

Colours as a Form of Corrective Feedback in EFL Learners' Writing

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to explore the effect of colours as a form of corrective feedback in EFL learners' writing and how the foregrounding of such feedback is related to the learners' performance in EFL acquisition. Data were collected from a group of EFL learners, in which majority of them came from the Middle East countries. A pre-test and a post-test were conducted to determine the types of grammatical errors that they committed the most. The result of the study revealed that colour corrective feedback was found to be effective in increasing learners' awareness which had improved learners' performance in writing. After receiving corrective feedback in the form of colours, it was found that grammatical errors, specifically mechanical and morphological errors committed by the learners had decreased tremendously whereas in terms of semantic errors, the number of errors had increased. This result supports the notion of Noticing Hypothesis whereby learning is effective when the errors are noticed. The use of colours in highlighting specific errors was also found to assist learners to progress further and faster in the learning process as the types of errors committed can immediately be identified. This study enlightens the usage of colour-coded system as a form of indirect corrective feedback for language instructors specifically in EFL context. Thus, the pedagogical implication of this study is that colours could be used as a form of indirect corrective feedback due to its ability to immediately direct students' focus towards specific grammatical errors.

Keywords: colour corrective feedback; EFL; writing; grammatical errors; performance

INTRODUCTION

Error treatment is one of the key issues in language learning encountered by both teachers and students. There are some controversies on whether error feedback helps the students in their writing or vice versa. Some researchers think that error feedback is useful for the students' improvement in their writing skill (Baghzou, 2014, as cited in Farrokhi & Sattarpour, 2012) while others rejected the proposal for fear of promoting inhibition towards the language (Truscott, 2007; Al Jarrah, 2016). Ji (2015) clarifies that regardless of any type

of error corrections made or feedback given by educators to learners, its significance must be considered as it guides students' attention to language form. Previous researchers have conducted studies on some aspects pertaining to error feedback in students' writing (Fathman & Walley, 1990; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Assassfeh, 2013). In general, the most common corrective feedback (CF, henceforth) can be categorized into two: direct feedback and indirect feedback (Walz, 1982; Bates, Lane & Lange, 1993; Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998; Eslami, 2014). Both types of corrective feedback in written and oral forms have been proven to be beneficial in students' writing process (Tootkaboni & Khatib, 2014; Sarvestani & Pishkar, 2015).

While direct CF indicates the error made by students when educators cross out the mistaken word and write the correct answer, indirect CF only specifies which error has been made. Various correction methods can be used to indicate the errors such as by underlining the errors or using symbols or codes which aim students to self-correct the errors they made. (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Mohebbi, 2013; Hoesseini, 2014). Besides underlining the error or using symbols, teachers can also place a cross in the margin next to the line to indicate the errors made (Talatifard, 2016). It is difficult to determine which type of feedback is the most effective to help students improve their writing. Various studies have been carried out to determine whether direct CF or indirect CF affects students' writing positively. Bitchener (2012) for instance states that, students are engaged in learning when they are guided as they are encouraged to self-edit themselves. Some studies, for instance, have proven that indirect corrective feedback seemed to be effective in helping students in improving linguistic accuracy of grammatical errors (Jamalinesari et al., 2015) such as subject-verb agreement in students' writing (Jusoh et al., 2016). However, lower proficiency students may not be able to correct their own errors since they may have insufficient knowledge in the target language (Mohebbi, 2013). Although students with low proficiency level know what and where the mistakes are, they may not be able to recognize them (Srichanyachon, 2012), hence, educators can choose any type of corrective feedback that suits their students best. However, it is vital to reflect how students respond to the correction (Khodareza & Delvand 2016).

Colour has been identified as a factor that could determine how long information is retained in one's brain as it evokes visual experience to humans (Dzulkifli & Mustafar, 2013). Brown (2012) also believes that different colours have different effects on students' overall performance in writing. Though studies on the usage of colours has shed some light on how it affects memory retention of adult learners, this area needs further clarification (Olurinola & Tayo, 2015). Therefore, this study attempts to look at the effectiveness of colours as a form of corrective feedback in students' writing.

Since there are limited past researches on how colours are used as indirect CF to assess students' writing, it is important to carry out the present study. Therefore, the aim of this study is to find out whether this technique can contribute towards reducing errors in the students' writing, focusing on the question - What are the effects of colour corrective feedback on students' writing?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Errors and corrective feedback are an integral part of language learning. As this study focuses on writing; whether it could be improved via the different CF strategies, Ellis's (2009) classification of CF is deemed as the best framework to guide the study. Ellis's classification encompasses six categories, namely, direct, indirect, metalinguistic, focused/unfocused, electronic, and reformulation. In the direct feedback, the correct form of the inaccurate form is provided. According to Ferris (2006), this includes the addition and omission of some words to form the correct form. Conversely, in indirect CF, the teacher indicates where the

