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Corrective versus Elaborative Feedback across Reading Task Modalities: The Case of EFL Students at Batna 2 University

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Abstract:
The present study investigates improving reading comprehension by using different feedback types: the elaborative which comprised of interpretation cues, and the corrective which was error correction. The study sampled 73 EFL students who received both forms of reviews as treatments during reading activities, and both were conditioned in terms of task repetition (repeated versus non-repeated) which was the replication or variance of the activities assigned, and task complexity (simple versus complex) which was the required/non-required use of reading structure properties. Results were inconclusive for the first hypothesis that elaborative form would yield a higher comprehension performance: while the corrective type was salient in repetition condition due to resource directing and transfer effects, the elaborative one was significant in the complexity condition resulted by the metalinguistic form of language between the complexities of text, task, and review. The second hypothesis was not fully confirmed that there was a correlation between the forms and modalities: repetition and type did not correlate with any of the treatments, but complexity exclusively showed strong correlation with the elaborative treatment thanks to attention channeling of cues. Finally, further research suggestions regarding reading comprehension and feedback were recommended.

Keywords: Complexity, Corrective Feedback, Elaborative Feedback, Repetition, Type

1. Introduction

1.1. Feedback Conceptualization

Pedagogy necessitates learner-centered approaches in order to improve learning outcomes and teaching processes: feedback, as a well acknowledged tool, is learner-centered and activates learners' higher-order activities. When defined concisely, it is commenting on learners'

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performances efficiently and using an appropriate outline to enhance their learning outcomes, hence it is bridging learning competence with learning performance (Yang et al., 2023). Feedback is multilayered in typology, it can be taken from learners' point of view: self, peer, or collaborative (Tajbadi et al., 2020); teachers' point of view: corrective, elaborative, praise-based (Vasalou et al., 2021); or setting's point of view: in-class versus online (Ebadijala & Yousofi, 2021; Sherafati & Mahmoudi-Largani, 2022).

Additionally, the notion of feedback focused extensively on learners' performances, then it shifted attention more recently towards the subject matter itself and how it can be adaptive to the rapidly changing teaching/learning demands (Kang, 2023). It is argued to enhance students' performance or input, given the extensive focus on writing skill and its correlation with feedback. Likewise, as a complex skill, writing performance is often measured with extensive reference to task complexity (Ren et al., 2023), task type, collaboration level (Ebadijalel & Moradkhani, 2023), and task repetition (Lu & Li, 2023) among others.

1.2. Task Modalities

Task modalities are also multilayered in similar way of feedback's typology. To begin with, complexity can be attributed to the language system itself and/or the task, during the 80's, extensive work focused on what makes a task complex, suggesting firstly that challenging learning outcome is the mere reference for task complexity (Campbell & Gingrich, 1986). However, identifying complex tasks later broadened, according to Campbell (1988, p. 40) complexity is "a psychological experience, interaction between the person and characteristics, and a function of objective task characteristics".

Progressively, given that it is not merely language-related, more frameworks and conceptualization were added to its puzzling nature to systematize the process (Ishakaw, 2006; Liu & Li, 2012; Robinson & Gilabert, 2007; Robinson, 2011). Literature focused on task complexity in accordance with productive skills as writing system and process. To illustrate, task complexity with respect to time manipulation, task planning, and micro and macro structures yielded greater levels of lexical complexity and fluency among Chinese EFL students (Ong & Zhang, 2010), yet Zhang et al. (2021) elicited that increasing the complexity of the task feasibly enhances the overall language proficiency of EFL students due to positive correlations found between task and syntactic complexities in their study.

As well, Xing (2015) found that lexical complexity ameliorated with increasing task complexity, however syntactic complexity, accuracy, and fluency relatively decreased. Disparity in the literature above was subject to

the broadness of both terms: task complexity and language (writing) proficiency. More recently, specific writing proficiency aspects were forwarded, Yoonseo (2022) made a distinction between writing performance and writing behavior when studying task complexity, whereby results were inconclusive regarding writing behaviors, and no influence was indexed on writing performance. Others have tackled the interplay between, task complexity, task planning, task sequencing and task repetition.

