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The Effectiveness of Oral Corrective Feedback in the Acquisition of Third-Person Singular‘s’ in Iranian EFL Context

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Abstract

Focus on form through oral corrective feedback has been the center of many L2 learning investigations in recent decades. Although research has been abundantly done on the impact of different single-feedback types, not many studies have included combinational feedback strategy, especially as regards the mastery of both explicit and implicit knowledge of morpheme ‘s’ by EFL students in Iran. Therefore, the present work attempted to compare the effectiveness of unmarked recast, explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation, and mixed feedback in the expansion of knowledge of third-person marker ‘s’ in Iranian task-based language teaching context, employing a pretest/posttest design. To this end, forty-eight lower-intermediate learners of EFL were selected as participants. Every feedback type was supplied to an experimental group through story retelling and picture description tasks. Control group, however, was not provided with any intervention and feedback. Untimed grammaticality judgment and elicited oral imitation tests were used as measurement tools. Results of Descriptive Statistics, One-Way Between Groups ANCOVA and Tukey’s Multiple Comparison Post-Hoc Test illustrated that all types of feedback were relatively effective. Nevertheless, mixed feedback and explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation lead to overall acquisition. The insights provided might benefit EFL instructors in Iran in employing the best way(s) of corrective feedback to foster language learning in task-based teaching approach, which can promote Iranian English learners’ acquisition of third person singular‘s’.

***Keywords*:** Explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation, focus on form, mixed feedback, oral corrective feedback, unmarked recast

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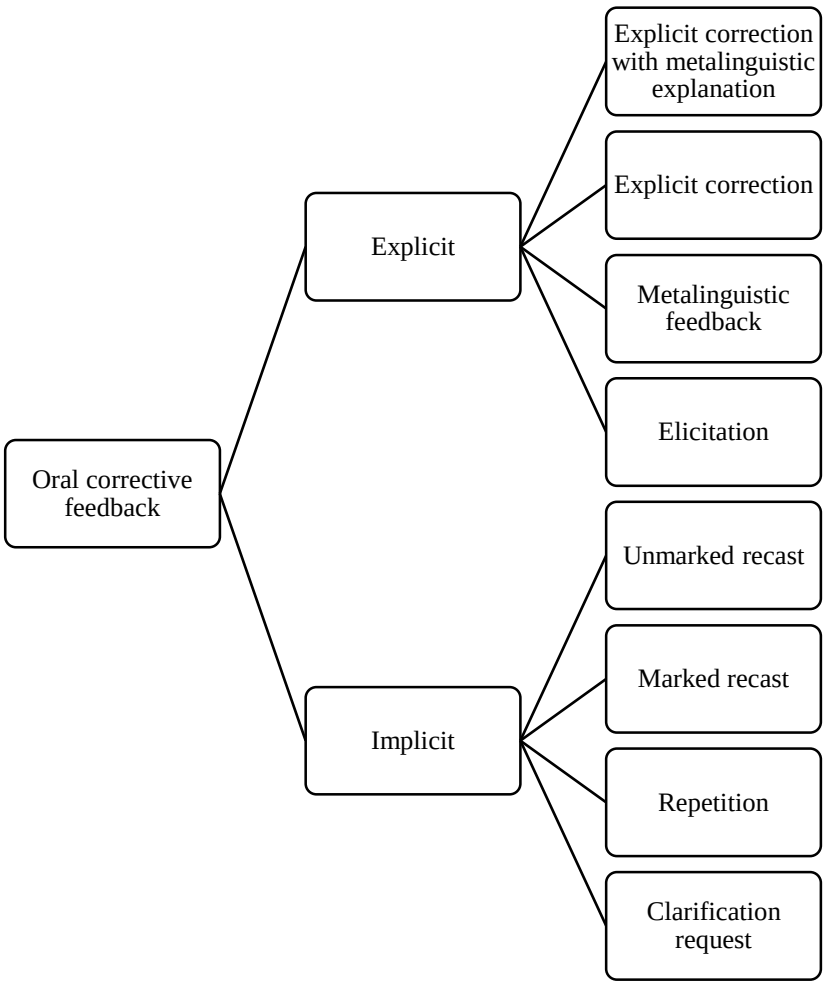
1. Introduction

Within task-based language teaching (TBLT) framework, focus on form (Fofo) is done by the incorporation of oral corrective feedback (CF) to respond to learners' errors (Long, 2016), using focused tasks (East, 2021). This approach has been advanced by Long (Ellis, 2016), emphasizing the need to attend to form while communicating.

