The Effectiveness of Focused Direct Written Corrective Feedback and Metalinguistic Explanations on the Use of English Articles by Vocational Training Students (Part I)

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Abstract
The present study examines the effects of two form-focused Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) types on the texts provided by vocational training students: Direct Written Corrective Feedback (DWCF) and Metalinguistic Explanations (ME). The first part of the study offers the theoretical background in which the Language Learning Potential (LLP) of writing in an additional language (L2) is discussed, followed by the LLP of WCF, different types of WCF and Task Repetition (TR). Part I also synthesizes empirical evidence of the usefulness of WCF, focusing on previous research comparing the two types of feedback later used in our own study.
Keywords: Language Learning, Written Corrective Feedback, Metalinguistic Explanations

Título: La Efectividad del Feedback Directo y las Explicaciones Metalingüísticas en el Uso de Artículos por Alumnos de Formación Profesional (Parte I).

Resumen
Este trabajo examina los efectos de dos tipos de feedback en textos escritos por alumnos de formación profesional: correcciones directas y explicaciones metalingüísticas. La primera parte del artículo ofrece un marco teórico en el que se estudia el potencial de aprendizaje de lenguas de escribir en una lengua que no es la materna, así como el potencial del feedback, de diferentes tipos de feedback y de la repetición de una misma tarea (Task Repetition). Además se sintetiza la evidencia empírica existente sobre la utilidad del feedback, centrándose particularmente en los dos tipos de feedback tratados en este estudio
Palabras clave: Aprendizaje de Lenguas, Feedback, Correcciones, Explicaciones Metalingüísticas.

INTRODUCTION

WCF is considered a useful tool in the teaching and learning of a second or foreign language. Consequently, research tried to elucidate which types of feedback can be more beneficial for learners and the different effects they may have on L2 learner's production. Most of the already existing research has focused on comparing direct and indirect WCF, while leaving ME to only a few studies. Therefore, ME is a type of feedback in need of more research attention. For this reason, inspired by Shintani and Ellis' (2013) study, among others, this paper focuses on ME, since this type of feedback could be considered equally relevant for L2 development in instructed second language acquisition (SLA). Thus, the aim of the present study is to examine the effects of DWCF and ME on the texts produced by vocational training learners and to determine whether one type of feedback is more effective than the other. To this end, the first part of this paper offers a theoretical background for the empirical study to be presented in Part II, in which I discuss the LLP of L2 writing, WCF, different types of WCF and TR. Part II presents the empirical study, in which 22 English learners took part in two sessions involving TR and the completion of two ECT.

I. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This first block delves into the LLP of L2 writing in order to lay the foundation for the present empirical study. More specifically, the following sections are devoted to the LLP of WCF and TR, including a recapitulation of the long-standing

debate on the usefulness of WCF and a discussion on the effects of degree of explicitness and LLP of different types of feedback. This review is needed in order to frame the empirical study to be presented in the second part.

I.1. Language Learning Potential of L2 Writing

The field of SLA studies the way in which people learn an additional language and research on L2 writing has explored two dimensions of L2 writing (Manchón, 2011a). On the one hand, the learning-to-write (LW) dimension deals with the "manner in which second and foreign language users learn to express themselves in writing" (p. 3). On the other hand, the writing-to-learn dimension deals with "the way in which the engagement with L2 writing tasks and activities can contribute to development in areas other than writing itself" (p.3), including writing-to-learn content (WLC) and writing-to-learn language (WLL).

Manchón and Williams (2016) state that scholars who work on the writing-to-learn dimension have moved in two directions. First, some scholars have focused on the theoretical and empirical foundation of the LLP of L2 writing, particularly on what is unique about writing - as opposed to speaking - and how and why this potential can be supported by SLA theories. Second, more recent lines of research aim to provide empirical evidence on the purported LLP of L2 writing, studying both writing and the processing of feedback on writing. To this end, researchers have studied writing processes and products in both individual and collaborative writing conditions, analyses contrasting task performance in speaking and writing, and they have explored task-related variables in the oral domain and whether they apply to the writing domain (Manchón & Williams, 2016).