error exists by underlining or specifying the location of the error. Ferris and Roberts (2001) believe that this feedback is more beneficial than the direct form in that the learners gain more processing time since they need to spend more time trying to figure out what is wrong. Thus, this will allow the learners to reflect on the kind of error they committed. There are two forms of metalinguistic feedback. The first one is error coding, where some codes are written by the teachers on the paper to suggest what problems learners have (e.g. VT for verb tense). The learners are provided with a list of the codes to avoid confusion. In the brief grammatical description form, the errors are numbered and a brief explanation for the error is provided. The next type of feedback is focused/unfocused. In unfocused feedback, the scope of correction is unrestrained and the teacher could correct all existing errors, but in focused CF, the teacher only focuses on what has been taught and ignores the rest of the errors. In electronic feedback, an electronic software is used to provide the feedback while in reformulation, the original meaning is retained but the form is reshaped to make it more native-like. In this study, indirect CF and metalinguistic feedback (error coding) were used in the pre-test while the post-test used colour corrective feedback to indicate students' errors.

An abundance of research has investigated the influence of corrective feedback – direct or indirect – towards students' writing. Truscott (1996) is among the pioneers who strongly believe that correcting students' grammatical accuracy is meaningless. He further argues that the practice is harmful to learning, time consuming and that by letting the mistakes uncorrected would serve the students best (Truscott, 1999; cited in Black and Nanni, 2016). Ferris (1999) forcefully opposes his stand. She offers a counter-argument by claiming that when CF is done clearly and selectively, it can at least significantly affect some learners in improving their writing. Polio (2012; as cited in Asassfeh, 2013) further supports Ferris's viewpoint and puts in words that it, "could be effective in certain conditions" (p.375).

Past literature has revealed that indirect corrective feedback has been proven to be significant in decreasing students' writing errors particularly in terms of grammatical accuracy. Jamalinesari et al. (2015) investigated the effectiveness of indirect and direct CF on students' essays in an EFL context. Two classes of female lower-intermediate English language learners in a private institution in Iran participated in the study. Eight types of grammatical errors were tested in the writing assessments of ten consecutive class session. For one class, the teacher applied direct feedback by providing the correct forms while in the other class, the teacher just underlined the errors. Participants in both classes were asked to review the essays and submitted them in the next class. Their responses were checked and recorded. The findings showed that indirect feedback outperformed direct feedback. Though there was no clear distinction which grammatical accuracy the students had improved the most, the result showed that indirect feedback assisted EFL students in decreasing grammatical errors. Additionally, there are other studies which prove that indirect CF affects the reduction of errors in grammar such as Westmacott (2017) who studied the benefits of indirect feedback in grammatical accuracy, Baleghizadeh and Dadashi (2012) who advocate the use of indirect feedback as more significant than direct feedback in correcting students' errors, and Erlan et al. (2013) who claims that indirect feedbacks assist learners to self-repair grammatical errors. Surprisingly, most studies which examine the efficiency of indirect feedback towards grammatical accuracy merely focus on mechanical errors (e.g. Baleghizadeh & Dadashi, 2012; Ghandi & Maghsoudi, 2014) and morphological errors (e.g. Varnosfadrani & Ansari, 2011) but did not analyse semantic errors.

Despite the significance of providing feedback (input) to learners as the literature has shown, another challenge subsequently emerged which is, how much of this input can be retained by the learners? Noticing Hypothesis proposed by Schmidt (2001, as cited in Lightbrown & Spada, 2006) emphasises on the notion that input does not become intake for language learning unless it is noticed (Schmidt, 2010). He believes that language learning can

take place and is largely driven by what learners pay attention to and the level of awareness that they displayed in the target language. He further claimed that for language learning to be effective, the linguistic features of the input must be noticed by the learners. This view is aligned with how corrective feedback works; when learners are conscious that they are making mistakes, learning begins and eventually develops the understanding of the target language. According to Krashen (2001, as cited in Lightbrown & Spada, 2006), even though appropriate input is available for the learners, language acquisition is a challenge if the learners experience anxiety throughout the process. In his affective filter hypothesis, Krashen argued that acquisition is unlikely to happen when the learners are anxious, and consequently, the input is filtered. This ultimately suggests that even if input such as in the form of corrective feedback (direct or indirect) is provided in abundance, acquisition might still be impossible as the learners are intimidated by those feedbacks. Subsequently, even when feedbacks are provided to learners, they are unlikely to retain those feedbacks. Students value their own ego and their pride over effective learning, therefore the types of corrective feedback provided should not be those which make them feel embarrassed or belittled (Ryan, 2012). This not only filters the input but might confuse them at times. Thus, it is worthy to note that the best practice in providing feedback to language learners need to be one that considers the learners' anxiety so that the errors can be noticed and ultimately, the input provided can be retained.

