an important aspect of being fluent in a language is the use of collocations, which are conventionalized word combinations that are often used together in a language." Shokouhi and Mirsalari (2010) defined two groups of collocations. Grammatical collocations consist of a noun, an adjective, or a verb plus a preposition or a grammatical structure such as an infinitive or a clause. (e.g. by accident). Lexical collocations consist of various combinations of nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. (e.g. storms rage).

Delshad (1980) found that Iranian EFL/ESL students have difficulty in the use of English prepositions. According to Delshad (1980), Iranian EFL students usually misuse or omit English prepositions. Similarly, Zarei (2002) found that Iranian EFL learners have problems with English collocations. He classified English collocational patterns into ten categories of which the collocations of prepositions are among the most problematic patterns, while 'adjective+ adverbs' and 'fixed expressions' rank among the least problematic collocational patterns for them. He further concluded that collocational competence is an essential part of achieving native-like competence in English. Sadeghi and Panahifar (2013) studied the use of different types of collocations in oral productions of Iranian EFL learners with the aim of identifying, categorizing, and accounting for the inappropriate collocations produced.
2. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Implicit and Explicit Corrective Feedback

As for implicit feedback, there is no overt indicator that an error has been made while in explicit feedback there is. Implicit feedback often takes the form of recasts. Explicit feedback can take several forms: it may draw attention to the source of problem indicated (for example, ‘Not goed’), where just negative evidence is presented; it may present explicit correction (for example, ‘No, not goed- went.’), where the feedback obviously shows that what the learner has stated is erroneous and supplies the correct form, so presenting both positive and negative evidence; or it may recommend metalinguistic feedback (for example, ‘You need past tense.’), defined by Lyster and Ranta (1997) as ‘comments, information or questions related to the well-formedness of the learner’s utterance’, which again just presents negative evidence.

A number of the studies (e.g., Carroll & Swain, 1993; Nagata, 1993; Rosa & Leow, 2004) proved that explicit feedback was more influential than implicit feedback investigation of the influences of recasts and metalinguistic feedback on the learning of English past tense ‘-ed’ done by Ellis, Loewen and Erlam (2006). Ellis, et al also found that the explicit type of feedback was more influential than the implicit type. Nonetheless, some of other studies (e.g., Sanz, 2003) indicated no difference. Just one research (Leeman, 2003) reported that implicit corrective feedback was more influential than explicit feedback.

Finally, the previous studies differed in their selection of aimed grammatical structure. Some of the researchers investigated morphological features, for example, distinguishing nouns and verbs in Carroll and Swain (1993) and French grammatical gender in Lyster (2004) while other researchers examined syntactical features, for instance, dative alternation in Carroll and Swain (1993) or clitic pronoun position in Spanish in Sanz (2003). It is sensible to think that the influence of corrective feedback treatment will rely on the selection of the aimed structure (Mackey, 2007). Pienemann (1998), for instance, believed that the order in which grammatical structures are acquired as implicit knowledge include the processing implementations.

2.2 Empirical Background

A well-known study on the relationship between corrective feedback and learner uptake is by Lyster and Ranta (1997), who studied second language learners in immersion classrooms in Canada. They examined six corrective feedback types in terms of their frequency and distribution, as well as their effects on learner uptake. Lyster and Ranta (1997) discovered that the teachers had a strong tendency (55% of all occurrences) to use recasts as the strategy for corrective feedback (Lyster & Ranta 1997, p. 53), even though it was the least likely strategy to elicit student-generated repair (only 31% of all occurrences). They concluded that of the six feedback types, elicitation, repetition, clarification requests and metalinguistic feedback were the more successful in evoking student generated feedback. The teachers provided corrective feedback on 62% of the students ‘erroneous utterances on average, and the researchers did conclude that more frequent corrections would probably be undesirable, but that teachers should more actively apply the different corrective techniques and not only the recasts.

In Iranian EFL context, numerous researches have been done to date. Vaezi, Zand-Vakili, and Kashani (2011) conducted a study on observational classroom research on corrective feedback and then presented an observational study of patterns of error treatment in an adult ESL classroom at two intermediate and advanced levels. Their study examined the range and types of feedback used by Iranian teachers in three different aspects (grammatical, phonological, and lexical).

The findings of their study showed an obvious tendency for implicit types of reformulate feedback, namely, recasts at intermediate level, especially in relation to structural errors, leaving little opportunity for other feedback types and at advanced level recast was the most frequent one in phonological aspects. Moreover, contrary to Lyster and Ranta’s model (1997) findings proved lack of Iranian teacher’s feedback in relation to lexical errors.