Oral CF is the responses generated by an educator as reaction against the errors in speaking made by learners (Li et al., 2022). The most comprehensive categorization of oral CF, suggested by Lyster et al. (2013), is illustrated below:

Figure 1

Oral CF Types (adapted from Lyster et al., 2013)



Explicit and implicit oral CF have been verified practical in treating learners' errors (Ellis, 2008) based on a large collection of research studies (e.g., Ellis et al., 2002b; Li & Vuono, 2019; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Nassaji, 2017). This, in turn, promotes knowledge acquisition and L2 learning (Ellis, 2009; VanPatten et al., 2020). Explicit feedback overtly alerts that there is a linguistic inaccuracy and supplies the accurate form. Implicit feedback, however, is an overt corrective reconstruction of a deficient utterance (Ellis, 2008; Ellis, 2021).

Despite the fact that a wealth of studies has confirmed the superiority of explicit feedback (e.g., Lyster, 2015; Nassaji, 2009, Rohollahzadeh Ebadi, 2015), some others have not shown any dissimilarity concerning the impacts of implicit and explicit types upon treating errors (e.g., Erlam & Loewen, 2010; Loewen & Nabei, 2007; Zhao & Ellis, 2022), or even more efficacy of implicit correction than the explicit (e.g., Ghahari & Piruznejad, 2016; Li, 2013). In addition, a composite of both explicit and implicit forms of CF, as a mixed-feedback strategy, has turned out to be as effective as or even more effective than a single-type feedback (Kartchava & Ammar, 2014; Sarandi, 2017).

Therefore, there has always been controversy over the most effectual CF type in a classroom situation. On the one side, although the effects of implicit and explicit feedback as single-feedback types have been extensively researched in Iran, there are not many studies comparing the efficacy of mixed feedback, and there is still need to further examine the impact of this feedback form (Lyster et al., 2013; Sarandi, 2017). On the other, as English morpheme 's' is among the least explored elements in CF domain in Iranian context, more investigation seems necessary, as this feature is among the most challenging structures to learn (Ellis et al., 2009), especially for Iranian learners (Hayati et al., 2011). For these reasons, the current research sought to probe the efficacy of unmarked recast, explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation, and mixed feedback in the promotion of explicit and implicit sorts of knowledge of third-person 's' by Iranian EFL students. In doing so, this research question was answered:

Is there any significant difference among unmarked recast, explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation, mixed feedback, and no feedback in Iranian lower-intermediate EFL learners' acquisition of third person singular's'?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Background

2.1.1. TBLT and FoF

TBLT has been criticized for not being able to develop complete accuracy (Long, 2016). Therefore, to incorporate FoF, CF can be applied via focused tasks, such as picture description and story retelling (Ellis, 2008), to encourage the use of a special language feature (García Mayo, 2018), while meaning receives primary attention (Ellis, 2003; VanPatten et al., 2020).

2.1.2. Oral CF

Oral CF is any response to learners' errors during communication (Ellis, et al., 2006). The constructive effect exerted by oral CF in second language acquisition (Wang & Li, 2021) is rooted in several theories of L2 learning, specifically Long's Interaction Hypothesis (Liao & Zhang, 2022), according to which language development can be a result of implicit negotiation of meaning for output modification when there is gap in the learner's interlanguage (Yu, 2022). In addition, Noticing Hypothesis, by Schmidt, maintains that if learners deliberately attend to linguistic form, they will have greater opportunities to learn a second language (VanPatten et al., 2020). The former hypothesis mainly highlights the significance of implicit feedback, while the latter does explicit feedback (Yu, 2022).

2.1.2.1. Unmarked Recast. Unmarked recast includes no sign of the existence of an error or any explanation over its nature, but the reformulation of it indirectly (Farrokhi, 2005). Negative evidence provided by recast through interaction has been confirmed to promote L2 learning (VanPatten et al., 2020) since unmarked recast, in particular, does not impede flow of communication while giving input (Lyster et al., 2013).

2.1.2.2. Explicit Correction With Metalinguistic Explanation. With this type of feedback, the teacher not only states that there is an error (Xie & Yeung, 2018) and corrects it (Lyster et al., 2013), but also helps learners establish a form-meaning association through giving metalinguistic information (Ellis, 2008). This consciousness-raising through the input in an interactional context can lead to intake and ultimate L2 development (Mitchell et al., 2019).

2.1.2.3. Mixed Feedback. As a relatively new form of oral CF, mixed feedback is a combinational approach, merging different types of both explicit

and implicit CF in different ways. One mixing technique, which is an equal alternation between the feedback types from one error to another, has been practiced by Kartchava (2012). This sort of feedback has been proven more practical than single-type ones, as it more resembles what happens in real classroom settings (Lyster et al., 2013) and establishes a better L2 acquisition context by incorporating positive effects of different feedback types (Goo & Mackey, 2013). Furthermore, it was found to be as at least effective as explicit feedback or even more effective than that in L2 development (Kartchava & Ammar, 2014; Sarandi, 2017; Yilmaz, 2013).