Differences between features of L2 writing and other forms of language use, like oral communication, are to be expected and researchers have reached the conclusion that the key differences are related to linguistic processing and time pressure. Manchón and Williams (2016) argue that "the slower pace of writing has been claimed to allow users to reflect on the linguistic demands of the task, plan on how to meet those demands, draw on different knowledge stores in doing so and user these resources to edit their output" (p. 571). They consider two possibilities: the additional time in writing may allow writers to access their explicit knowledge and compare it to their written output, or the additional time may allow them to access their implicit knowledge for inspection and analysis. Both possibilities suggest more attention to formal aspects of language, in comparison to other language tasks that do not involve writing. In addition, the problem solving nature of L2 writing could also play an important role in consolidating and increasing control over one's linguistic knowledge and even generate new knowledge (Manchón, 2011b, quoting other authors). In addition, it has been posited that the deeper linguistic processing associated with the meaning-making activities that are critical to written communication may prompt learners to engage in processes such as noticing or metalinguistic reflection of explicit knowledge. Ellis (2011, in Manchón & Williams, 2016) maintains that the conclusion we can draw from the research on L2 is that explicit knowledge plays a role in the development of implicit knowledge and he mentions output processes and feedback as means to that end.

Manchón (2011b) provides a synthesis of empirical research on the LLP of writing, grouping the studies in two categories: descriptive studies have explored the manner in which the production of written output fosters a number of processes believed to be conductive to language development, whereas interventionist studies deal with the manner in which the L2 learner's linguistic processing during individual or collaborative writing can affect their learning. The results she reported were that both types of study provided evidence of learners engaging in five different learning processes: (i) noticing and intentional focus on form processes, (ii) formulation of hypotheses about linguistic forms and functions, (iii) hypothesis testing, (iv) generating and assessing linguistic options through the use of both explicit and implicit knowledge as well as cross linguistic comparisons, and (v) metalinguistic reflection. She makes reference to other authors and concludes that the existing research on modality effects shows that a type of linguistic processing with potential learning effects is more likely to take place in writing than in speaking.

Finally, Hirvela (2011) quotes other authors in relation to the writing-to-learn content dimension, including "the belief that writing actually engenders understanding by virtue of exploration and reexamination of ideas it affords" (McGinley & Tierney, 1989, p. 243), which is similar to the idea that "writing is how students connects the dots in their knowledge" (National Commission on Writing in the USA, 2003, p.14) or, as Newell (1998) elegantly puts it, "writing to learn is supportive of a vision of teaching and learning that enables students not only to know but to do"(p. 197).

Having analyzed the LLP of L2 writing, the following subsections narrow the present review down to the LLP of WCF and TR, starting with the debate on the usefulness of WCF mounted by Truscott and Ferris.

I.1.1 The Written Corrective Feedback Debate

Ever since John Truscott published "The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes" in 1996, there has been a tug-of-war debate regarding the effectiveness - or lack thereof - of Written Corrective Feedback (WCF), with him and Diana Ferris as the main advocates of each side.

Truscott's premise was that "correction is clearly ineffective" and even "has significant harmful effects" (1996, p. 330, in Ferris, 1999) since it can demotivate students or cause stress. He explained that its usefulness had been taken for granted and this view had become so dominant that teachers could hardly consider an alternative. His view was related to Stephen Krashen's non-interface position and the distinction between learning and acquisition (1985), according to which explicit knowledge, like the one derived from feedback processing, could not be converted into implicit knowledge. Consequently, Truscott argued, WCF can only lead to "a superficial and possibly transient form of knowledge or pseudolearning" (1996, p. 345, in Van Beuningen, 2010).

