

# Effects of Implicit and Explicit Teacher Written Corrective Feedback on Adult Learners' Written Grammatical Accuracy

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## Abstract

The purpose of this experimental research is to investigate different forms of teacher written corrective feedback to shed light on which form is the most effective to the acquisition of adverbs of manner. Researchers measure the acquisition of this specific device as a strategy to guide learners into a practice of producing more effective written communication. This research focuses on two experimental groups and one control group from a university language center. Each of these groups includes seven intermediate-level, (B2) learners, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

To achieve their purpose, researchers have implemented different corrective feedback strategies such as implicit and explicit teacher written corrective feedback in each of these groups. Correspondingly, the research design uses a mixed method approach to data collection which includes three written tasks, two open-ended questionnaires and teacher observations. Findings suggest explicit teacher written corrective feedback to be more effective in increasing adult B2 learners' acquisition of adverbs of manner when contrasted to implicit teacher written

corrective feedback or no corrective feedback over a short-term period. Specifically findings suggest explicit teacher written corrective feedback supports (B2) learners' proper use of adverbs of manner which allows learners to express themselves more descriptively in their written output. Results also suggest implicit corrective feedback could motivate and foster autonomous and collaborative learning practices in adult, (B2) learners.

Further findings propose learners formed a positive perspective of explicit and implicit written feedback after receiving it and they believe their feedback to be advantageous to their language learning in reference to developing more effective communication skills in written form. Suggestions for future research include a larger treatment groups, a longer data collection period and various grammar devices with learners of different profiles and proficiency levels.

## Resumen\*\*\*

El propósito de este proyecto experimental es investigar diferentes formas de corrección docente en la escritura para encontrar la forma más efectiva en la adquisi-

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## Key words:

teacher written corrective feedback, implicit feedback, explicit feedback, adult intermediate learners, self-directed learning, autonomous learning, collaborative learning, written tasks, effective communication strategies.

## Palabras clave:

corrección docente escrita, realimentación implícita, realimentación explícita, adultos aprendices nivel intermedio, aprendizaje auto dirigido, aprendizaje colaborativo, tareas escritas, efectivas estrategias comunicativas.

ción de adverbios de modo. Los investigadores miden la adquisición de este dispositivo gramatical como una estrategia para guiar a los aprendices hacia una práctica de producción escrita más efectiva. Esta investigación se centra en dos grupos experimentales y un grupo de control del centro de lenguas de una universidad. Cada uno de los grupos cuenta con diez aprendices de nivel intermedio (B2), de acuerdo al Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas (MCERL).

Para lograr su propósito, los investigadores implementan diferentes estrategias de realimentación correctiva como; corrección implícita y explícita en la escritura en cada uno de los grupos. Paralelamente, el diseño de investigación usa un enfoque mixto el cual incluye tres tareas escritas, dos cuestionarios abiertos y observaciones por parte del profesor de los grupos. Los resultados indican que la realimentación explícita en la escritura es más efectiva en el incremento de la adquisición de adverbios de modo en aprendices adultos (B2), comparado con los efectos de la corrección escrita implícita docente o ninguna realimentación correctiva en un periodo de corto plazo. Por consiguiente, estos resultados sugieren que la realimentación correctiva explícita es más útil en ayudar a los aprendices (B2) en el uso de los adverbios de modo. De esta forma, los aprendices pueden expresarse más descriptivamente en su producción escrita.

Los resultados también sugieren que la realimentación implícita puede motivar y fomentar el aprendizaje autónomo y colaborativo en aprendices adultos (B2). Los resultados revelan que los aprendices tienen una perspectiva positiva con respecto a sus correcciones escritas realimentarias docentes explícitas e implícitas y consideran las correcciones convenientes para su aprendizaje de una segunda lengua con respecto al desarrollo de habilidades comunicativas en la escritura. Sugerencias para futuras investigaciones incluyen la investigación con grupos más grandes, más tiempo para la recolección de información y más dispositivos gramaticales con diferentes perfiles y niveles de competencia.