2.1.2.4. Effectiveness of Oral CF. Positive influence of oral CF on L2 development (Mapunda & Kyara, 2023) has been endorsed by most of the language acquisition theories, such as Noticing Hypothesis, Interaction Hypothesis, Output Hypothesis and so on (Yu, 2022). Both implicit and explicit feedback have been proven effective by a wealth of observational and experimental studies both in laboratory and classroom settings (e.g., García Mayo & Milla, 2021; Loewen & Nabei, 2007; Nassaji & Kartchava, 2020) since it is believed that oral CF modifies the output through meaning negotiation (East, 2021). However, there are mixed results in this regard. Some scholars assert that implicit feedback, like recast, outweighs explicit one in the course of time (e.g., Gooch et al., 2016; H. Li, 2018; Mackey & Goo, 2007) because, according to Interaction Hypothesis, recasts provide learners with an opportunity to make cognitive comparisons between the proper form given and their own erroneous formulations (Sarandi & Çelik, 2019).

Conversely, a bulk of other similar works (e.g., Ellis et al., 2006; Parkinson, 2001; Yu, 2022) have shown a noticeable advantage of explicit correction over implicit one, which is mainly, as Lyster et al. (2013) maintain, owing to the variety in the instructional intervention present in explicit CF in addition to the consciousness it develops in learners about the error and correction process (Ellis et al., 2006).

Mixed CF, too, has yielded to be effectual in promoting L2 in an array of studies (e.g., Kartchava, 2012; Sarandi, 2017; Yilmaz, 2013) due presumably to combining positive effects of diverse sorts of feedback (Goo & Mackey, 2013).

Nonetheless, there is promising evidence that no substantial discrepancy exists between implicit and explicit correction strategies when it comes to their effectiveness (Erlam & Loewen, 2010), confirmed through a

mass of explorations (e.g., Kim & Mathes, 2001, Sanz, 2003, as cited in Ellis, 2008; Zhao & Ellis, 2022).

2.1.2.5. Assessing the Efficacy of Oral CF. So as to assess the efficacy of oral CF, we need to estimate language users' ability in accurate application of a specific target element in their modified speech production (Narimani Vahedi et al., 2018), which mirrors their explicit and implicit knowledge (Ellis, 2008). An exceptionally valid and reliable test of implicit type of knowledge is elicited oral imitation (Kim & Nam, 2017). Similarly, untimed grammaticality judgment is a valid and reliable test of explicit type of knowledge (Ellis, 2008).

2.1.2.6. Oral CF and Third-Person Singular's'. A plethora of studies (e.g., Kim & Han, 2007; Mackey et al., 2000) have been conducted to evaluate the influence of oral CF on morphosyntactic features in classroom settings, probably because of the importance of grammar knowledge in accurate language production (Long, 1991). Of the grammar features, third person 's' has been the target of some CF studies, since despite being an easy structure concerning explicit type of knowledge, its correct application, specifically in time-bound conditions, can cause trouble even for high-level learners (Ellis, 2009), as it needs tremendous time and endeavor to become entirely internalized (Sarandi, 2017).

2.2. Empirical Background

Sarandi (2017) explored the efficacy of mixed oral CF upon the internalization of third-person marker, employing a pretest/posttest design. Twenty-four EFL university scholars had been put into one control and one experimental group. To conduct this research, the researcher employed oral narrative task and tests of untimed grammaticality judgment, elicited oral imitation, and error correction. After the pretest, instruction was given in the form of mixed feedback, implicit followed by explicit. Then, the researcher administered an immediate and, then, a delayed posttest. The conclusions illustrated an overall advantage of the experimental group. This highlights the efficacy of mixed feedback with respect to the acquisition of third-person suffix's'.

Another experimental study was conducted by Zheng (2019) to probe the usefulness of explicit and implicit feedback types as regards the expansion of English subjunctive mood among Chinese college students. The participants were 120 non-English major students from three classes. Two of the classes formed the experimental groups, while the other one was the control group. All

three research groups worked on four communicative tasks, during which one group was offered metalinguistic feedback, one was given recast, and the control group went on without feedback. The results achieved from posttests demonstrated that although either feedback form was helpful in fostering the internalization of the investigated form by the participants, explicit feedback turned out to prove more beneficial than the implicit one.