As a reaction to this position, Ferris (1999) was up in arms and wrote an article in which she agreed with Truscott in some areas but defended the importance of WCF, explaining that there was empirical evidence showing that students value receiving grammar correction and the absence of feedback could frustrate them and even affect their motivation and confidence. That same year, Truscott (1999) replied back and stated that "pro-correction interpretations (...) did not address the question of whether correction makes students better writers" (p. 115) and we could not infer from the empirical evidence that the assisted students would write more accurately in the future when they do not have feedback to guide them. He argued that the argument for students' beliefs was circular, with teachers encouraging students to believe in WCF, students believing in its efficacy and, consequently, teachers enforcing it. He even suggested that students would shorten and simplify their writing to avoid being corrected" (p. 117). One of the points raised by Truscott was that the empirical evidence provided by Ferris and other authors was not longitudinal, a point she counteracted by arguing that "when a longitudinal study is done, it is critiqued for not being controlled enough" (2004, p. 56). Critics of error correction defended that the fact that students can edit their texts in the short term did not demonstrate that this progress would stand the test of time. Ferris argued, nonetheless, that "the cognitive investment of editing one's text after receiving error feedback is likely a necessary, or at least helpful, step on the road to longer term improvement in accuracy" (2004, p. 54) and admitted the importance of both measures.

As time went by and both authors continued to publish their thoughts on the matter, along with others who joined in the debate (cf. Bruton, 2009, 2010), it became clear that this debate was only in its early stages and it only seemed like they were further along their investigation than they really were, as Ferris (2004) admitted. What did become more evident was that Truscott and Ferris were discussing two different types of feedback and they were not mutually exclusive. Manchón (2011, in Manchón & Williams, 2016) described Ferris' side as *feedback for accuracy*, which focuses on revisions of a text for which students have received feedback; and Truscott's side as *feedback for acquisition*, which states that applying the knowledge acquired with feedback to a new text is the true evidence of language development. Hyland, Nicolás-Conesa and Cerezo (2016) link the first one to the notion of uptake and explicit knowledge in the short term, whereas the latter is linked to acquisition, or retention, not mere uptake, and the acquisition of implicit knowledge in the long term. Polio (2012) shares Ferris' view (2004) and paves the way for further research, explaining that "changes in accuracy are by no means the same as acquisition [and] it is necessary to look at whether or not an approach views greater accuracy on a written text as evidence of acquisition" (p. 377).

I.1.2. Language Learning Potential of Written Corrective Feedback

Taking into account that most authors agree on the usefulness of providing feedback and having narrowed it down to the extent to which feedback is beneficial rather than just whether it is useful or not, researchers have studied the effects of WCF and linked its provision to noticing, compared it to oral feedback and explained how it can help learners in their development of L2 competencies from different perspectives. Van Beuningen (2010, quoting other authors) states that "output should be accompanied by CF in order to be beneficial to the language learning process" (p. 6) since students need sufficient feedback to know if their message has been successfully conveyed. Evans et al. (2010, p. 446) explain that "withholding such feedback is likely to frustrate learners, erode learners' confidence in their teacher and undermine the teaching process". After all, students trust their teachers and "assume that instructors know something they, the students, do not [and] the instructor is able to effectively impart that knowledge" (Hafernik et al., 2002, p. 12, in Evans et al., 2010).

WCF has been treated as a noticing facilitator and it has been posited that it is more effective than oral feedback. According to Smichdt's Noticing Hypothesis (2010), input does not become intake unless it is noticed and consciously registered so noticing is necessary for learning to take place. Consequently, WCF is thought to allow learners to notice a mismatch between what they can produce and what they would like to produce. This idea has been referred to as "noticing the gap" or "cognitive comparison" (Van Beuningen, 2010, quoting other authors) and it "enables learners to notice the gap between their own interlanguage output and the target language input" (p. 6) or feedback provided. Van Beuningen (2010) argues that both oral feedback and WCF can in principle allow learners to notice mismatches in their interlanguage system although it might be more difficult in online oral language use. This issue can be explained by the fact that "WCF is delayed whereas oral CF occurs immediately after an error has been committed. WCF imposes less cognitive load on memory than oral CF, which typically demands an immediate cognitive comparison, thus requiring learners to heavily rely on their short-term memory" (Sheen, 2007, p. 256). Apart from that, Schmidt (2001, in Van Beuningen, 2010) explains that the classic conception is that attentional resources are limited and students may lack processing capacity to analyse all the stimuli provided by oral feedback at a given moment.