## Introduction

This experimental research sheds light on the most beneficial teacher written corrective feedback to increase adult, (B2) learners' written grammatical accuracy to more effectively communicate in written form when using adverbs of manner.

According to the researchers' hypothesis there is no major difference suggesting any advantage to using implicit or explicit teacher written corrective feedback to improve learners' written grammatical accuracy when using adverbs of manner in a series of written tasks over a short time period. However, implicit correction could better foster self-directed learning in adult (B2) language learners when compared to explicit teacher written corrective feedback or no teacher written corrective feedback. This research is a mixed-method study; therefore, researchers collect qualitative and quantitative data by using three different forms of data collection tools.

These tools include two open-ended questionnaires, three written tasks and teacher observations. Researchers use these in five interventions which take place during class time in a face-to-face context.

## Objectives

1. Identify the most effective written corrective feedback form for the acquisition of adverbs of manner.
2. Examine how teacher corrective feedback might be used to support learners' development of more effective written communication.

## Method

### Data Collection Procedures Intervention procedure for Questionnaire

Course teacher administered an open-ended questionnaire in the target language in a face-to-face context to learners during the first week and, again, administered this same questionnaire to learners during the last week the course. This questionnaire contains three questions which focus on learners' opinions and perceptions of teacher written corrective feedback.

Researchers use the same questionnaire format in both administration processes so they are able to compare data from before and after learners receive specific types of written corrective feedback. Course teacher distributes these questionnaires to the learners in paper-based form.

### Intervention Procedure for administration and Treatment of Written Tasks

Researchers administered written tasks to learners in their respective treatment groups. They administered the first written task during the first week of learners' course; the second was administered during the middle of the course, and the third during the last week of the course.

Researchers provided a specific type or combination of teacher written corrective feedback to all of the three written tasks after learners had successfully completed each one. The course teacher managed these written corrections with the assistance of a co-researcher, an American English teacher, who did not have substantial contact with learners. These corrections are in paper-based form. The course teacher photocopied

and returned these written tasks with corrections to learners in person. Experimental groups one and three received different forms of focused correction on their written usage of adverbs of manner.

Conversely, the control group, which is the second group, received a mixture of focused correction on punctuation and structure unrelated to the target grammatical device. This second group did not receive correction on adverbs of manner and, therefore, is justified as a control group.

## Description and Designation of correctional Treatment for Experimental Groups

This research consists of three separate groups. Each group has seven learners who individually provide their written output and subsequently receive written corrective treatment on three short, written tasks from the co-researchers. These tasks share similar content and identical directions.

Researchers treat the first experimental group with focused implicit teacher corrective feedback. The second experimental group serves as a control group; accordingly, corrections given to this group are an equal combination of focused implicit and focused explicit teacher corrective feedback. However, the second group is treated as receiving no written corrections in the data analysis as their corrections do not address the device of focus, adverbs of manner. Researchers, instead, focus this control group's correction to sentence coherence and cohesion instead of the target grammatical device. This decision reflects the need to uphold the ethical values of this research. The third group receives focused explicit corrective feedback on the target grammar device.

## Results

As this research is mixed method in its approach, these data are triangulated and, therefore, support one another. These quantitative data from three written tasks illustrate learners' accuracy when using adverbs of manner in their written output. Additionally, these qualitative data illustrate learners' perception of different forms of teacher written corrective feedback taken from two questionnaires before and after receiving their feedback. Teacher observations, over the course of the three written tasks, also contribute to these qualitative data. Data from the second and third written tasks suggest explicit corrective feedback is the most effective in promoting gains in learners' written grammatical accuracy in regard to the use of adverbs of manner. The third group provided the highest number of correct examples using adverbs of manner on the second and third written tests. The performance on the second and third written tests is signi-

ficant as it shows a learners' response after receiving written corrective feedback. This supports Chandler's (2003) study on direct corrective feedback, or explicit corrective feedback, as supporting the largest accuracy gains, not only in revisions, but also in subsequent writing. Studies by Ellis et al. (2007) and Ashwell (2000) also support corrective feedback as advantageous in increasing learner written grammatical accuracy. Moreover, data from the second questionnaire reflect learners' preference for explicit corrective feedback. These data suggest learners believe explicit corrective feedback is crucial to their language learning process. Learners from the other two groups share this view of written corrective feedback as an integral part of their language learning as well.