As such, the present study explores the use of colour as an alternative way in which corrective feedback can be provided in order to help learners notice the grammatical errors without increasing their level of anxiety. Providing corrective feedback in abundance could somehow trigger anxiety and confusion to students due to having an entire paper marked with symbols or codes in red (Ryan, 2012). Thus, it is significant to enhance students' positive attitudes in learning which could further sustain cognitive retention because it may contribute to better academic achievement (Dzulkifli & Alias, 2012). Eslami (2014) also carried out a study among a group of 60 EFL learners. The study compared the effectiveness between direct red pen feedback and indirect feedback towards simple past tense errors in three pieces of writing. A series of pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test were done to achieve the objectives. The finding disclosed that the usage of indirect feedback via red-inked pen was better in improving students' grammatical knowledge in the long-run which proves that indirect feedback is significant to be carried out over the course of time. In comparison to error codes, Brown (2012) described colour coding as another creative way of marking students' errors (e.g. blue colour to indicate verbs) and proved that his students noticed and remembered colours more than when error codes were used. A study on the use of red ink rather than blue ink in grading students' work was done by Dukes and Albanesi (2013). They discovered that the red colour conveys unintentional negative emotions to the students. Too many errors marked in red had somehow triggered the volunteers' emotions to rate their instructors as being judgmental or harsh. This shows that colours play a significant role in how students perceive feedback. Error feedback and corrections are made because teachers want to see changes, a better version of the paper to show that students reflect and learn something from mistakes. This means that the learning process has begun since they can diagnose the errors and correct them. If students modify or change their writing assessment by correcting them, the feedback process is completed (Dukes & Albanesi, 2013).

Since there are inadequate past researches that analyse semantic errors in students' writing through corrective feedback and limited usage of colours as a form of corrective feedback, it is pertinent and timely to conduct this study.

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

This study was based on an action research project. A group of 14 EFL learners aged between 19 to 26 years old were chosen to participate in the study. All of them are currently learning English in a private English language centre. This English course is a certified English program which comprises 9 levels (101 – 103 for beginner level, 104 – 106 for intermediate level and 107 – 109 for advance level). The program covers structure and speaking practice, reading and writing skill as well as language and technology class. Students who enrolled will receive a certificate upon completion of each level, which will enable them to enrol into colleges and universities of their choice in Malaysia. Majority of them came from Middle East countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. Thus, they do not have adequate knowledge in the target language. The students attended a 3-hour writing class per week. Although they are adults, their English proficiency is ranked at lower-intermediate level (Level 4). In this level, they are expected to be able to understand a few words and phrases, communicate at a basic level in everyday situations and respond to simple questions and directions. As for their writing assessment, they are required to learn an essay format of a 4-paragraph essay comprising of an introductory paragraph, two body paragraphs and a concluding paragraph. The instructor usually applies indirect corrective feedback to show students' errors. Their mistakes are shown using editing symbols (see Appendix A) e.g. SVA for subject-verb agreement and P for punctuation. However, for this study, students are informed earlier that besides editing symbols, colour-coded system would also be used as their writing feedback. A list of errors and colour codes prepared in a form of a table was given to the students before the writing assessment started (see Appendix B). They were also informed beforehand that the assessment would not affect their grades.

TREATMENT PROCEDURE

Since this research aims to look at the effectiveness of colours in a short period of time, the treatment was carried out in a period of one week. The language intake one perceives must be absorbed and processed in short-term memory before it is retained in long-term memory (Kihlstrom, 1984). Schmidt (1990) further concluded, "If consciousness is indeed equivalent to the short-term store, this amount to a claim that storage without conscious awareness is impossible" (p.136; as cited in Vahidi et al., 2016). The instructor who is also the researcher must conform to the curriculum and syllabus aligned by the private language centre; therefore, the study was carried out under certain restrictions. To answer the research question, one of the writing assessments that students need to compose is to write an Informational Process essay whereby they must write an informative essay using some information and directions. During the pre-test, the students were asked to write an essay on 'How to Fail a Test'; an informational process essay which is the type of essay that they need to write about. On the other hand, the topic given for the post-test is 'How to Make Your Parents Happy'. The topics selected for the assessments are randomly chosen by the instructor; however, similar topics have been used as practice in class such as 'How to be a Good Wife' or 'How to Lie to Your Parents'. As they are in the lower-intermediate level; one level above the beginner level, the students were asked to write essays which were approximately 180-200 words in length. The length of the essay is outlined in the course itself and was clearly explained by the instructor before they began writing.

FEEDBACK CONDITION

The error code was formulated from the current editing error code (see Appendix A). The colour coded system (see Appendix B) is designed from three types of errors: (1) morphological errors (singular-plural e.g. they *has* to be there and verb tense e.g. she *go* yesterday), (2) mechanical errors (punctuation e.g. what is *wrong!* and capitalization e.g. *i* start my day with a smile) and (3) semantic errors (word choice e.g I *defiantly* want to buy the watch and spelling errors e.g. The man lives in an old *horse*). The colour-coded system was introduced in this study to determine whether it helps students in reducing errors they made earlier. This new system was presented before they started the writing class. The students were provided with the colour-coded system information sheet to give them the chance to digest the difference between two types of feedback; feedback given using the editing symbols and feedback given using the colour-coded system – before it can be implemented.

