Looking at Reformulation Task Types in Writing Classrooms: Theoretical and Empirical Perspective

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Abstract.

One of the hot topics in an EFL/ESL setting revolves around the question of how explicit and how focused CF should be in order to aid learners work more efficiently. Among different topics discussed in writing, reformulation is a pedagogical technique that provides a special kind of input. Writers compare their original work with a new version that has been reformulated by a native speaker, and subsequently revise their own work. It can influence, noticing and shape intake by helping learners to notice the gap. This paper provides a critical look at reformulation in writing though theoretical and empirical perspective. In so doing, this study embarks upon elucidating different classifications of reformulation, different feedback types, along with the concept of noticing which have been interwoven with two crucial cognitive linguistic notions of attention and awareness. The paper ends with some empirical aspect of the reformulation task in writing. This paper has implication for EFL teachers and materials developers.

Keywords: reformulation, noticing, metacognitive, corrective feedback, writing

1. The historical perspective of Reformulation.

The first definition of reformulation was proposed by Levenston (1987). In this definition, learner's composition revised by native speaker. In this revision, original draft's ambiguity, awkwardness, lexical inadequacy, stylistic problems, syntactic and spelling mistakes, and grammatical errors are revised.

Cohen (1983) explains reformulation as ''having a native writer of the target language rewrite the learner's essay, preserving all the learner's ideas, making it sound as native like as possible''. He continued that Native speaker can change text to make it as native one; this change can occur in lexical, syntactic or style (Allwright, Woodley & Allwright, 1988). Some studies consider reformulation as a feedback tool which have often use by output and noticing in the context of L2 writing. The technique of reformulation has potential to affect some disadvantages of traditional feedback methods, which often target non-target like forms (Hanaoka & Izumi, 2012).

Reformulation is a useful technique for providing input in writing skill. In writing and speaking, sometimes learners cannot reach to their communicative goals as a result of lack of L2 knowledge. But in writing, learners have a chance to resolve their problems by different ways like: using model, reference sources, and asking teachers. By using reformulation technique, learners also can compare their text with new version of it and rewrite their text. So reformulation as an immediate input can help learners to solve their difficulties (Williams, 2012).

Reformulation is defined by Cohen (1983) as a technique of 'having a native writer of the target language rewrite the learner's essay, preserving all the learner's ideas, making it sound as native like as possible'. Learners are expected to compare their original writing with the reformulated one 'with regard to vocabulary, syntax, cohesion, and rhetorical functions' (Cohen, 1983). Cohen (1982) found that, compared to typical teacher error correction, reformulations gave more extensive feedback on improving students' essays, especially in the area of cohesion. Student reactions were mostly positive in that reformulations provided them with a complete example of a more native-like way to express their own ideas. Furthermore, Cohen (1983) indicated 'that most students needed assistance in comparing their version with the reformulated one and that these comparisons need to be purposely eye-opening and engaging' .One way of providing such assistance is having learners talk to each other or the teacher as they work through the texts, identifying or noticing changes and discussing why these changes might have been made.

Reformulation is a pedagogical technique that provides a special kind of input. Writers compare their original work with a new version that has been reformulated by a native speaker, and subsequently revise their own work. It provides immediate and focused input where learners can find ways to resolve their communication problems. In other words. Reformulation can influence, noticing and shape intake by helping learners to notice the gap (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Swain, 1998) between their own production and the target language. Based on the results of their study, Swain and Lapkin (2002) suggest that reformulation ''is an effective technique for stimulating noticing and reflection on language''(p. 298). The results of this and other reformulation studies

indicate that when learners have an opportunity to   compare their work to relevant input, their texts and the language in them generally improve.