Data from teacher observations also support explicit corrective feedback as being advantageous to learners. The course teacher observed learners in the third group were able to distinguish between adverb and adjective forms after receiving and analyzing the explicit written corrective feedback given to them. Furthermore, the teacher detected these learners appreciated receiving explicit written corrective feedback and were anxious to share this feedback with their peers. Ellis (2006) also found data to support the advantages of explicit corrective feedback over implicit feedback in grammaticality judgment tests which are similar to the written tasks researchers used in this research. Schmidt (1990), providing further support, explains explicit correction allows learners to consciously notice their errors; it is this noticing which controls access to conscious knowledge. Researchers feel it is this knowledge that allowed learners in this study to acquire adverbs of manner.

While data from the three written tasks, the two questionnaires and teacher observations suggest explicit written corrective feedback to be most effective, these data also propose implicit corrective feedback to be more advantageous in promoting B2 learners' grammatical accuracy gains compared to similar profile learners who received no written corrective feedback. Data from the second and third written tasks illustrate a much larger improvement in learners' written grammatical accuracy in usage of adverbs of manner after they received implicit written corrective feedback as opposed to the written grammatical accuracy demonstrated by learners who received no written corrective feedback.

Ferris (2002) found similar results which suggest indirect correction is effective in fostering acquisition. Data from the first and second questionnaire also propose learners who received implicit written corrective feedback preferred knowing where they made errors in each of the three written tasks, but not having the correct answers given to them. Data from teacher observations also suggest learners in the first group view their implicit corrections as a challenge. Accordingly, data from the two questionnaires and teacher observations have led researchers to the opinion that learners used this challenge as a form of motivation to continue searching for more information to rectify their written errors outside of class. These actions, which learners in the first group acted on in response to implicit written corrective feedback, were independent and collaborative in their manner.

As aforementioned, triangulation of these data suggests any form of written corrective feedback to be more advantageous than no feedback. This perspective parallels Ellis (1991) who states in order for acquisition to take place learners must notice, compare, and integrate feedback. Ashwell (2000) also argues corrective feedback improves grammatical accuracy in written output in adult second language learners. These data also suggest the higher the degree of explicitness contained in this written feedback, the more advantageous it should be for supporting improvement in B2, adult learners' written grammatical accuracy when using adverbs of manner. However, implicit corrective feedback could be more advantageous than explicit written corrective feedback in challenging learners; this, consequently, could motivate B2 learners to practice autonomous and collaborative SDL strategies outside of the classroom.

These findings support and make clearer the first objective of this research: to identify the most effective written corrective feedback form for the acquisition of adverbs of manner. Focusing on this objective, triangulated data suggest explicit written corrective feedback to be the most beneficial in promoting gains in learners' written grammatical accuracy in reference to this grammar device. Researchers suggest one benefit of explicit corrective feedback is that it contains explicit knowledge. Ellis et al. (2004) link explicit knowledge to a conscious awareness of grammatical rules and the knowledge to correctly label and verbalize these rules.

This knowledge could support learners' acquisition of grammar rules, and these rules could support an improvement in learners' written grammatical accuracy. In reference to the second objective – to examine how teacher corrective feedback might be used to support learners' development of more effective written

communication – triangulated data suggest researchers could support arguments for benefits from the usage of explicit as well as implicit written corrective feedback. The first suggestion is the more explicit this feedback, the more grammatically accurate and, consequently, the more effective learners' written grammatical communication could become in response to the feedback. The second suggestion for teacher usage of written corrective feedback is implicit corrective feedback could create a challenge in B2 learners.