Though complexity was dominant in writing improvement, repetition was more directed towards oral productions (Ahmadia, 2012; Baleghizadeh & Derakhshesh, 2012; Finardi, 2008; Liao & Fu, 2014). More specifically, Lambert et al. (2016) elicited that language proficiency level and task type do not eliminate the effect of repetition on different speech production stages and that such effect varied across stages. Likewise, Hsu (2017) elaborated on using post-transcribing alongside repetition because it yielded higher measures of language complexity, accuracy, and fluency in his experiment with EFL students' oral performances.

On a different note, Duong et al. (2021) found no correlations between input repetition and vocabulary mining and formulaic sentence structures in EFL context. Replicated, Duong et al. (2023) confirmed the lack of congruence between input repetition and task repetition on lexical use and fluency. As well, Khezrlou (2021) highlighted limited effect of task repetition on implicit knowledge. Similarily, Garcia Mayo et al. (2016) found no correlation between repetition and negotiations of meaning, except when task was carried collaboratively.

In fact, collaborative learning was indicated as a task-based approach activity that fosters critical thinking and promotes higher levels of language performance (Moonma & Kaweera, 2022). And it gained recognition in task-based research as an assessment tool for learners' output, especially writing (Krishnan et al., 2022, Pourdana, 2022; Zhang & Zou, 2022). Effectively, collaboration, task complexity, and task repetition were tackled by literature, however only as dyads of task repetition and collaborative learning, task repetition and task complexity, or task complexity and collaborative learning.

To exemplify, Kim and Tracy-Ventura (2013) highlighted that task repetition has a positive influence on collaborative syntactic complexity of EFL students during speech production. Similarly, syntactic improvement through repetition during collaborative writing tasks was held positive (Carver & Kim, 2020). Holistic measures also detected the improvement of collaborative writing levels following task repetition procedure (Hidalgo & Lazaro-Ibarrola, 2020).

However, the correlation of task repetition and task complexity was found negative in the study of Tabari et al. (2022), and though both variables significantly affected syntactic complexity of writing output, their reciprocal effect was limited. Besides, Khatib and Farahanynia (2020) found that while task complexity and repetition improved fluency of oral output, both variables did not exert any influence over one another. What could only be deduced is that their relation might be relative rather than correlational. Lastly, the third dyad, working collaboratively was employed as a tool to reduce the level of complexity students face during tasks (Kirschner et al., 2011).

To conclude, the question of feedback with regards to one of the task modalities aforementioned focused either on writing or speaking i.e., feedback and task repetition (Amelohina et al., 2020; Azkarai & Oliver, 2019, Kim et al., 2022; Roothooft et al., 2022), feedback and task complexity (Mohammadreza, 2022; Valizadeh & Soltanpour, 2021), feedback and collaborative learning (Xu et al., 2019). The interplay of all task modalities and feedback in addition to feedback and task type was overlooked in available literature. Hence, identifying the research gap, the following research questions are proposed:

1. Is higher reading comprehension performance attributed to corrective feedback or elaborative feedback?

2. Do corrective feedback and elaborative feedback correlate with task modalities of: task complexity, task repetition, and task type?

And the following hypotheses were proposed:

1. Higher reading performance is attributed to elaborative feedback.

2. Corrective feedback and elaborative feedback correlate with task modalities of task complexity, task repetition, and task type.

2.Method

2.1. Research Design

The study featured 73 EFL second year undergraduate students from the department of English language and Literature at Batna 2 University. The sample size made 85% of the whole population, and the sampling technique used is convenient sampling due to the duration of the experiment (one academic year) and the lack of accessibility to larger sample of students, also the experiment was implemented in a specific reading course 'Study of Texts' to implement the treatments (feedbacks forms) thoroughly. The sample selected for the study had the age mean of 19.8, ranging between 19 and 24 years old, and they were distributed in terms of gender between 54 females and 19 males.