Zhao and Ellis (2022) also examined the relative impacts made by explicit and implicit CF upon the promotion of morpheme‘s’. One hundred and nine Chinese university majors were put into four research groups, namely implicit feedback, explicit feedback, no feedback, and control. Instructional mediation was done through three communicative tasks. Experimental groups received the assigned feedback, while no tasks or feedback were given to the control group. The researchers used untimed grammaticality judgment and elicited oral imitation tests during pretest, immediate posttest and delayed posttest. The overall outcome showed that although explicit feedback prompted more moves of uptake including repair, there was no distinction between explicit and implicit feedback concerning the ultimate mastery of the target feature.

Likewise, to measure the influence of recast on the development of third-person marker ‘s’, Lv and Liu (2022) conducted a study on recast, complexity of task and young students’ L2 advancement in a primary school in China. Ninety-two learners formed three groups according to the task difficulty, which would be given to them. After taking the pretest, treatment started, during which all three groups were supplied with recast when committing an error with regard to third-person ‘s’. Right after the treatment, different versions of the pretest were administered in posttest occasions so as to measure any pretest-posttest differences. Overall, recast was discovered to have beneficial impacts upon the acquisition of the structure under investigation.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Forty-eight male learners in four EFL classes of 12 students each at lower-intermediate level being instructed based on TBLT approach at an English education center in Tabriz, Iran, participated in the study. They had relatively similar individual characteristics of age, native language, and English language background. Participants’ ages ranged from 13 to 16 (Mean = 14).

3.2. Materials and Instruments

3.2.1. Story Retelling (SR) Task

As a validated instructional procedure (French, 1988), SR is a technique to prompt spontaneous speech for research purposes (Gazella & Stockman, 2003). Here, SR task, which aimed to elicit the formulation of sentences with third-person singular verbs, included a picture sequence narrating a story, the written format of the story containing the structure under investigation, a list of required verbs for reproducing the story, and a prompt to help the participants. This task was designed in three different formats, differing slightly in their written accounts.

3.2.2. Picture Description (PD) Task

Pictures, as valid educational tools, can stimulate students' interpretation and production in a communicative fashion (Lavalle & Briesmaster, 2017). In this study, PD task included different sequences of pictures representing some characters' typical day, intending to induce the production of sentences encompassing third-person singular verbs. Also, a prompt accompanied the task to aid the participants. Three distinct formats of this task were made, differing in the arrangement of the pictures.

3.2.3. Elicited Oral Imitation (EOI) Test

For evaluating the implicit knowledge, a 24-statement EOI test was designed in three versions. Twelve of the sentences were grammatical and twelve ungrammatical. Eight of the statements tapped the target element, eight of them targeted another grammatical feature, and the other eight were distractors. Four target statements were grammatically accurate, while the remaining four inaccurate. Also, a scrambled combination of both old items, presented during the instruction, and new items were employed to include item learning in addition to generalizability (Ellis et al., 2006). The index of reliability for this tool was calculated as 0.72.

3.2.4. Untimed Grammaticality Judgement (UGJ) Test

In order to measure explicit knowledge, a UGJ test was developed in three versions. This instrument consisted of twenty-four items, half of which correct and the other half incorrect. Eight of them tapped the target structure, eight were in form of another structure, and the remaining eight were distractors. Out of the eight target statements, four were grammatically correct and four incorrect. In addition, a combination of formerly-practiced and novel

sentences was included in this test to check both item learning and generalizability (Ellis et al., 2006). The reliability measure for this instrument was 0.78.

3.3. Procedure

Four intact classes of lower-intermediate level were selected through Convenience Sampling. Each class, then, was appointed to a research group of explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation, unmarked recast, mixed feedback, and no feedback via random assignment. However, to reaffirm the participants' level of English and check the groups' homogeneity, The Oxford Placement Test was conducted. The One-Way ANOVA test exhibited no significant difference among the mean scores of the four research groups ($p = .11 > .05$). During the research, all four groups took one pretest, one immediate posttest and one delayed posttest. Nonetheless, only the experimental groups underwent the instructional intervention plus feedback, while no intervention or feedback was supplied to the control group.

3.3.1. Pretest

A pretest was given some days prior to the instruction. As with the EOI test, each participant took the test individually. The researcher read each statement in the test aloud, and the participants immediately provided their oral response. That is, they were instructed to repeat each sentence in grammatically right form. However, only the items pertaining to the target element were the focus of analysis. A score of 1 was given when a correct statement was imitated correctly or an incorrect one was corrected. Contrarily, a score of 0 was allocated when the target structure was not used, the grammatical statement was repeated incorrectly, or the ungrammatical item was not corrected.

For the UGJ test, similarly, the participants sat the test one by one. This test was conducted in written form. However, each item was given to the participants separately so as to avoid any generalization from the previous ones. Participants were to decide whether a statement was correct or incorrect. Here, the participants were allowed to think about each statement before checking them grammatical or ungrammatical. Test takers received a score of 1 for each right answer and 0 for wrong ones in respect of the sentences containing the target feature. As with the previous statement, only the items including the target structure were the purpose of the measurement.