This challenge could motivate these learners to practice SDL strategies inside and outside the classroom. Accordingly, Nunan and Lamb (1996) argue if learners are to learn anything at all, they have to do the learning for themselves. Accordingly, these learners could gain more explicit knowledge from their SDL practices and could become more effective written communicators as well. In concern to the research question, findings from data from the second and third written tasks suggest B2 learners who receive explicit corrective feedback perform better when correctly using adverbs of manner in their written output and are able to more effectively communicate when compared to learners who have received implicit or no written corrective feedback. One possible reason for an increase in performance with explicit written corrective feedback could be due to it containing metalinguistic feedback as well as the provision of correct forms. This com-

combination of metalinguistic and form feedback may aid learners' effectiveness at raising their awareness of how to more correctly use adverbs of manner in their written output.

Additionally, triangulated data suggest B2 learners who receive explicit corrective feedback more quickly acquire adverbs of manner when compared to learners who receive implicit written correction. The explicit correction of learners' errors may have activated learners' noticing of their gaps between the target form and their existing interlanguage forms.

Consequently, learners may restructure their interlanguage based on these corrections. Accordingly, these findings suggest explicit correction best helped learners to notice their mistakes when using adverbs of manner. Explicit correction could also have created an opportunity for learners to compare and update their use of adverbs of manner with their own limited interlanguage rules for this device.

Moreover, these triangulated data suggest explicit written corrective feedback activated learners noticing more than implicit written corrective feedback.

Researchers believe this result is due to implicit corrective feedback not fully supporting learners' opportunity to compare the correct form of adverbs of manner in their existing interlanguage.

## Discussion

In reference to aforementioned suggestions from triangulated data, adult intermediate language learners could benefit from explicit written teacher correction in activities or tasks in which they produce written output in an attempt to acquire adverbs of manner. One benefit could include an increase in learners' written grammatical accuracy when using this device over the short-term in subsequent writings. However, implicit teacher written corrective feedback could support learners to become more self-directed. This type of feedback could promote an increase in learners' participation in collaborative learning behaviors such as sharing work which their teachers have revised with peers. Therefore, researchers promote the usage of implicit teacher written corrective feedback if the aim is to support SDL through peer collaboration.

Focusing on these benefits, researchers suggest any degree of corrective feedback could be more advantageous to using no written corrective feedback in the language learning classroom; accordingly, teachers should implement some form of written corrective feedback in their classrooms.

This measure to implement written feedback could include supportive online tools for more effective SDL strategies which this feedback could foster. For example, implicit

corrective feedback on a grammar device could include encouragement to use appropriate online grammar exercises, tasks or quizzes to help learners to notice and to correct their written errors or to research to find out more about a specific topic related to the target language and their learning needs.

## Recommendations for Further Research

Conclusions from this research highlight a possible difference in degrees of written feedback effectiveness and an increase in adult intermediate-level learners' written grammatical accuracy. Accordingly, researchers recommend a larger-scale study be undertaken in this area of written corrective feedback in regard to learners' written grammatical accuracy. Studies could be beneficial not only for adult participants possessing intermediate proficiency levels, but for varied age levels and proficiency levels of language learners as well. A much larger number of participants could also promote an increase in data validity. Along with a larger number of participants, further research into the effectiveness of various forms of written corrective feedback could benefit from longer data collection periods. This extended period of research time could allow for a constructive comparison of various forms of written corrective for short and long-term benefits. For example, data from this research suggest explicit feedback as more effective in increasing learners' written grammatical accuracy when using adverbs of manner; however, it is unclear if this suggested trend would continue over a longer time period. Furthermore, electronic means of data collection could prove advantageous for a larger-scale research.

Additional studies into written teacher corrective feedback could focus on different grammatical devices, other than verb in combination with an adverb of manner. This variety in grammar devices could prove constructive to advancing knowledge in the area of teacher corrective feedback.

Researchers also suggest further investigation into written corrective feedback and its effects on motivating SDL strategies in adult intermediate language learners. A comparison of different forms of written corrective feedback and their suggested effects on specific learning strategies could be beneficial as well. This research should compare short-term and long term effects of written corrective feedback on these learning strategies and their relationship to life-long learning. Specifically, research could further delve into learners' perceptions of written corrective feedback and its importance in their language learning process. Lastly, future research could explore noticing and its role in relation to learning strategies and written corrective feedback.



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