Qi and Lapkin (2001) maintain that it is the quality of noticing engendered by reformulation that improves subsequent production. Specifically, they claim that deeper processing of noticed input, which they operationalized as providing reasons for revision, is more likely to lead to learning. In a follow-up study, Adams (2003) isolated the effects of reformulation from repetition and found that reformulation led to more noticing than repetition alone. Sachs and Polio (2007) compared reformulation to error correction and found the latter resulted in more noticing but that reformulation was superior to the control condition. Furthermore, they found that the noticing stimulated by reformulation was related to revision. Hanoaka (2007) found writers were more likely to scan reformulated models for solutions to problems that they had identified for themselves during output, and make revisions in accordance with these suggestions, than to make revisions of problems identified by the native speakers who reformulated the models. As a whole, Hanaoka & Izumi(2007) suggest that the act of writing, which prompts learners to reflect on holes in their knowledge and primes them to focus on specific aspects of future input, combined with the pedagogical technique of reformulation, which provides tailored input and potential resolutions to composing problems, promotes noticing and at least short-term changes in language production. Tocalli-Beller and Swain (2005) note that the cognitive conflict created by this comparison of written learner output and reformulated input prompts a level of noticing and reflection that would not be possible in spoken interaction.

Reformulation tasks provide tailored input. In contrast, repetition tasks provide no new input. Learners simply have an opportunity to write a second draft in response to the same prompt after a period of time. This would seem to be a purer test of the impact of the act of writing alone. For the learners who were asked to revise their original draft without the benefit of feedback in a study by Polio, Fleck, and Leder (1998), simply having a second opportunity to complete the tasks led to improvement. Again, this is likely to be linked to the two salient features of written production. During revision, learners are able to access their explicit L2 knowledge and notice the gap between it and their first draft production. Thus, although some of these claims are applicable to output more generally, other facilitating effects may be specific to written output.

2. Different types of reformulation.

It has been investigated three task types of reformulation in this study: paraphrasing task, comparison task, and description task.

1. Comparison**:** In comparison each student will be given her original text along with the reformulated version in writing class. The intervention aims to help students compare the two versions of the short stories so as to discover all differences to the best of their knowledge. At this stage, students will negotiate together about the differences between the original text and the model text of short stories.At the final step in comparison, the students are asked to write their short stories by themselves.

2. Paraphrasing**.** Paraphrasing can be used as a strategy for avoiding plagiarism (Yamada, 2003). For avoiding plagiarism, students can use substantial paraphrases which are defined by Keck (2006) as including only main words that repeated in the text and related to the topic. Also, they can use superficial paraphrasing in their writing. Keck (2010) said for using this strategy, L2 writers can add new words, delete words, or change with synonyms words. Abbasi and Akbari (2008) argued that many L2 students use superficial paraphrasing to avoid using their own words and this can be due to lack of confidence. Substantial paraphrase by using only the main words doesn't guarantee good paraphrasing (Shi, 2012).

3. Description task. Students in description task were asked to compose a text in response to the picture prompt as a model text. In more details, description RTG was a task where each of student described a picture by writing meaningful sentences on it. Thus, description RTG involved writing a few meaningful sentences or paragraph on a given picture. It let the subjects to frame sentences and form stories on their own.At the final step in description task, students were asked to compare their own writing with origin text to find out all differences .

4. Copying. Sometimes copying in writing skill consider as plagiarism. Copying from source text considered necessary for academic writers to develop their writing. It can be a step before paraphrasing (Chandrasoma, Thompson & Pennycook, 2004; Hyland, 2001). Keck (2006) states that textual borrowing is not necessarily an ill-intention illustration of plagiarism since it can be a learning or developmental process. Researchers say there are differences among plagiarism, novice writers'citation, high level proficiency writers, and summaries (Wette, 2010).

3. Reformulation and corrective feedback.

As Sachs & Polio (2007) point out, even among those who assume that written feedback is helpful, the form that error correction should take remains a contentious issue. This debate has mainly revolved around the question of how explicit and how focused CF should be in order to help learners more effectively (Bitchener, 2008).

Reformulation is one possible form of CF for students' writings. It provides learners with feedback in the form of a re-written version of the learner's original text.

This new version makes the language seem as native-like as possible while keeping the content of the original intact (Thornbury, 1997). Reformulation has been researched both pedagogically (Cohen, 1989; Hedge, 1988; Thornbury, 1997) and empirically (Adams, 2003; Allwright, Woodley & Allwright, 1988; Cohen, 1982; Qi & Lapkin, 2001; Sachs & Polio, 2007; Swain & Lapkin, 2002; Tocalli-Beller & Swain, 2005) and its effectiveness has been widely recognized. However, the studies on reformulation have developed quite independently from the studies on different types of CF.