There are several theoretical perspectives on the LLP of WCF, both supporting and denying its potential for language use, discussed in Polio (2012) and Bitchener (2012). The most relevant ones are:

o   Krashen's (1985) monitor model: he equates *acquisition* with implicit learning and *learning* with explicit knowledge. Although he states that oral and written CF do not play a role in the acquisition of language, he concedes a monitoring role for learning and, consequently, a limited role for explicit CF.

o   Skill acquisition theories: intentional learning can become automatized over time with enough practice or repeated activation. The idea is that there are three stages of development: declarative, procedural and automatic, and feedback can provide the declarative or explicit knowledge, also stopping errors from being proceduralized (DeKeyser, 1997, 2007, in Polio, 2012).

o   Interactionist perspective: these theories argue that input is not sufficient and it is interaction that forces learners to produce pushed output (Long, 1996, cited in Bitchener, 2012). Implicit feedback in the form of negotiation of meaning and recasts is common in oral interaction and this perspective posits that, while oral feedback comes with time constrains during online iterations, it is easier to take advantage of written CF since it is more explicit and there are no such time constrains.

o   Sociocultural approach: this approach states that learners can achieve a higher level of proficiency when they are aided by other individuals, in the form of scaffolding or CF. This helps create a zone of proximal development (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994, in Polio, 2012) in which feedback from more proficient people can help learners modify their interlanguage.

Finally, Evans et al. (2010) point out that the effectiveness of WCF depends on a series of contextual variables, which can explain why WCF may not always achieve the same outcome and there may be conflicting results in the literature. These factors include learner variables, such as first language, nationality, cultural identity, learning style, values, attitudes, beliefs, socioeconomic background, motivation and future goals, among others. These variables are considered to be the most important type in terms of influencing the learning process and Dörnyei (2005, in Evans et al., 2010) argues that "research has typically found learner variables to be consistent predictors of L2 learning success"(p.6) in SLA, not only in writing skills. The second type of variables are situational ones, and they include the teacher, the physical environment, the learning atmosphere or the political and economic conditions of the learning context beyond the classroom. Evans et al. (2010) explain that "while in many contexts situational variables may have a negligible effect on learning, in other context their influence may (...) overshadow of the learner or the instructional methodology" (p. 450). Third, methodological/pedagogical variables include "what is taught and how it is taught" (p. 450) and aspects such as sequencing of activities or effective pacing can make a difference in the learning process. The degree of explicitness and type of feedback provided are also relevant variables and are worth discussing separately, as we do in the next section.

I.1.3. Degree of Explicitness and LLP of Different Types of WCF

As Goldstein (2016) explains in her review of the relevant literature, while some students usually find teacher feedback to be useful and motivating, other students find these commentaries confusing and even illegible. Some students have reported using the WCF provided without understanding why or having "difficulty finding out a strategy for revising" (p. 418) even when they do understand the feedback, which brings up the issue of choosing the correct type of feedback. In

addition, some types of feedback are more time consuming than others on the part of teachers and offer more room for mistakes (Ferris & Roberts, 2001) since it is more difficult for teachers to offer accurate metalinguistic explanations, for example, than simply providing the correct form. Consequently, as the choice of using a particular type of WCF affects both students and teachers, there has been abundant research studying the degree of explicitness of WCF and how useful different types of feedback are. Goldstein (2016) reports that students have a preference for "constructive criticism or for criticism that is softened by praise [although] sometimes students find praise disingenuous" (p. 418). She also points out that students prefer feedback phrased as questions, imperatives and declaratives rather than symbols, circles, check marks, abbreviations or underlining.

In general, the two main types of WCF are direct and indirect, with metalinguistic feedback as a third alternative. In the case of direct WCF, students are provided with an explicit correction, the correct form, by crossing out or inserting an incorrect or missing word, phrase or sentence, respectively (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010). Given the explicit nature of direct WCF, it is purpoted to be particularly useful for learners with low proficiency, as Ellis (2009) explains, since they may not know what the correct form is and may not be capable of self correcting their own errors. Nevertheless, he notes that "it requires minimal processing on the part of the learner [so] it may not contribute to long term learning" (p. 99).