The pre-test corrective feedback was given in the beginning of the week and the post-test was assigned at the end of the week to ensure that students are aware of their mistakes. During pre-test, students wrote the essays in one hour. Then, the instructor marked them by using the colour-coded system. Their errors were calculated and recorded. The essays were given back to the students and they were instructed to read and correct them by rewriting the essays back. At the end of the week, the pre-test was done. Using a different topic, the instructor marked their essays after their submission. The errors were underlined using colour-coded system that was given earlier. Again, the errors made were calculated and recorded. For both tests, the errors which were not in the code (e.g. articles and missing word) were not abandoned. The teacher corrected those mistakes directly by writing the correct answers using another different coloured pen. The essays were given back to the students to be rewritten as a form of revision.

The total numbers of errors for both pre-test and post-test were accumulated. The numbers of errors for different aspects (morphological errors, mechanical errors, and semantic errors) were recorded and the nature of the errors was analysed.

FINDINGS

In order to answer the research question, a comparison was first conducted between the two tests to see how students responded to the colour corrective feedback. The students wrote their first essays before they were being introduced to the colour-coded system. The total number of errors in the pre-test was 219. The number of morphological errors was 74, the number of mechanical errors was 75, and the number of semantic errors was 70. In the post-test, on the other hand, the students had already been introduced to the colour-coded system. The total number of errors was 171. The number of morphological errors was 55, the number of mechanical errors was 36, and the number of semantic errors was 80. The three types of errors (morphological, mechanical, and semantic) made by the students were compared in the figures below.