Bitchener (2008) highlights two important and very explored distinctions in the CF literature: (i) focused/unfocused feedback and (ii) direct/indirect feedback.

Focused feedback only targets specific errors or types of errors while unfocused feedback targets all (or almost all) the errors. Although reformulation has also been used to address specific grammar points (e.g. French pronominal verbs, Lapkin, Swain & Smith, 2002; Tocalli-Beller & Swain, 2005), when reformulating a text every error is transformed into a correct target language (TL) form. Therefore, the CF offered by means of reformulation can be classified as unfocused. On the other hand, reformulation can be said to offer both indirect and direct CF. Direct CF offers learners the correct target language form while indirect CF encourages learners to self-correct the errors by using different strategies, such as underlining or circling errors, recording the number of errors on a given line and using a code to show where the error has occurred and which type of error it is (Bitchener, 2008; Ellis, Sheen,Murakami & Takashima, 2008).

Those in favor of direct CF value this type of feedback because students and teachers prefer it (Ferris & Roberts, 2001) and also, on analogy with discussions of recasts in the oral feedback literature (Mackey, Gass & McDonough, 2000),because direct corrections are less ambiguous than reformulations. As a matter of fact, reformulations can be perceived by the learner as alternative ways of expressing the same idea instead of being perceived as corrective (Lyster, 1998; Lyster & Ranta,1997). On the contrary, those in favor of indirect CF emphasize that it involves students in a problem-solving task, a type of task which provokes cognitive conflict and might promote acquisition in the long-run (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ferris, 2002). This idea is totally in line with research on reformulation, which has been defined as a strategy that, by presenting information that contradicts students' beliefs,provokes cognitive conflict and enhances learning (Tocalli-Beller & Swain, 2005).The reformulated text can, accordingly, be included as one more strategy for indirect CF. All in all, it must be noted that reformulation straddles the boundary between direct and indirect CF, since it provokes cognitive conflict but it does, in fact, offer a target like alternative just as direct feedback does. This means that with reformulation students might benefit from both the advantages of direct and clear feedback and the advantages of being presented with a cognitive conflict. Corrective feedback has recently gained prominence in studies of ESL and other L2 education contexts, as a number of researchers have looked specially into its nature and role in L2 teaching and learning (e.g., Doughty & Varela, 1998; Havranek, 1999; Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Much of this research has been motivated by the theoretical claim that, although a great deal of L2 learning takes place through exposure to comprehensible input, learners may require negative evidence (i.e., information about ungrammaticality), in the form of either feedback on error or explicit instruction, when they are not able to discover through exposure alone how their interlanguage differs from the L2 (Bley-Vroman, 1986; Rutherford & Sharwood Smith, 1985, 1988; White, 1987). If corrective feedback is sufficiently salient to enable learners to notice the gap between their interlanguage forms and target language forms (Schmidt & Frota, 1986), the resulting cognitive comparison may trigger a destabilization and restructuring of the target language grammar (Ellis, 1994; Gass, 1997). An additional effect of corrective feedback may be the enhancement of learners' metalinguistic awareness (Swain, 1995).

4. Noticing and different types of feedback.

The concept of *noticing* combines the two crucial cognitive linguistic notions of *attention* and *awareness* (Svalberg, 2007). The Noticing Hypothesis states that subliminal SLA is impossible, and that it is only through conscious attention that input can be converted into intake. Schmidt thus argued that noticing is a necessary condition for language learning.Another essential role associated with attention is its ability to make learners aware of "a mismatch or gap between what they can produce and what they need to produce, as well as between what they produce and what target language speakers produce" (Schmidt, 2001, p. 6). This concept has been commonly referred to as *noticing the gap* (e.g. Schmidt and Frota, 1986). Ellis (1995) used the term *cognitive comparison* rather than noticing the gap because,in his view, learners also need to notice when their output is the same as the input.