3.3.2. Instructional Intervention

Instruction started a few days following the pretest. Within each experimental group, three subgroups of four were formed so that each one can work on one version of the designed tasks. The whole instruction took approximately 180 minutes (3 sessions of 60 minutes). Every one of the experimental groups was given relatively same hours of instructional intervention (approximately 60 minutes) in order to accomplish both tasks and receive feedback. In addition, distribution of different feedback types given was as follows, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Number of Feedback Received by Each Group

Feedback	Total	Implicit group	Explicit group	Mixed group
Number	77	26	27	24

In all experimental groups, each subgroup received one version of the SR task. In a few minutes, participants read the story and, collectively, prepared to retell it. To do so, they were allowed to use the picture sequence and the verbs given, but not to copy the written account. Also, they were not permitted to make any written notes. Then, a representative narrated it to the whole class. Furthermore, to maintain the communicativeness of the task performance, the researcher requested all groups to listen carefully to the others' narrations to record the order of the events.

In the same session, PD task was introduced. Again, each subgroup received one version of the task. They were given a few minutes to prepare their description. However, they could not write down their prepared narration. After preparing, a representative narrated it to the whole class. To preserve communicativeness, groups were asked to listen to one another and number the pictures in the order they heard.

During the instruction, explicit feedback group received explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation, while implicit feedback group received unmarked recast when making any mistakes while producing the structure under investigation. Mixed feedback group, however, received a combination of both explicit and implicit feedback as unmarked recast and explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation, respectively. Here, the researcher alternated between the two feedback types as equally as possible in reaction to the emerging errors. Instances of the exchanges including learners' suffix's' production and reproduction, and teacher's feedback are below:

Extract 1:

1 P1: she *is watering* the seed....
(Participant's incorrect production)
2 INS: yes. She *waters* the seed.
(Instructor's unmarked recast)
3 P1: she *waters* the seed....
(Participant's correct reproduction)

Extract 2:

1 P2: ... the boy *get* dressed.
(Participants' incorrect production)
2 INS: no! Incorrect! The boy *gets* dressed. Boy is a singular subject. After
That, we should use third-person form of the verb.
(Instructor's explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation)
3 P2: Aha! The boy *gets* dressed.
(Participant's correct reproduction)

Unlike the experimental groups, however, control group continued their regular classroom instructions and did not receive any of the stated instructional materials, and consequently, any form of discussed feedback.

3.3.3. Posttest

A couple of days after the instruction, the researcher administered immediate posttest, precisely duplicating the pretest procedure, elaborated on before. About two weeks following the first posttest session, the researcher conducted delayed posttest, again exactly similar to the procedures undertaken during the previous two testing sessions.

3.4. Data Analysis

Version 26 of Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) was employed for analyzing the data obtained for the purpose of suggesting an answer to the formulated research question. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were provided. To sum up and report the collected data, measures of Descriptive Statistics like means and standard deviations were computed. Furthermore, One-way between groups analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and Tukey's multiple comparison post-hoc test were conducted for finding any significant difference within each research group and among all research groups, respectively.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

Table 2 below compares the mean scores of the participants' EOI test among four research groups during three testing occasions.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for the EOI Test Scores Among Four Research Groups in Three Testing Occasions

	Pretest		Immediate posttest		Delayed posttest	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Explicit Feedback Group	19.58	4.10	24.00	5.16	25.50	3.60
Implicit Feedback Group	18.83	6.49	22.16	5.58	18.98	5.52
Mixed Feedback Group	19.20	5.29	23.08	5.37	24.54	4.56
Control Group	18.58	4.64	18.25	3.39	18.50	3.65

As shown in Table 2, the explicit group's mean score rose from the pretest (M=19.58) to the immediate posttest (M = 24.00) to the delayed posttest (M = 25.50). Implicit feedback group, however, showed an immediate improvement in their mean score (M = 22.16) but not an overall growth (M = 18.98). Mixed feedback group exhibited a somehow similar pattern to explicit group, with a surge in both their immediate (M = 23.08) and delayed performance (M=24.54). On the other hand, control group displayed no betterment during either immediate posttest (M=18.25) or delayed posttest (M=18.50).

Table 3 displays any significant difference in immediate posttest scores among four research groups in the test of EOI. As Table 3 makes it obvious, a statistically significant difference was found among the four groups of research in the immediate posttest in EOI test, $F(3, 45) = 7.01$, $p = .003 < .05$, partial eta squared = .305. This confirms the considerable impact of treatment on the test takers' instant construction of the structure in question. However, the effect size turned out to be moderate based on Cohen's (1988) guidelines. In addition, Post-Hoc Comparisons indicated that all groups of feedback did better compared to the control group, and explicit feedback group did noticeably different than the implicit and mixed feedback groups. In detail, explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation was the most effective feedback in promoting implicit variety of knowledge of the focused structure in the short run.