Ferris and Roberts (2001) define indirect WCF as a form of correction in which "the teacher indicates in some way that an error exists but does not provide the correction, thus letting the writer know that there is a problem but leaving it to the student to solve it"(p. 164). It can be done by underlining or circling errors, or making notes in the margins, in which case the exact location of the errors may be indicated. Ellis (2009, citing other authors) points out that direct CF is aimed at problem solving and guided learning, and it "encourages students to reflect about linguistic forms" (p. 100). Ferris and Roberts (2001) indicate that researchers who have compared direct and indirect CF have found that indirect CF is more beneficial for accuracy in the long term.

Metalinguistic WCF provides learners with an explicit explanation, not an explicit correction, about their errors. Ellis (2009) describes the two most common forms of metalinguistic feedback: the use of abbreviated labels or codes for different kinds of errors, and the provision of full metalinguistic explanations of each error. The second type is more time consuming and requires the teacher to have sufficient metalinguistic knowledge to be able to provide adequate explanations, which is more difficult than identifying and correcting errors directly. This type of feedback is not necessarily in opposition to direct and indirect WCF, as it can be combined with either of them: in most cases the metalinguistic explanation does not follow an explicit correction, as in the case of the current study, but the explanation can also be used to complement direct CF. Similar to what happened with indirect CF, Panova and Lyster (2002, in Hyland et al., 2016) note that metalinguistic explanation "forces learners to reflect on and engage with the feedback (...) for deeper processing of familiar forms" whereas a more explicit correction may help learners "master new forms"(p. 437).

Finally, another important aspect of WCF is its scope, whether it is focused or unfocused, which applies to the three previously mentioned types of feedback. Ellis (2009) explains that teachers can correct all of the students' errors in unfocused CF or they can focus on specific error types for correction, be it one or more than one type, in focused CF. Ellis and Shintani (2013) suggest that "focusing on a single grammatical feature increases the likelihood that learners will not just memorize the specific corrections but develop an awareness of the underlying rule" (p.289) , which is the rationale behind many studies being focused, like theirs and this one. Shintani, Ellis and Suzuki (2014) argue that "unfocused CF corresponds to actual teaching practice and thus has high ecological validity"(p. 106). Ellis (2009) adds that focused CF allows learners to study multiple instances of the same error, giving them a better opportunity of understanding and acquiring the correct form. He notes, nevertheless, that unfocused CF has the advantage of addressing a wider range of errors and may prove to be superior in the long run but the relative effects of focused and unfocused CF are in need of further study.

I.1.4. Language Learning Potential of Task Repetition

The provision and processing of WCF must be lined to the SLA literature on TR as the aim of providing feedback is to prompt students to repeat the task bearing in mind the feedback provided. As Manchón (2014) explains, TR offers "a favorable scenario for prioritizing a focus expressing the intended meaning (during the first iteration of the task) while at the same time fostering focus-on-form (FonF) processes (during the repetition of the task) thereby leading to improved performance and promoting optimal conditions for acquisition to take place" (p. 18). The idea is that, since students have already worked on what they want to express, the repetition of the same task may allow them to exclusively focus on accuracy during the second session and "rework their language" (Samuda & Bygate, 2008, p. 114, in Manchón, 2014).

The assumption that TR will allow for deeper processing and improved performance has already been tested empirically in the field of oral production and the consensus is that TR fosters attention to language and results in increased fluency, accuracy, and complexity of oral production (Manchón, 2014). She notes, however, that writing, as opposed to oral production, is less restricted in terms of time availability, allowing for more time for task conceptualization, task planning and task completion itself. These characteristics are in direct relation to the notions of awareness and attention: overcoming time constrains may allow learners to go over what they have written and the feedback received, thus being "more in control of their attentional resources, more prone to prioritize linguistic concerns (...) and more likely to attend to language" (p. 20). Finally, Manchón also points out that TR and WCF are inherently linked since "the rationale for the provision of feedback is precisely to engage the learner in a form of TR [in which the learner's] attention is drawn towards those dimensions of the task in need of improvement, such as ideational concerns, textual matters or language related dimensions" (p. 21).

Having reviewed relevant research about L2 writing, WCF and TR, we now move on to the analysis on the empirical evidence behind those conclusions. This way, we will be able to compare the present study to previous relevant research on the matter and see whether or not we obtain similar results.