According to Buyukbay (2010) recasts, a form of corrective feedback has been investigated more than any other type
of corrective feedback by researchers. Gholizade (2013) studied on the differential impact of recast and metalinguistic feedback on speaking performance of male and female EFL learners. The results showed that corrective feedback, in the form of metalinguistic was effective in leading to speaking accuracy, fluency and complexity. This study failed to find any significant difference between male and female participants. Buyukbay (2010) investigated the effectiveness of repetition as corrective feedback in terms of its contribution to students’ uptake and acquisition. He videotaped both of the classes of the experimental and control group. He analyzed the feedback episodes and based on them created a grammar test. Then, he compared the test results. The results revealed that the experimental class, which was exposed to repetition as corrective feedback, achieved higher scores. In addition, repetition as a correction technique, is effective in terms of its contribution to uptake and acquisition.

Although students pay more attention to explicit corrective feedback than implicit corrective feedback (Mackey et al., 2007; Nassaji, 2009; Shokrpour & Zarei, 2015), and prompts more than recasts (Ammar, 2008), some researchers have proposed that the effects of implicit corrective feedback may be more lasting than those of explicit corrective feedback, which may be more effective in the short term memory (Ellis et al., 2006; Li, 2010; Mackey & Goo, 2007). Shorpour and Zarei (2015) studied on the efficacy of explicit corrective feedback (CF) with metalinguistic rules on picture-cued task of speaking assessment for production of seven common English tenses. Based on their oral proficiency at the beginning of the study, the two groups were homogenous, but the results revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the immediate and delayed post-oral testing. As they state "the results also confirmed that the effect of error correction was more significant on present perfect tense and less significant on simple present tense" (p. 3565). The results in this study indicate the importance of providing explicit and metalinguistic corrective feedback. Conducting studies like this one may contribute to better teaching and testing oral skills to the foreign language learners.

Mendez et al. (2010) studied on the role of corrective feedback in the EFL classes in English language program, and they analyzed the corrective feedback techniques, used by the EFL teachers in this program. According to Mendez et al. (2010) "it also seems that instructors’ target for oral corrective feedback is phonology and morphosyntax, but semantics and pragmatics are the most neglected areas. The provision of corrective feedback seems unsystematic, inconsistent and ambiguous" (p. 1).

As mentioned before, there are some factors that influence the choice of corrective feedback. One of these factors is gender that will be examined in this study. Gender is one of the aspects of psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic mechanisms. Numerous studies have investigated the effects of different types of corrective feedback on learners. Moreover, many researchers have examined the effect of gender on their language learning. There are few studies about the differences between males and females in different types of corrective feedback. Different researches focus on learner-learner and teacher-learner interactions in the classroom. Gender can influence these interactions. So, the role of gender in this interaction is so important that has become an important variable in these studies. As a result, this study examines the relationship between male and female learners and different types of corrective feedback.

In accordance with the research objectives, the researcher formulates the research question as follow:

Is there any significant difference between Iranian EFL learners’ gender and the effect of implicit, explicit, and blended corrective feedback?

Accordingly, the null hypothesis is posed by the researcher as follow:

There is not any significant difference between Iranian EFL learners’ gender and the effect of implicit, explicit, and blended corrective feedback.
3. **METHOD**

### 3.1 Participants

The researcher selected 90 intermediate EFL male and female students, who were studying at Shokuh institute in Quchan in Khorasan-e Razavi in Iran. The students were aged between 15-24 years old. They divided into three experimental and one control groups. All these students passed 7 levels of Top Notch books. To capture their language proficiency, the researcher first administered the Nelson test and then decided to select the students whose scores fell between one standard deviation above and below the mean. In other words, the students at the intermediate level were selected.

### 3.2 Instruments

The instrument that used in this study was 50-item Nelson English Language Proficiency Test. This multiple-choice test included cloze passages, vocabulary, structure, and pronunciation tests that used to homogenize the participants. The English language proficiency test, used in the present study, was adopted from Fowler and Coe (1978). The reliability coefficient of this proficiency test was high, Cronbach Alpha = 0.82 (Hashemian, Roohani, & Fadaei, 2012). The scoring of the test was calculated out of 50, one score for each question. After that, students took a pre-test that was a combination of different questions about different topics in speaking. A pretest, an FCE test was used. It was a standardized measurement with four essential qualities – validity, reliability, impact, and practicality – and internationally used to describe language ability of learners. A post-test (the same version of FCE test) was used to check the efficiency of the treatment was used.

### 3.3 Procedure

At first, Nelson test was given to the students for the purpose of homogenizing the participants, and those students whose scores fall one standard deviation above and below the mean were elected for the study. After that, students took a pre-test that is the combination of different questions about different topics in speaking. In the treatment part, the three experimental groups received oral implicit, explicit, and blended corrective feedback on the erroneous usage of collocations for ten sessions. The material of these exams extracted from numerous collocations books such as English collocations in use by (Michael McCarthy, 2005) Key words to fluency by (George Woolard, 2005), Collocations organizer by (Memoniak Kifékoi, 2015).

In the class that implicit corrective feedback carried out, the students were given five minutes to prepare themselves to talk about a topic and then they were supposed to speak in the class. If they had any mistakes, the researcher indirectly tried to direct the student to the correct answer by giving some clues orally. In the other class with explicit feedback, five minute of the class was allocated to each student to talk, too. If there were any mistakes, the researcher tried to guide the student to the correct answer by directly correcting them. In the class that blended corrective feedback is used, five minutes of the class time was allocated to each student to talk and teacher tried to guide implicit or explicit corrective feedback randomly. After ten sessions of treatment, students were given post-test to investigate the result of the treatment.