Table 3

One-Way Between Groups Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) for the Immediate Posttest Scores in EOI Test Among Four Research Groups

Source	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Corrected Model	284.039[a]	4	131.380	5.352	.004	.334
Intercept	685.185	1	685.185	32.391	.000	.503
Pretest	.319	1	.319	.017	.007	.001
Experimental Groups	284.039	3	172.131	7.012	.003	.305
Error	575.278	45	24.547			
Total	12593.000	48				
Corrected Total	1889.083	47				

Table 4 demonstrates any significant difference in the delayed posttest scores among four research groups in the EOI test.

Table 4

One-Way Between Groups Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) for the Delayed Posttest Scores in EOI Test Among Four Research Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1.985[a]	4	94.708	5.933	.002	.357
Intercept	333.079	1	333.079	43.791	.000	.578
Pretest	1.3265	1	1.3265	.004	.034	.010
Experimental Groups	1.985	3	.913	8.417	.012	.345
Error	210.448	45	15.964			
Total	11855.000	48				
Corrected Total	794.972	47				

The data obtained from Table 4 demonstrated a statistically significant difference among the four research groups in the delayed posttest scores in EOI test, $F(3, 45) = 8.417$, $p = .012 < .05$, partial eta squared = .34. So, it can be inferred that mediation exerted a marked influence upon the participants' performance over time. In addition, according to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, the effect size was moderate. Post-Hoc Comparisons, however, demonstrated that groups of explicit and mixed feedback surpassed both groups of implicit

and control. Moreover, implicit feedback group did not function differently compared with the control group, whereas explicit feedback group turned out to be significantly different from mixed feedback group. That is, although both of explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation and mixed feedback turned out to be constructive in the overall promotion of implicit form of target structure knowledge, greatest influence was recorded for explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation.

Table 5 gives information about the participants' mean scores in UGJ test among four research groups during three testing occasions.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for the UGJ Test Scores Among Four Research Groups in Three Testing Occasions

	Pretest		Immediate posttest		Delayed posttest	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Explicit Feedback Group	25.25	5.84	25.33	4.67	28.92	6.36
Implicit Feedback Group	25.08	6.21	28.67	5.24	25.88	4.94
Mixed Feedback Group	25.16	6.02	28.20	4.95	29.65	5.65
Control group	25.00	4.81	25.13	4.51	25.35	4.17

As can be seen in Table 5, there is an overall rise in the participants' mean score in the explicit feedback group (M = 28.92) although there is no immediate increase in their performance (M = 25.33). Implicit feedback group, in contrast, demonstrated some growth from the pretest (M = 25.08) to the immediate posttest (M = 28.67) but not to the delayed posttest (M = 25.88). Elsewhere, mixed feedback group experienced an overall growth from the pretest (M = 25.16) to the delayed posttest (M = 29.65). However, no improvement was experienced by the control group with regard to their mean score from the pretest (M = 25.00) to the delayed posttest (M = 25.35).

Table 6 below displays any significant difference in respect of scores of the immediate posttest among four research groups in UGJ test. Reporting on Table 6, a statistically significant difference was seen in the scores of immediate posttest among four research groups in UGJ test, $F(3, 45) = 11.232$, $p = .007 < .05$, partial eta squared = .661. It revealed that CF greatly affected the participants' scores of immediate posttest in UGJ test. It should also be noted that a large effect size was recorded based on Cohen's (1988) guidelines. Furthermore, Post-Hoc Comparisons indicated that both implicit and mixed feedback groups showed better performance than groups of explicit feedback

and control. In addition, implicit and mixed feedback groups significantly differed from one another. This means that both unmarked recast and mixed feedback had an immediate impact on the explicit knowledge of the focused structure gained by the participants although unmarked recast was relatively more effective.

Table 6

One-Way Between Groups Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) for the Immediate Posttest Scores in UGJ Test Among Four Research Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	102.789[a]	4	140.163	20.828	.000	.661
Intercept	1.637	1	1.637	48.091	.000	.600
Pretest	1.233	1	1533	.075	.785	.002
Experimental Groups	102.789	3	510.227	11.232	.007	.661
Error	222.767	45	14.336			
Total	16588.000	48				
Corrected Total	1343.556	47				

a. R Squared = .661 (Adjusted R Squared = .630)

Table 7 below indicates any significant difference in the delayed posttest scores among four research groups in UGJ test.