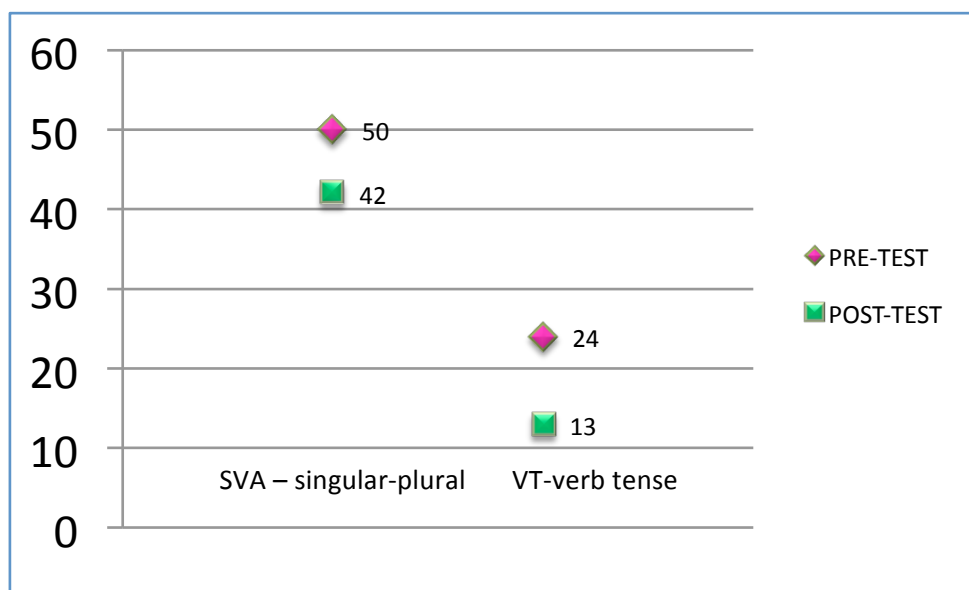


FIGURE 1. Number of morphological errors committed

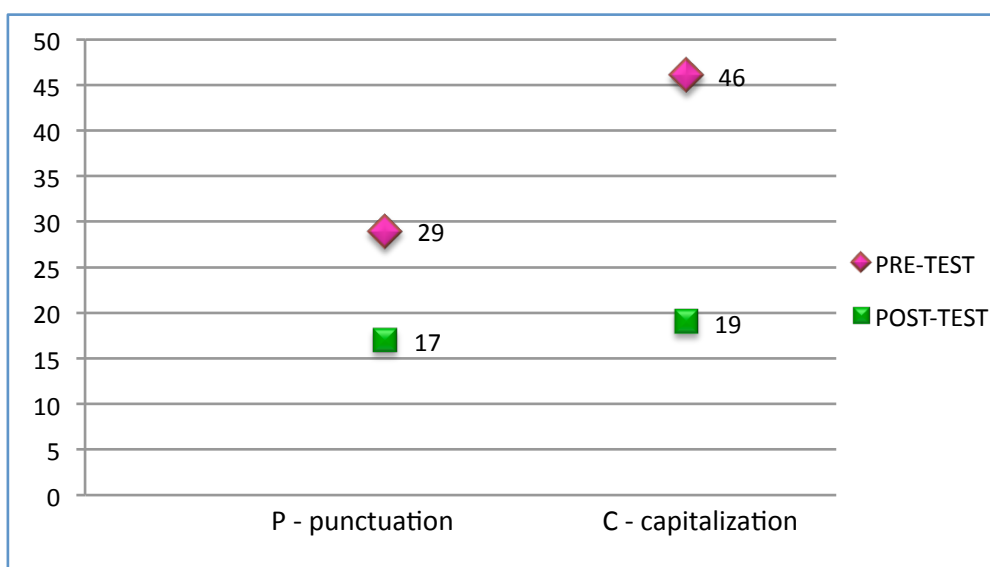


FIGURE 2. Number of mechanical errors committed

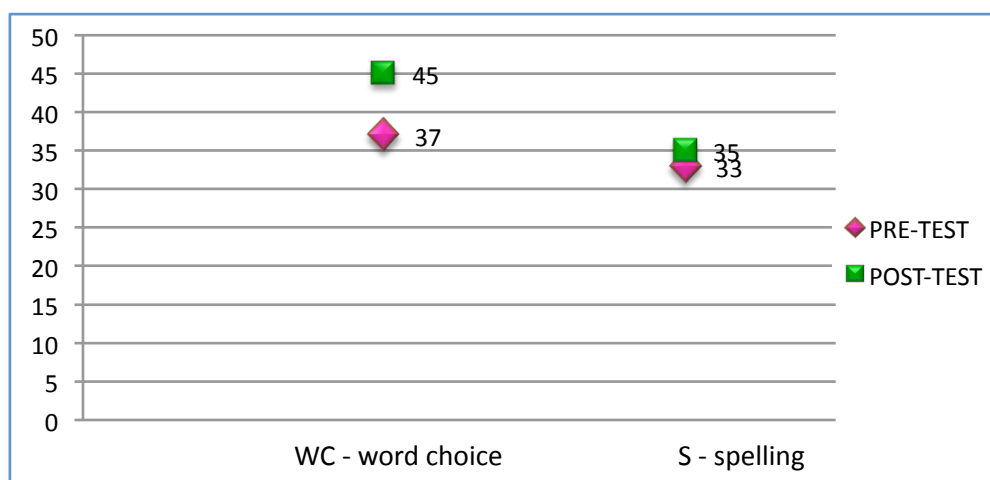


FIGURE 3. Number of semantic errors committed

Figure 1 shows the total number of morphological errors in the pre-test and post-test. Based on the findings, it was found that there was a significant decrease of morphological errors in the post-test, both in Subject-Verb Agreement and Verb Tense. In the pre-test, it was found that certain students have the tendency to commit morphological errors in their writing;

Example (1a): I think everyone who *fail* a test have a lot of problems. [SVA]

Example (2a): Some students *is* good in test and some students *isn't* good in test. [SVA]

Example (3a): *Fail* a test is not good for everyone. [VT]

Example (4a): These information can be the reasons of *fail* a test. [VT]

In the post—test however, the same student made significant improvement by using the correct form of morphological structures;

Example (1b): I think everyone who *wants* to make his or her parents happy should listen to them carefully and be comfortable with them. [SVA]

Example (2b): Most parents *are* happy with their children. [SVA]

Example (3b): With all these steps, *making* your parents happy will be easier. [VT]

Example (4b): *Making* your parents happy is not difficult when you follow these steps. [VT]

Figure 2 shows the total number of mechanical errors in both tests. For both punctuation and capitalization errors, there was a prominent decrease of the number of mechanical errors from the pre-test to the post-test. In the pre-test, it was found that students tend to commit mechanical errors in their writing;

Example (1c): If you want to pass a test [,/]you must study hard. [P]

Example (2c): First [,] if you have a test the next day, you go in cinema. [P]

Example (3c): *when* you enjoy your hobby too much, you will fail a test. [C]

Example (4c): *next*, if you have a problem in your life and your mind is busy with that. [C]

In the post—test however, the same student showed improvement in terms of mechanical errors;

Example (1d): If you follow this information, you can make your parents happy. [P]

Example (2d): Next, buy some gifts for them. [P]

Example (3d): *Next*, you can get them a give [gift] at their birthday celebration. [C]

Example (4d): *When* they are sad, you can also give them a gift. [C]

Figure 3 shows the total number of semantic errors in the two tests. It was found that students have a tendency to commit semantic errors in their writing;

Example (1e): You go with your friend outside and you don't study [for] *you* test. [WC]

Example (2e): When *you* teacher gives you homework, you did not do. [WC]

Example (3e): Second, when you *principle* speaks, you speak with your friend. [SP]

Example (4e): All people like to *past* a test. [SP]

In the post-test, the number of semantic errors increased after the learners received feedback on their essays, particularly in terms of word choice. There was a slight increase of semantic errors in terms of spelling. Spelling errors included only if the (apparent) misspelling resulted in an actual English word.