2.2. Research Instrumentation and Analysis

The procedure of the experiment lasted for one academic year 2022-2023, and it used two equally-timed treatments. The first treatment consisted of offering traditional corrective feedback to learners which is correcting errors and giving the accurate reading information, whereas and the second treatment consisted of offering elaborative feedback, which was assigning reading cues as part of additional reading instructions in order to assist learners during these activities to identify the target information. The purpose of particularizing these pre-mentioned treatments was to identify if learners yielded a better reading comprehension performance through using cues or through locating and correcting the errors.

The experiment was carried out through the same task types: *Multiple Choice*; *True/ False/ Not given*; *Sentence/ Paragraph completion*; *Short-answer questions*; *Matching Information of headings, endings, paragraphs, features*; *Identifying information and views*; and *Summary Note, Table, Flow-chart Completion*. These treatments were implemented to one singular experimental group to study the variance of reading performances by the same learners, different to using a control group to study the effect of each treatment independently which is a motivation for further research.

They also followed the same sequencing and typology of the tasks as well as the same conditions: the task repetition condition (non-repeated versus repeated) and task complexity condition (simple versus complex), the sequencing of each condition was orderly i.e., non-repeated to repeated and simple to complex. Repeated tasks consisted of replicating the same task type, whereas non-repeated tasks consisted of using a different activity during the session. To illustrate, students at one point of the experiment were assigned with reading materials where a task type was repeated (e.g., *short-answer questions*) during one session, and were assigned with reading materials and different task types (e.g., *multiple choice* and *identifying information and views*) in another session. Complexity, on a different note, involved reading materials with higher or lower familiarity of vocabulary, sentence structure, and background knowledge on the topic, for example, one of the texts displayed a pre-intermediate to intermediate set of vocabulary and sentence structure on the topic of university life; meanwhile another text used upper-intermediate to advanced level on the topic of marketing.

Both conditions during both treatments were selected as methodological extremes (simple/complex and repeated/non-repeated) to understand their effect on the usefulness of these treatments and the difference between one another, and which relatively affected the reading

comprehension performance in general. It was essential to see if there was a correlation between task modalities with the receptive skill of reading similar to how it was reportedly pertinent in the performance of productive skills. This allowed to precise the type of feedback that yielded a better reading performance in general and in which condition. Overall, all task modalities with different complexity levels, repetition, and typology were carried in classroom setting and were adapted from *Gold Advanced Coursebook* by Burgess and Thomas (2014). Finally, the data were discussed through analyzing error percentages in all reading tasks assigned to learners.

3. Results and Discussion

The overall data displayed in Table (1) and Table (2) provide inconclusive results regarding the first hypothesis: higher reading performance was detected when students received the elaborative feedback treatment during the second condition of task complexity, meaning that students used the cues adequately across different task types and complexity levels, where they did not only gain knowledge on the correct information, but made use of remedial accounts, challenged their input, and self-assessed.

In addition, there is an amalgamation among the different layers of complexity, more specifically, between code complexity and communicative stress (Sekhan, 1998, p.99), where the variance in text activity and text informational load intersects with conditions of task behavior, including the learning setting and context. Therefore, task is dependent on linguistic and behavioral conditioning, and elaborative feedback assists the advanced linguistic condition of the texts and tasks provided.

Additionally, both tables elicited that elaborative feedback yielded more significant results in the second condition of experiment than the first one, this is explained through the higher correlation found between elaborative feedback and complexity as the overall performance in the complex condition was the highest (35.62%) as well the differential mean in the first condition less significant (=3.55) than differential mean in the second condition (=3.84). Most notably, elaborative feedback was more salient during non-repeated and complex tasks, explaining the type of correlation between elaborative feedback and the two modalities: while there is a positive and strong correlation with complexity, there is a limited one with task repetition.