Table 7

One-Way Between Groups Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) for the Delayed Posttest Scores in UGJ Test Among Four Research Groups

Source	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Corrected Model	109.005[a]	4	66.448	3.110	.040	.226
Intercept	59.173	1	59.173	58.959	.000	.648
Pretest	23.122	1	23.122	5.763	.022	.153
Experimental Groups	109.005	3	79.502	4.658	.029	.325
Error	683.628	45	21.363			
Total	983.933	48				
Corrected Total	882.972	47				

Table 7 presented a statistically significant difference among the four research groups in the scores of delayed posttest in UGJ test, $F(3, 45) = 4.65$, $p = .029 < .05$, partial eta squared = .325. Accordingly, we can deduce that intervention remarkably influenced the participants' delayed posttest scores in UGJ test. In addition, according to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, the effect size was moderate. Post-Hoc Comparisons, however, demonstrated that explicit and mixed feedback groups outperformed both implicit and control groups. Mixed feedback group, in addition, differed significantly from explicit feedback group. In other words, mixed feedback group was the most effective in the mastery of the target element's explicit knowledge in the long run although explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation had positive impacts, too.

4.2. Discussion

In respect of the research question that inspected the efficacy of oral CF in the acquisition of third-person singular 's', mixed results were obtained. Implicit feedback given as unmarked recast had positive impacts upon the immediate improvement of the participants' explicit and implicit knowledge alike. This is a confirmation of Long's (2015) claim that "Recasts may function as crucial points at which implicit and explicit learning converge in optimal ways" (p. 55). This immediate knowledge enhancement can be justified by Long's Interaction Hypothesis (Liao & Zhang, 2022), which asserts that implicit feedback provides learners with the opportunity to compare what they made erroneously and the incoming correct input (Goo, 2020) through scaffolding learners to perform beyond their existing knowledge (East, 2021). This piece of finding highlights what Lv and Liu (2022) found, concluding an immediate impact of implicit feedback upon the mastery of target grammar feature. In contrast to what Lyster et al. (2013) suggest, however, the stated improvement did not last long since no overall knowledge acquisition was seen. This maintained that unmarked recast did not work well in ultimate promotion of the target structure, since learners were presumably unable to incorporate the structure in their interlanguage system. This piece of finding accents the fact that implicit feedback is not normally conceived as correction due to its non-salient nature (Ellis et al., 2006), especially among Iranian learners of English that are mainly acclimatized to overt correction of errors by the teacher. Another reason might be the participants' relatively low linguistic competence, as it has been confirmed that low level students do not benefit much from recasts because of their inability in recognizing them as correction (Goo, 2020). This contrasts with the discoveries of a group of past

inquiries (e.g., Gooch et al., 2016; H. Li, 2018; Mackey & Goo, 2007), where recast was found to be effective. In sum, no ultimate learning of third-person marker‘s’ has occurred by means of giving unmarked recast.

Regarding the influence of explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation upon the development of third-person‘s’ knowledge, quite consistent results were obtained. There was no immediate improvement of explicit knowledge, which might be justified by the fact that learners at this level already possess some explicit knowledge of third-person singular ‘s’, and did not have enough time yet to practice and assimilate the new knowledge into their lingual system. This is not in agreement with the findings of Zheng (2019), which demonstrated immediate impacts of explicit feedback. However, the long-lasting development of explicit knowledge is in congruence with Schmidt’s Noticing Hypothesis (VanPatten et al., 2020) stating that the consciousness raised during explicit feedback provision facilitates acquisition (Mitchell et al., 2019) by a deeper understanding it provides (Ellis, 2008). This overt awareness might also have resulted in learners’ more deliberate practice of the target feature, the impact of which is seen in the results of the delayed posttest. Additionally, explicit feedback can convert explicit knowledge to implicit knowledge (Ellis et al., 2006) that is evident in the immediate and overall implicit knowledge acquisition. This piece of finding confirms the results yielded by a wide array of past explorations (e.g., Ellis et al., 2006; Parkinson, 2001; Yu, 2022), which found explicit feedback as an effective tool in stretching knowledge. To sum up, explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation helped learners with the promotion of English morpheme‘s’.

Considering the efficacy of mixed feedback in the learning of third-person‘s’, consistent results were achieved. Both implicit and explicit knowledge types were developed not only immediately but also over time. Here, an alternation of explicit and implicit kinds of feedback was supplied evenly. Hence, the participants must have enjoyed the merits of the both forms at the same time, as discussed earlier. This mixed form, which combines implicit and explicit types of feedback (Goo & Mackey, 2013), supplies learners with benefits of both types simultaneously. Furthermore, based on the Counterbalance Hypothesis developed by Lyster and Mori, a balanced provision of implicit and explicit CF is likely to contribute to their efficacy, as it provides a better opportunity for learners to perceive the remedial nature of the implicit feedback (Kartchava, 2012). In other words, this alternated approach to correction causes learners to become more attentive to recasts as an advantage of previously given explicit feedback, which boosts the

productivity of implicit feedback beyond its sole capacity. This in in congruence with the results of a couple of studies (Kartchava & Ammar, 2014; Yilmaz, 2013) and agrees with what Sarandi (2017) concluded, confirming the positive impacts of mixed feedback on grammar acquisition. To conclude, mixed feedback also was effective in the overall learning of third-person marker‘s’.