Example (1f): You can buy gift and give them *at* father's day and mother's day. [WC]

Example (2f): You must do some things to make *you* parents happy. [WC]

Example (3f): Next, you can get them a *give* [gift] *at* their birthday celebration. [WC/SP]

Example (4f): When they are sad, *effect* it your relationship. [SP]

Example (5f): Follow your parents say *accept* bad things. [SP]

DISCUSSION

COLOUR-CODED SYSTEM AS A FORM-FOCUSED FEEDBACK

In providing written corrective feedback to students, it is crucial to ensure that students not only improve but are able to identify the nature of the errors committed. In doing so, it is important for the students to notice the different types of errors committed before they can actually engage with the feedback. The results of the study support Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (2001, as cited in Lightbrown & Spada, 2006) which suggests that nothing is learned unless it has been noticed. It also manages to dispute Truscott's belief (2001, as cited in Al Jarrah, 2016) that students' learning is most effective without error feedback. The prominent decrease of the number of grammatical errors from the pre-test to the post-test suggests that some parts of the colour corrective feedback had been retained by the students. Noticing does not itself result in acquisition but it is the essential starting point. Colour-coded system as a form of corrective feedback; thus, is an alternative that should be considered in providing corrective feedback in students' writing. It is believed that the strategy of utilizing various colours with each of them representing one type of grammatical error can immediately direct students' attention and focus to the nature of the errors committed. The results of the study also support proposition made by Unlua (2015) whereby she believes that noticing is indeed essential in language learning but that other factors need to be taken into consideration. This study manages to address one of those factors, which is learners' anxiety.

Colour corrective feedback can actually reduce students' anxiety and increase their level of motivation as compared to other types of feedback. Instead of comparing one's performance with another, colour corrective feedback enables students to positively engage with the feedback without promoting fear of being inferior to their peers. Editing symbols for instance, when being provided in abundance, might direct students' attention towards ego issues, such as how smart they are by the sight of errors often marked in red. In contrast, using colour corrective feedback manages to address one of the issues raised previously by Ryan (2012), which is students' self-worth. He identified that the least favoured types of corrective feedback by the students are those that make them feel belittled. Here is when colour corrective feedback comes into play, as it takes them away from the feeling of being embarrassed. Noticing which colour that occurs the most in the feedback provided enables the students to immediately identify those errors as the weakest area that needs to be improved on, without lowering their level of motivation and self-confidence. A student can have a lot of errors in yellow, signifying his or her weakness in Subject-Verb Agreement for instance, but none in green, signifying that they are better in punctuation. Immediate identification of the errors distribution in their writing might give them the impression that they are not entirely weak in writing, but that there are certain errors that require more practice and attention. This ultimately can lead to self-monitoring and independent learning from the students. Students have been drilled from early age in the form of corrective feedback either in direct as in reformulation or indirect as in editing symbols. Introducing colour-coded system as an alternative form of corrective feedback might be something unexpected for them and thus the students are pushed to positively respond to it.

GRAMMATICAL ERROR

Regarding different types of errors, colour corrective feedback had produced surprisingly significant results. For the post-test, there was a significant decrease of morphological errors committed by the students, showing some effects of colour corrective feedback. The highest decrease of morphological errors in their essays was in terms of verb tense. This indicates that students paid some attention to verb tense when they wrote an essay. In terms of Subject-

Verb-Agreement, there was a slight decrease of errors made in the post-test, though not so much. Examples given in (1b), (2b), (3b) and (4b) in the post-test clearly showed how the students had managed to retain the feedback provided in the pre-test by using the correct form of grammar in their writing. By noticing the Subject-Verb-Agreement error highlighted in (1a), the first student made significant improvement in (1b) whereby the verb 'wants' now agrees with the subject 'Everyone'. Similarly, in (3b), the use of gerund 'making' is mobilised correctly by the second student after the error was pointed out in (3a) in the pre-test. Example (4a) also shows another similar error in terms of Verb Tense (VT). This student committed the same error as the student in (3a) whereby this student failed to employ the gerund 'fail' correctly but made significant improvement in (4b) by writing the correct form of the gerund 'making'. Although this awareness cannot be completely attributed to the effect of colour corrective feedback they received on their essays, the process of finding out the correct form themselves by referring to the colour-coded system previously taught seemed to help students internalize the rules related to the morphological errors.

The students also showed improvement in the post-test in terms of mechanical errors. It was found that there was a prominent decrease of mechanical errors from the pre-test to the post-test. This finding, as similar as that of the morphological errors, showed positive effects of colour-coded corrective feedback. The students showed some improvement in terms of their punctuation and capitalization by committing fewer errors. In (1c), the student had committed a punctuation error whereby a comma was missing between the first and second clause. In the post-test however, the student showed some improvement in his writing by committing fewer punctuation errors as seen in (1d) whereby the first clause ended with a comma followed by the second clause. The most prominent improvement was noted in terms of capitalization. In reference to (4d), the first word in the first clause started with a capital letter 'W' from the word 'When'. Compared to (4c) in the pre-test, the letter 'w' in the word 'when' was employed in small letter instead of capital letter to signal the beginning of a sentence. It was also found that that the highest decrease of mechanical errors in their essays was in terms of capitalization, with 27 errors being reduced in the post-test. This suggests that huge parts of the feedback had been retained by the student effectively. This result correlates with that of Storch and Wigglesworth (2010) in which they found out that feedback on mechanical errors are easier to be retained compared to other types of errors, regardless of the types of corrective feedback being employed, either direct or indirect. The result also correlates with Brown's (2012) whereby his students noticed the errors committed and remembered more when using colour codes compared to using error codes. This supports the study by Dzulkipli and Mustafar (2013) which identified colours as a factor that could determine the duration of information retention in one's brain as they evoke visual experience.