I.2. Empirical Evidence of the Usefulness of Written Corrective Feedback

For the review of empirical evidence in this section I have focused on a meta-analysis published by Kang and Han in 2015, and a narrative review published by Bitchener and Storch in 2016. I chose these two works since they are recent and up to date comprehensive reviews by renowned authors and because of their thorough analyses of relevant literature.

I.2.1. Empirical Evidence on All Types of WCF

On the one hand, Kang and Han (2015) meta-analyzed 21 studies published between 1980 and 2013, including articles covered in our own review, like Sheen (2007), Bitchener and Knoch (2010) or Shintani and Ellis (2013), apart from several articles by Truscott and Van Beuningen, among others. The aim of their meta-analysis was to analyze the empirical evidence on whether or not WCF is useful for improving accuracy, what type of WCF is more effective and what factors may affect its efficacy.

The authors estimated the effect size of a series of variables and used formulas provided by Cohen (1988, in Kang & Han, 2015) and Oswald and Plonsky (2010, in Kang & Han, 2015) in order to classify the effect size relevant studies on WCF. The former formula yielded a 'moderate effect size', whereas using latter formula instead resulted in 'small to moderate' efficacy of feedback. While the term "moderate" may sound discouraging, these results surpass what Truscott (2007, cited in Kang & Han, 2015) had estimated and align well with the results obtained in a previous meta-analysis by Biber et al. (2011, in Kang & Han, 2015). Nevertheless, Kang and Han (2015) recommend caution when interpreting these results, given the small sample size of their analysis.

Their meta-analysis found no significant differences between direct and indirect feedback or with respect to the scope of the feedback, whether it was focused or unfocused. Their analysis also showed that those studies with a single session of treatment or few sessions reported greater improvements than those that provided multiple sessions but these differences were not statistically significant. As for the genre of the writing composition, there were significant improvements in accuracy following feedback on compositions, moderate improvements in letter writing, and only small improvements in journal writing. Therefore, they suggest that "L2 instructors should be aware that certain types of writing are not as amenable to correction as are other types of writing such as compositions or narratives" (p. 11). This analysis also tried to find out what type of WCF is more effective and they found no clear differences between them. They point out that "to date, there have been no available empirical studies directly investigating the relationship between the proficiency level and the effects of different types of feedback"(p. 10). Nevertheless, they mention a "somewhat ambivalent" finding from their analysis: learners in a second language setting benefitted more from WCF than students in a foreign language setting, contrary to what other meta-analyses suggest. Kang and Han (2016) argue that this disparity may be explained by the salience of WCF, since learners tend to misunderstand oral corrections and take "recasts as a signal of agreement rather than correction, rendering the (oral) feedback futile"(p. 11) and perhaps explaining why written feedback may prove to be more useful to them.

On the other hand, Bitchener and Storch's (2016) narrative review of previous empirical research divides the studies included in their analysis into early studies and more recent studies, being Truscott's infamous "case against grammar

correction in L2 writing classes"(1996) the point of inflection. Apart from studying whether improved accuracy in new texts can contribute to L2 development, they tried to ascertain whether some types of WCF are more effective than others and whether the scope of the feedback also played a role in its efficacy, concluding that it is premature to draw conclusions on any of these last two questions and stating the need for further research on the matter.

As for the general efficacy of WCF in terms of L2 development, the authors reviewed four pre-1996 articles and draw our attention to a debate about the validity of the early studies, given a series of design shortcomings such as not including a control group or the lack of details about the conditions in which the students had written their compositions. Therefore, Bitchener and Storch argue that two of the articles should not be included as evidence of development in L2 accuracy, whereas the other two should only accepted with caution because of the already mentioned flaws in their design.

In terms of post 1996 studies, they reviewed works such as Sheen (2007), Bitchener and Knoch (2010), Shintani and Ellis (2013) and Shintani et al. (2014). In contrast to earlier studies, these present more "valid and reliable findings" and the conclusion drawn is that students who are provided with even a single instance of feedback saw an increase in accuracy that the control groups did not and this written accuracy was retained over different periods of time after the provision of the feedback.