With regard to the development of third-person marker without offering any types of feedback, predictable results were produced. There was neither immediate nor long-lasting acquisition of any type of implicit or explicit knowledge. This might supposedly be because when an error was committed and not addressed, there was no chance that learners become aware of them and receive the correct input since in Iranian context, learners seem to still be over-dependent on the input provided by teacher. As a result, with no teacher correction, they may not have noticed the errors and accordingly were not able to correct them and elevate their existing language levels. This highlights the need for FoF incorporation in TBLT (Long, 1998) and significance of error treatment in the eradication of linguistic errors and promotion of accuracy (Ellis, 2009) and, subsequently, in the overall process of teach (S. Li, 2018), which has been verified in an array of studies (e.g., Ellis et al., 2002a; Panova & Lyster, 2002). Also, a large body of research studies have proved that non-treatment of errors has mainly been outperformed by treatment of errors (e.g., Baleghizadeh & Derakhshesh, 2017; Ellis et al., 2006; Xie & Yeung, 2018). In sum, regular instruction with no CF did not improve the knowledge of morpheme‘s’.

By and large, all feedback types were found to be somehow effective, which agrees with the claim that “corrective feedback plays a pivotal role in the kind of scaffolding that teachers need to provide to individual learners to promote continuing L2 growth” (Lyster et al., 2013, p. 1). However, with regard to overall acquisition, unmarked recast failed to promote any long-lasting development of target structure knowledge, while both explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation and mixed feedback stretched students’ possessed knowledge of the feature in question. This means that explicit and mixed feedback outperformed implicit feedback, which is in line with the findings of Zheng (2019) that concluded a clear advantage of explicit feedback. This superiority of explicit feedback has been validated relatively extensively in the literature (Ellis, 2008) in a quite overwhelming variety of surveys (e.g., Carroll, 2001; Sheen, 2004, as cited in Ellis, 2008; Xie & Yeung, 2018) since it provides clearer accounts of the error (Panova & Lyster, 2002),

resulting in a deeper comprehension of the error's nature, more attendance to the feedback given and, finally, to acquisition of different structure areas (Sarandi, 2017), in particular lexical and grammatical ones (Panova & Lyster, 2002), especially when there is metalinguistic explanation that gives overt information about the erroneous form. Similarly, mixed feedback was advantageous because of including all merits of explicit feedback and accentuation of positives of implicit feedback owing to the juxtaposition with explicit feedback (Yilmaz, 2013). This feedback technique might have been beneficial as it provides a more realistic context of attending to form, the way it happens in real classroom situations (Lyster et al., 2013), which has been supported by the conclusions drawn from several works (e.g., Kartchava, 2012; Sarandi, 2017; Yilmaz, 2013). All in all, both explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation and mixed feedback turned out to be the most effective when it comes to third-person's' learning.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The findings of this research asserted the importance of oral CF in the mastery of third-person marker's' in Iranian EFL context. In detail, overall acquisition was attributed to explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation and mixed feedback, which accentuates the clear advantage of these two feedback types. Therefore, we can conclude that the application of explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation and mixed feedback work better in the Iranian EFL context, specifically for male teenage learners of lower proficiency levels.

The insights emerging upon the conclusions of this work can not only help Iranian EFL instructors rethink the significance of FoF in classroom situations, but provide them with a better understanding of the most effectual techniques of oral CF to use. This would, in turn, benefit Iranian EFL learners as it can encourage them to embrace opportunities to be corrected, develop their knowledge of the target feature and promote their overall learning.

However, there were some inevitable limitations due to administrative concerns. First, the researcher used a relatively small sample of participants with more or less similar individual attributes. Future studies can compensate for this shortcoming by enlarging the sample size and including a variety of individual differences, which may yield more varied results. Having participants from different proficiency levels, too, would broaden the scope of the research. Secondly, the present work employed only two most extreme types of CF. Similar studies can involve more types of feedback in order to

arrive at more detailed conclusions about their practicality. Finally, this research used two types of instructional tasks and only two measurement instruments. Future studies can recruit a wider variety of tasks, which can be complemented by the use of more measurement tools to evaluate the influence of oral CF more meticulously.

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