Table 01: Treatments' results during condition one

Code: What is the percentage of errors made during the task?	Corrective Feedback (no cues)		Elaborative Feedback (cues)	
Task Type	non-Repeated	Repeated	non-Repeated	Repeated
Multiple Choice	35,30%	37,20%	38,36%	40,03%
True/False/ Not given	26,13%	31,51%	25,33%	30,50%
Sentence/Paragraph Completion	40,20%	42,70%	50,71%	53,71%
Short-answer Questions	50,42%	50,90%	49,23%	56%
Matching Information of headings, endings, paragraphs, features	50,19%	52,43%	37%	41,69%
Identifying information and views	22%	23,38%	33,94%	37,07%
Summary Note, Table, Flow-chart Completion	50%	57,60%	53,62%	54,05%
Overall Performance	39,17%	42,24%	41,17%	44,72%

Table 02: Treatments' results during condition two

Code: What is the percentage of errors made during the task?	Corrective Feedback (no cues)		Elaborative Feedback (cues)	
Task Type	Simple	Complex	Simple	Complex
Multiple Choice	40,96%	42,40%	37,19%	33,16%
True/False/ Not given	28,56%	31,64%	28,02%	22,80%
Sentence/Paragraph Completion	28,80%	30,87%	55,28%	49,73%
Short-answer Questions	49%	50,22%	27,16%	22,60%
Matching Information of headings, endings, paragraphs, features	47,09%	52,32%	44,98%	41,24%
Identifying Information and views	47,57%	46%	38,25%	35,02%
Summary note, table, flow -chart completion	48,80%	50,15	45,36%	44,83%
Overall Performance	41,54%	43,37%	39,46%	35,62%

Related, complex tasks necessitate the use of resources to not only correct the errors, but also to process the learning strategies of the tasks and to learn how to monitor and filter information from the reading material. Learners' engagement with feedback helps to build on language forms and develop their L2 system which is primarily dynamic. Essentially, feedback

complexity itself may intersect with task complexity and text complexity as a metalinguistic form of language.

On the contrary, corrective feedback shows different dynamics during the two phases. Table (1) shows higher reading performance in the first condition where differential mean is 3.07 than in the second condition displayed in Table (2) where the differential mean is 1.83. More precisely, corrective feedback is salient in non-repeated and simple tasks, scoring the highest levels of respectively 39.17% and 41.54% so corrective feedback correlated negatively with task complexity and task repetition.

Next, it is important to understand the nature of correlations detected across modalities and feedback types. To begin with, task repetition did not yield any significance when both treatments were implemented due to the insignificant differential means in repeated and non-repeated tasks, and in spite of the order of sequencing, transfer effect was unsuccessful, which is the employment of information and skill from the previous task to enhance the next task, rather we have a negative transfer effect whereby we have regressive pattern across task types and feedback types.

In fact, repeated and non-repeated tasks represent the level of task familiarity by learners, and though tasks were repeated using wholly different texts, the performance during the non-repeated condition was higher for both types of feedback types (39.17% for corrective feedback and 41.17% for elaborative feedback), hence learners' attention was directed towards the tasks and not the texts. In return, the higher levels of errors in repeated task condition (42.24% for corrective feedback and 44.72% for elaborative feedback) is explained by students' level or engagement and attention. Such attention to tasks rather than the text might be motivated by the level of topic familiarity of the text and the activation of background knowledge and this can be a subject for further research.

Moreover, there is higher level of performance when corrective feedback was implemented in both conditions of non-repeated and repeated tasks in comparison with the elaborative feedback, adding up to the argument forwarded by Sekhan (1998, p. 97) that attention is channeled by the level of instruction given and when there is an excess of informational cues of code, attention rather increases, given that the nature of corrective feedback which represents correctness and exactness without challenging any extra cognitive processing.