Semantic errors, in contrary, had slightly increased from pre-test to post-test. In the post-test, the number of semantic errors was higher than that of pre-test. In reference to (1e), the student made a wrong word choice whereby the possessive adjective was replaced by a pronoun. In the post-test (1f), the student again committed word choice error in terms of preposition whereby the word 'at' was chosen instead of 'on'. In terms of spelling, the errors were found to be in abundance for both pre-test and post-test. As seen in (3e), one student failed to correctly spell the word 'principal' and in (3f), the same student committed more spelling errors by mobilising the word 'accept' instead of 'except'. It is interesting to note how students can retain the feedback received in terms of mechanical errors but failed to do so when it comes to semantic. Example in (3d) clearly shows how one particular student managed to retain the feedback received in (3c) whereby the transitional marker 'Next' was employed in capital letter, showing evidence of retention on feedback related to mechanical errors. However, this same student struggled to retain the feedback on semantic error

whereby the noun ‘gift’ was mobilised as the verb ‘give’ (see (3f)), despite the same type of error had been pointed out in (3e). This shows almost no effect of the colour corrective feedback. This is especially true for the errors in word choice. Even when students knew they had made a wrong word choice, they may not have found the right word to replace it all the time. Morphological and mechanical errors were easier to correct in that students could choose the right morphological form for different situations, such as the verb tense and subject-predicate agreement, if they knew the rules. This result supports previous research done by Liu (2008) and Srichanyachon (2012). Liu found out that feedback on semantic errors were more difficult to be retained compared to morphological errors for both direct and indirect corrective feedback. This explains why the total number of morphological and mechanical errors for both tests was not as high as that of semantic errors. As discussed earlier, semantic errors are not rule-based; thus, harder to be treated than mechanics and morphological errors. Though students could correct some of the semantic errors marked by the teacher in revision, they made new errors when drafting a new piece of writing. In comparison, the students’ level of proficiency in this study is similar to that of Srichanyachon’s which is low to intermediate. Thus, the results of the study support her notion that low proficiency students are unable to recognise the correct forms of words even if they knew the exact nature and location of the errors. Students were more likely to make errors in semantic because they might not have found the right word to explain in their writing.

INTERLINGUAL INTERFERENCE

Semantic errors in terms of word choice in the students’ writing were found to be higher in the post-test compared to pre-test. According to Mahmoud (2011), even when there is a rule (e.g. “at” + time - “on” + day), Arabic students have a tendency to commit prepositional errors such as in (11) ‘[...] *at father’s day and mother’s day*’ most probably due to interlingual transfer from Arabic. Students were also found to encounter problems in finding the right words to express meanings in their writing. Students have a higher tendency to use words in the noun form such as ‘effect’ instead of in their verb form ‘affect’ (12). ‘Affect’ is a verb meaning ‘to influence’, while ‘effect’ is usually a noun, referring to the result of a change. This error can be explained by the students’ lack of familiarity in using the word. The sentence structures employed by the majority of students in writing those essays were examined. It was found that these students have a higher tendency to mobilise the noun form of a word rather than the verb form, as well as the adjective form instead of the adverb form. The difference between these parts of speech is so slippery that learners tend to use them interchangeably. Other semantic errors committed by the students include words such as ‘role/roll’, and ‘good/well’. These findings suggest that semantic errors committed by the students with respect to sentence structure may be due to their influence of LI. As mentioned previously, majority of the students came from Middle East countries where their first language is Arabic. Al-Khresheh (2010) noted that the Arabic has a free word order, ranging from V-S-O, O-V-S, and V-O-S, with V-S-O being the basic structure. In contrast, English has the structure of S-V-O as its basic structure. Thus, the differences in the sentence structure of the students’ LI seem to have an impact on their L2 sentence structure. As such, when the sentence structure was supposedly employed as S-V-O as in ‘[...] *it will affect their relationship*’, the students’ LI seems to interfere with the process resulting in ‘[...] *effect it your relationship*’. In this example, not only was the sentence structure word order incorrectly employed (V-S-O), but the Verb ‘affect’ was also replaced with the Noun ‘effect’ which functions as the Subject, again following the V-S-O structure. These semantic errors suggest the learners’ inability to think in English. The students seem to freely lean on their LI

in order to understand English. Briefly, the basic English sentence structure is the simple sentence, with one clause representing the structure S-V-O. In contrast, Arabic has different word order structures. As mentioned earlier, the basic word order for Arabic is V-S-O. This result supports the claim previously made by Mohebbi (2013) whereby he stated that insufficient knowledge in the target language may cause lower proficiency students to have difficulty in correcting their own errors.