When conscious attention to linguistic form is considered facilitative to or even a prerequisite for interlanguage development, focus-on-form interventions such as CF can be expected to support the SLA process (e.g. DeKeyser, 1994; Han, 2002). As Hulstijn and Schmidt (1994) stated, they can be considered cognitive focusing devices for learner attention. In raising learners' awareness of certain linguistic features, CF enables learners to notice the gaps between their own interlanguage output and the target language input (i.e. the feedback provided). Subsequently, these noticing operations could prompt destabilization and restructuring of learners' developing interlanguage grammar (e.g. Gass, 1997; Long, 1996).

Adams (2003) furthermore pointed out at the advantage of written CF over orally provided feedback. Although both modalities provide learners with the opportunity of noticing mismatches between the target language and their interlanguage system, learners might not (always) be able to make the cognitive comparison in online oral language use. The classic psychological conception of attentional resources is that they are limited (Schmidt,2001); when presented with an overwhelming number of stimuli at any given moment, the human brain might be unable to attend to them all due to a lack of available processing capacity (Al-Hejin, 2004).

When L2 learners' incorrect hypotheses and inappropriate generalizations lead to errors in their written texts, appropriate feedback from the teacher is needed in order to help learners correct these errors. Zhang's (1995) research indicates that L2 learners genuinely and overwhelmingly welcome feedback, especially from the teacher. Error correction is also what most learners want. For example, Leki's (1991) research found that 70% of the 100 learners surveyed expected all their errors to be corrected. In the context of L2 acquisition, error is referred to as the discrepancy between the learner's interlanguage (IL) and the native speaker's version, i.e., the TL (James, 1998). However, research results regarding what is considered to be appropriate and effective feedback on students' errors in writing ''have been inconclusive, sometimes contradictory, and in L2 writing,sparse'' (Leki, 1990).

Some research has tried to identify factors that may influence the effectiveness of written feedback. One such factor is that the teacher's feedback may be unclear, inaccurate, and may lack balance among form, content, and style (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990). A second factor may relate to a possible lack of sensitivity of teachers to different contexts as well as to varying levels of need, ability, and other individual differences of students in providing feedback (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Ferris, Pezone, Tade, & Tinti, 1997; Hyland, 1998).

Another critical factor, as we view it, is that the type of feedback the teacher offers to the learner does not provide optimal conditions to help learners notice their errors, i.e., the gap between their IL and the TL when they receive and process the feedback. James (1998) compares noticing the gap as similar to learners doing their own error analysis (EA), as both entail making a comparison between IL and TL.Ellis' (1995) notion of ''cognitive comparison'' roughly refers to this same idea. However, James has identified a difference between Ellis' ''cognitive comparison'' and EA. Cognitive comparison refers to the learner's noticing of a linguistic entity in TL input before comparing it with his/her own IL version of it. However, EA proceeds in the converse direction: The learner first notices a problematic formulation in his/her own production before comparing it with a TL version of it. According to James, it is not just preferable but necessary that the forms learners notice and cognitive comparisons they make ''are based on their own recent learning experience, particularly where that experience is negative'' .This EA sense of cognitive comparison is consistent with the output hypothesis in that both emphasize the important role of noticing derived from output in L2 learning.

A key function of reformulation is its provision of opportunity for noticing. If cognitive comparison is essential to learning as discussed earlier, we should select feedback types on the basis of their capacity to promote noticing and EA. Some criteria for appropriate types of feedback should be their potential to encourage learners to pay attention to form and, moreover, provide learners with TL data so that they can make comparisons between their IL and a TL model of it.

Thornbury (1997) proposes that reformulation is one feedback type that meets these criteria. Johnson (1988, cited in Thornbury, 1997) argues that ''exposing learners to the target behavior after the event—rather than providing a model beforehand—has greater psychological validity, in that the learners are predisposed to look out for (and notice) those features of the modeled behavior that they themselves had found problematic in the initial trial run (or first draft)'' (see Thornbury, 1997). This idea is also argued for in output theory. That is, the problems learners encounter in output could ''trigger an analysis of incoming data, that is, a syntactic analysis of input'' (Swain & Lapkin, 1995).