In addition, task complexity conditioned higher reading performance in both treatments, more significantly during the elaborative feedback treatment in both simple (38.5%) and complex (35.02%) tasks compared to

corrective feedback treatment in both conditions (47.57% and 46%, respectively) due to the complexity of reading comprehension process which involves identifying forms and meanings as well as drawing inferences, from which we see the efficient use of the cues and the progressive pattern of reading comprehension: task complexity enhances reading performance when reading cues are provided.

Overall, while repeated tasks across different feedback types are insignificant, task complexity significantly enhances reading comprehension using cues (elaborative feedback) and minimally reading comprehension with the lack of cues (corrective feedback), supporting Robinson (2001) that task complexity correlated positively with resource directing which enhances learners' productivity, that explains the efficient use of the reading cues during complex tasks.

Related, there is an effect of task familiarity on reading performance which must differentiated from and content familiarity. Task familiarity is rather procedural and it involves learner's acquaintance with the procedure and how it is carried. Essentially, there is a minimal attribution of task type, and given a detailed outlook, corrective feedback treatment had less significant effect in the first condition only in *Short Answer Questions* (differential mean is 0.48) and *Identifying Information and Views* (differential mean is 1.38); and same differential means, but less noticeable, were yielded during the second condition: 1.22 and 1.57, respectively. Elaborative feedback was less prominent only during the first phase of repetition in *Summary Note, Table, Flow-chart Completion* where the differential mean is 0.43.

Such differentiation between the two notions is essential to understand the use of cues in certain condition opposed to others. Looking closely, cues were mostly advantageous to learners where learners carried differentiated procedures of the task in all conditions. During the second conditioning, the use of cues was relatively higher in both extremes, this motivates the claim that feedback complexity, task complexity, and task familiarity correlate with elaborative feedback, whereas the during the first phase, correction of errors was more interactive and given attention by students.

All in all, the type of feedback intersects with other linguistic and metalinguistic features where we consider source, language, learner, outcome, feedback, and use of feedback chained altogether to deliver an efficient learning performance and to ameliorate the learners' output.

4. Conclusion

The study presented the context of reading comprehension with accordance to task modalities and feedback types. It presented EFL learners with two types of feedback in two different conditions. It was hypothesized that elaborative feedback would yield higher reading comprehension performance than corrective feedback in both conditions of research (repetition and complexity), yet the corrective type was more salient than the elaborative one in the repetition condition, and the latter was more significant in the complexity condition. The data suggested mixed results regarding the effectiveness of one type of feedback over the other since repeated tasks did not yield any effect on the corrective type nor on the elaborative one compared to complexity.

Furthermore, the second hypothesis elicited the correlation of corrective and elaborative feedback with task modalities of type, repetition, and complexity. The results again were not held true for task repetition and task type for both treatments of feedback, yet results were strongly positive between task complexity and elaborative feedback. This was explained through the negative transfer when the tasks are repeated and the effect of task complexity on language input.

Hence, results of both hypotheses framed that reading comprehension enhancement is not merely dependent on feedback typology rather the task's level of complexity and familiarity as well: the challenging tasks stimulates cognitive abilities to be generated and activated. When both of them were salient, the reading comprehension level statistically peaked as students benefited from the challenge and the cues provided. Overall, the findings support the use of both types for students to enhance reading comprehension process; as well, it is essential to carefully design complex tasks in order to cater to the disparity of linguistic and cognitive levels of EFL learners. When contextually appropriate, elaborative feedback will enhance the language input and language output. Also, it is essential to look closely at when and how tasks should be corrected.

In conclusion, some limitations hindered the generalization of the findings which were the size of the sample and the lack of equal representation of the gender, the duration of the treatments, and the classroom setting which can create challenges to reading comprehension. For further research, this study encourages future researchers to incorporate more measures and to engage other modalities in their research, to initiate new methodological procedures to study reading comprehension, and to study reading comprehension with reference to other tools besides feedback.

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