To sum up, errors on morphology and mechanics decreased in the post-test, showing positive effects of colour corrective feedback. Conversely, semantic errors showed negative effects of colour corrective feedback. The nature of semantic errors which are not rule-based makes it difficult for the colour corrective feedback to be retained by the students as they need to possess the vocabulary needed to replace the words regardless of the types of CF used. Apart from that, failure to retain the colour corrective feedback is probably caused by the interlingual errors with regard to simple sentence structure committed by the students due to the transfer of L1 habits. The findings suggest that the students are still very much influenced by their L1 knowledge in understanding the English sentences. The study also seems to indicate that they have not mastered the English basic S-V-O structure in simple sentences.

CONCLUSION

Evaluation can be considered as ‘the act of finding value in a piece of writing’ (Hansen, 1996). It is regarded as a vital aspect in which it allows learners for self-evaluation. The writer is expected to evaluate his or her writing by finding value and respond to different interpretations of whether they are doing well as a writer. The amount or comprehensible knowledge would not be enough if the learner himself does not make any effort to improve. Therefore, this colour corrective feedback does emphasize the importance of self-awareness among EFL learners. Rollinson (2005) states that negative evidence as indirect feedback that comes from teachers or peer corrections would not be the only way to help students in writing. He emphasizes that the interlanguage knowledge is not provided by teachers or advanced learners but instead, stem from their reflection and systematic focus on form that develop one’s ability in writing. If the student himself does not have any interest and is not aware of how important corrective feedback is, there is a little chance for him to ever succeed in writing. The need to be independent in learning should be highlighted by the teachers. They have to be consciously aware about which grammatical areas they should focus on and how it can be corrected.

Swain’s (1993, 1995) output hypothesis has previously explained that learners need to be pushed to make use of their own resources and to extend their productive repertoire. Writing is a complex task which involves many thinking skills such as generating ideas, organizing ideas, and expressing ideas logically. When feedback is given to them in accordance to such skills, students ought to employ the learnt knowledge and this triggers their own understanding to correct themselves. When learners are aware of their own mistakes, eventually they would allow self-correction where they activate their linguistic competence, foster language awareness through reflection, and emphasize self-discovery in the learning process (Makino, 1993). Although language learners have learnt everything that they should through formal education setting or language learning through experience, they still need to explore and develop their own knowledge explicitly.

In order to contribute to the need of corrective feedback in writing (Ferris, 1999; Truscott, 1996), the present study investigated the effects of colours as a form of corrective feedback in EFL learners’ writing. It was found that colours function as an alternative to indirect feedback (editing symbols) where it gives learners the autonomy to repair their errors

by noticing different colours. It also helps students to develop awareness on grammatical errors especially morphological and mechanical errors without reducing their level of self-esteem. Everything matters when it comes to the consequences of corrective feedback. Students and teachers must work as a unit as to ensure that the communicative presence exists. Teachers' beliefs and educational background also contribute to the types of feedback employed to the learners. Knowing the students' strengths and weaknesses give ways to educators in establishing useful and practical solutions to help them especially in writing. Optimal and positive learning environment has to be taken into account to motivate students to always respond and assess their writing process. Undoubtedly, choosing the best corrective feedback will definitely benefit the students' self-efficacy and interest to perform better and maintain their growth in grammatical accuracy.

This present study was conducted to examine the effects of colour corrective feedback on students' writing and identify the type of error(s) that decrease and increased the most when colour corrective feedback is applied. The results obtained suit the objective of the study which focuses on immediate retention. It is discovered that in a period of a week, mechanical and morphological errors improved significantly. As the sample was small and was done in a short time, the data cannot be generalized. Regardless, the data is valuable for future long-term study. It is likely possible for teachers to use this in classroom and they are expected to provide feedback consistently. The current study has managed to demonstrate how colour corrective feedback can be utilized in the teaching of language learners. More studies on this type of feedback may be conducted on a larger scale in order to validate the findings of the current study. Expansion of this study by involving more EFL/ESL students and teachers may be considered in order to widen the scope of the study regarding the effects of colour corrective feedback on students' performance. As such, researchers may continue to develop this area and involve students from different backgrounds and language proficiency, as they may demonstrate the various ways in which those feedbacks are retained by the students. Furthermore, apart from performance, future researchers could explore colour corrective feedback and look at several aspects such as learning context, proficiency level, students' perceptions and students' motivation. Teachers may opt to use colour corrective feedback in order to improve students' writing. Students should be given meaningful corrective feedback from time to time. If teachers do not do so, students should ask their teachers to give them corrective feedback.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank Muna Liyana Mohamad Tarmizi, a lecturer at the Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam for her contribution in completing this study. The authors also gratefully acknowledge the helpful comments and suggestions of the reviewers, which have improved the paper.

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APPENDIX A

Symbol	Error	Symbol	Error
SVA	Singular-Plural	WC	Word Choice
VT	Verb Tense	RP	Rephrase
SP	Spelling	?	Unclear meaning
C	Capitalization	WO	Word Order
P	Punctuation	@	Articles
_____	Omit word(s)	^	Add a word

APPENDIX B

Symbol	Error	Colour
SVA	Singular-Plural	Yellow
VT	Verb Tense	Black
WC	Word Choice	Red
SP	Spelling	Magenta
P	Punctuation	Green
C	Capitalization	Blue

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