The conclusion they draw is that studying the general effect of WCF is as important as studying "how and why such development has occurred" (p. 44). In their review of research on different types of CF they analyzed studies that compare metalinguistic explanations and direct error correction, as discussed in the following section.

1.2.2 Empirical Evidence Comparing Direct CF and Metalinguistic Explanations

Bitchener and Storch's (2016) narrative review of relevant research is a good starting point to see what empirical evidence shows about the use of metalinguistic explanations (ME) as a form of CF, since their analysis is up to date and very thorough. They devoted a section to studies comparing direct WCF and direct WCF plus ME, and another section to the comparison of metalinguistic feedback and other types of CF. All articles mentioned in this section are used as secondary sources taken from Bitchener and Storch's analysis.

On the one hand, the section studying the addition of ME to direct CF includes six articles published between 2005 and 2014. Bitchener et al. (2005) reported that students who received direct error correction (DEC) plus oral ME outperformed those who had only received DEC in terms of accuracy using the definite article and the past simple tense but not in the use of prepositions. Nevertheless, Bitchener (2008) explained in his study about ESL migrants that the groups that received DEC alone or DEC + oral ME seemed to benefit more than those who received DEC plus written ME. Bitchener and Knoch (2008, 2010) later extended the sample size and retained the same treatment but found no significant differences between the three groups. Bitchener and Storch (2016) acknowledge these results in their analysis and suggest that the participants were low proficiency learners and "may have had a more limited working memory capacity than more advanced learners, and therefore have been less able to cope with cognitive load and process metalinguistic explanations" (p. 49). Apart from that, the metalinguistic explanations were too limited, including only rule and example, and may not have been sufficient for such learners. Similarly, Stefanou (2014) reported no difference between a group of participants that received DEC and those who received DEC plus ME. Finally, Sheen (2007) found no significant difference either in her study comparing the effectiveness of DEC and DEC plus ME. She found in a delayed post-test, however, that the DEC plus ME group outperformed the other one in the long term. Although she noted that there may have been a test practice effect, seeing as how the control group also improved over time, the CF treatment groups outperformed the control group anyway, "indicating that the CF treatment had an effect over and above the test practice effect" (p. 275). Thus, Bitchener and Storch (2016) suggest that a separation of feedback approaches may be more useful and might yield different results.

On the other hand, a second section includes five articles from this decade in which the effectiveness of ME alone is compared to other types of CF not accompanied by ME. First, Bitchener and Knoch (2010) studied the use of the definite article with three groups: written ME, written and oral ME and a third group with indirect underlining or circling of errors. While there was no apparent difference in the immediate post-test, a delayed post-test after ten weeks showed that both ME groups outperformed the other group. As Bitchener and Storch (2016) note, the passage of time may be the key in this case, as it was in the case of Sheen (2007). Similarly, Guo (2015) reported that there were no difference between three groups of explicit correction (DEC, ME and DEC plus ME) but they outperformed groups that had received less explicit

forms of feedback, such as underlining or error codes. Shintani and Ellis (2013) studied the use of the indefinite article with groups that received DEC and ME. They found that the ME group outperformed the DEC group in terms of explicit knowledge (in an error correction test) but not in terms of implicit knowledge in the second writing task or a delayed third writing task. Rummel (2014) reported similar results and no difference between DEC, ME and indirect feedback when dealing with the past simple and present perfect tenses. Finally, Shintani, Ellis and Suzuki (2014) took Shinani and Ellis' (2013) work with articles as a starting point and updated it, adding the hypothetical conditional as another target structure. They reported that DEC was more effective than ME after two weeks and in later revisions. Although these results contradict their previous year's findings, they suggested that "DEC may be more helpful to lower proficiency learners for complex structures like the hypothetical conditional" (Bitchener & Storch, 2016, p. 52).

CONCLUSION

This theoretical background lays the foundation of the following empirical study. Taking into account what other authors have reported on the matter, and since the degree of explicitness of different types of feedback has been a topic of interest in SLA throughout the years, the second part of this study compares Direct WCF and ME in a two-session TR activity with vocational training students. The results obtained are then discussed and compared to the existing research on the matter.

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