5. The Effect of Noticing on EFL Learners' Writing Performance.

Generally, teachers and researchers recognize part of the role of instruction is to promote beneficial language learning habits. For instance, Lightbown and Spada (1999) review SLA research that shows that one important aspect of classroom language teaching is helping learners to notice form in the L2 through various techniques that direct learners to pay attention to form while they are in the process of communicating in the L2. Such instruction not only allows learners to become more accurate regarding the form in focus but also promotes a language learning skill that learners can carry with them beyond the present instructional situation. It seems that encouraging learner autonomy is increasingly recognized as a beneficial practice to promote language learning. Therefore, it is necessary to explore language learning tasks that encourage learner autonomy and that also lead to gains in accuracy in the second language. The present study is an attempt to find such a task suitable for the advanced ESL writing classroom.

Research in SLA emphasizes the need to help L2 learners notice their own L2use in comparison to the use of the target language as produced by native speakers. Doughty and Williams state that 'one of the central issues in Focus on Form (FonF) research is how to lead the learner's attention to a linguistic mismatch between IL (interlanguage) and TL (target language)'(1998: 238). It is argued that the recognition of this mismatch between

the learner's IL and the TL promotes language learning. The FonF literature seems to imply that the recognition of the mismatch is an autonomous process for language learners.

Research on noticing in L2 acquisition has largely focused on input. Based on Schmidt (1990), Batstone (1996) defines ''noticing'' as ''the intake of grammar as a result of learners paying attention to the input'' where ''intake'' refers to ''input which becomes part of the learning process'' In this definition, noticing is equated with intake that is derived from the source of input. It can be argued, however, that in the broader context of language acquisition, it is not just intake that stems from an input source that can become part of the learning process. There are types of intake that do not stem from the input source but are generated in output (Swain, 1985) that may also be significant for L2 acquisition.

Swain (1985) has proposed the output hypothesis and argues that comprehensible output is a necessary mechanism of acquisition independent of the role of comprehensible input. She points out that producing the TL may be the trigger that forces the learner to pay attention to the means of expression needed in order to successfully convey his or her own intended meaning.

Swain (1995, 1998) further argues that the noticing/triggering function of output can prompt L2 learners to recognize consciously some of their linguistic problems. It may make them aware of something they need to find out about their L2. L2 writing studies that employ think-aloud research techniques support the claim that output stimulates noticing of problems that prompts learners to engage in some kind of analysis of their existing linguistic resources in order to resolve these problems (Cumming, 1990; Swain & Lapkin, 1995; Qi, 1998).

According to the most extreme views, such as Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 2002; Sheen, 2007, Fathman and Whalley, 1990; Ferris and Roberts, 2001; Robb et al., 1986) CF is of value in promoting greater grammatical accuracy. In contrast, Several researchers have argued that written CF does not have a positive effect on the development of students'L2 writing accuracy (Kepner, 1991; Truscott, 2007; Sheppard, 1992). For example, Sheppard (1992) analyzed the effects of two types of CF (indirect error coding CF vs. holistic comments in the margins) on the development of L2 students' accurate use of verb tense, punctuation, and subordination. His students wrote seven essays which then were analyzed for accuracy with regard to the targeted linguistic features. He reported that the group that received holistic comments outperformed the group that received CF and further noted that the CF group regressed over time by avoiding the use of the complex structures as a result of the CF. This led him to conclude that grammar error correction had a negative effect.

6. Pedagogical Implications.

This study indicates clear and positive findings, in line with previous studies, in support of such a pedagogical method, because a large benefit was gained for a rather small amount of time. Overall, the findings provide empirical support for EFL instructors to provide feedback to their student writers through reformulation as an implicit feedback. The conclusion is that reformulating can help students develop writing accuracy and it also provided information and how this information can be used to provide valuable insights to the writer. The key benefit of such a procedure was that is actually provided one complete example of a more native-like way to express the writer's same idea, rather than simply fixing up the language that students already knew how to use ,however ,inappropriately.

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