### 3.4 Data analysis

To find if the results of students' erroneous usage of collocations in speaking make any difference or not, the researcher gave implicit, explicit, and blended corrective feedback to three experimental groups of students. Descriptive statistics was conducted to see the mean and standard deviation of each group. Matched T-test was used to check the efficacy of each treatment.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to test the null hypothesis, four independent t-test were run to compare the gained scores of male and female participants in the experimental groups. The first Independent t-test was run to compare the gained scores of the male and female participants in the explicit corrective feedback group. As displayed in Table 1., the t-observed value is 3.582. This amount of t-value at 28 degrees of freedom is lower than the critical t-value of t, i.e., 3.67.
Table 1

*Independent t-test for Gained Score of the Female and Male of the Explicit Group Independent Samples Test*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.563</td>
<td>.459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>3.582</td>
<td>26.776</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on these results, it can be claimed that there is not a significant difference between the male and female participants in the explicit corrective feedback group’s gained scores. The female participants in the explicit corrective feedback group gained higher scores than males in that group. However, the difference is not significant. The mean gained scores for male and female participants are 4.1333 and 6.1333, respectively. The descriptive statistics for the two groups of participants in the explicit corrective feedback group are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics for Gained Score of the Female and Male of the Explicit Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.1333</td>
<td>1.35576</td>
<td>.35006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>.1333</td>
<td>.81221</td>
<td>.153040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.1333</td>
<td>1.68466</td>
<td>.43498</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second Independent t-test was run to compare the gained scores of the male and female participants in the implicit corrective feedback group. As displayed in Table 3, the t-observed value is .164. This amount of t-value at 28 degrees of freedom is lower than the critical t-value of t, i.e., 3.67.

Table 3

*Independent t-test for Gained Score of the Female and Male of the Implicit Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.986</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on these results, it can be claimed that there is not a significant difference between male and female participants in the implicit corrective feedback group’s gained scores. The mean gained scores for male and female participants in the implicit corrective feedback group are .6000 and .7333, respectively. The descriptive statistics for the two groups are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implicit Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>.7333</td>
<td>2.18654</td>
<td>.56456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implicit Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>.6000</td>
<td>2.26148</td>
<td>.58391</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third Independent t-test was run to compare the gained scores of the male and female participants in the blended corrective feedback group. As displayed in Table 5, the t-observed value is .649. This amount of t-value at 28 degrees of freedom is lower than the critical t-value of t, i.e., 3.67.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.352</td>
<td>.558</td>
<td>.649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blended Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>.649</td>
<td>.429</td>
<td>.27.429</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on these results, it can be claimed that there is not a significant difference between male and female participants in the blended corrective feedback group’s gained scores. The mean gained scores for male and female participants in the blended corrective feedback group are .5333 and .8667, respectively. The descriptive statistics for the two groups are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blended Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>.8667</td>
<td>1.30201</td>
<td>.33618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blended Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>.5333</td>
<td>1.50555</td>
<td>.38873</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The forth Independent t-test was run to compare the gained scores of the male and female participants in the three experimental groups. As displayed in Table 7, the \( t \)-observed value is 1.412. This amount of \( t \)-value at 88 degrees of freedom is significant lower than the critical \( t \)-value of \( t \), i.e., 3.41.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>3.295</td>
<td>.073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>1.412</td>
<td>84.788</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on these results, it can be claimed that there is not a significant difference between total male and female participants in the three experimental groups’ gained scores. Thus the null hypothesis is accepted. The mean gained scores for total male and female participants in the three experimental groups are 1.7556 and 2.5778, respectively. The descriptive statistics for the two groups are displayed in Table 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description Statistics for Gained Score of the Female and Male of the Experimental Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 below displays the difference between the improvement from the pretest to the posttest for male and female participants in the experimental group due to the treatment.
According to the analysis of findings in the study, the following conclusion could be drawn: Gender of the learners had nothing to do with different types of applied feedback and the teachers who teach in mixed classes can also take advantage of the results of the current study.

Language learners’ gender has been a problematic issue with regard to the application of different types of corrective feedback. Different results were reported by various researchers, who conducted studies on the relationship between the gender of learners and corrective feedback. In a study, Zarei (2002) found that there is no special reaction from males when there is no correction, whereas the female find it ineffective. In addition, female students find direct corrective expressions more favorable than male students. The results of the mentioned studies revealed that there is no consensus on the relationship between the learners’ gender and their reaction to corrective feedback in EFL context. Consequently, the obtained result of the current study was justifiable which showed gender has no relationship with the applied corrective feedback. The results illustrated in Tables 1., 3., 5., and 7 reveal that there is no gender difference among the participants of this study in terms of the type of corrective feedback, which they receive.

REFERENCES


