Effectiveness of Form-Focused Repairs in Improving Low-Proficiency Learners' Speaking Performance[*]

ประสิทธิผลของการปรับแก้ที่เน้นรูปในการปรับปรุงกฤตกรรมการพูดของผู้เรียนที่มีความสามารถทางด้านภาษาในระดับต่ำ

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Abstract

The purposes of this study are to examine the effectiveness of form-focused repairs in enhancing low-proficiency learners' speaking performance, to determine the features of performance differences between low-proficiency learners treated with form-focused repair and that of the control group without form-focused repair. Purposively selected in the second semester of the academic year 2016, the participants in this study included 60 Mathayom 4 students at a high school in Trang. Data were collected using a pre- and post- speaking test with an oral assessment rubric. Form-focused repair was performed in the warm-up, introduction, presentation, practice and evaluation stages of teaching. The findings reveal that the total scores from the interview test obtained from the two groups were significantly different at 0 .01 (t = 2.71). It was shown that low-proficiency learners treated with form-focused repair orally performed significantly better in the post test compared to those without form-focused repair treatment. Especially, the scores in all five features, including pronunciation, grammar accuracy, fluency, appropriacy of word choices, and style of expression, were significantly different at .01 level. The students in the control group on the other hand underperformed in the post test. It was concluded that form-focused repair is not only more effective than merely meaning-focused in repair but is essential in developing speaking performance of low-proficiency learners.

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บทคัดย่อ

        งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาประสิทธิผลของการปรับแก้ที่เน้นรูปในการพัฒนากฤตกรรมการพูดของผู้เรียนที่มีความสามารถทางด้านภาษาในระดับต่ำ โดยการเปรียบเทียบกฤตกรรมของผู้เรียนในกลุ่มทดลองที่ได้รับการปรับแก้เน้นรูปกับกลุ่มควบคุมที่ได้รับการปรับแก้ที่เน้นเฉพาะความหมาย กลุ่มตัวอย่างคือนักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 4 ที่มีความสามารถทางด้านภาษาอังกฤษในระดับต่ำจำนวน 60 คน ที่กำลังศึกษาในภาคเรียนที่ 2 ปีการศึกษา 2559 ณ โรงเรียนมัธยมศึกษาแห่งหนึ่งทางภาคใต้โดยคัดเลือกด้วยวิธีการสุ่มแบบเจาะจง เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัยประกอบด้วยแบบทดสอบการพูดก่อนและหลังเรียน โดยในงานวิจัยในกลุ่มทดลองมีการสอนที่สอดแทรกการปรับแก้กฤตกรรมที่เน้นรูปในการสอนตามขั้นตอนที่ประกอบด้วยขั้นเตรียมความพร้อม ขั้นนำเข้าสู่บทเรียน ขั้นนำเสนอ ขั้นฝึกฝน และขั้นประเมินผล ผลการวิจัยพบว่าการใช้วิธีการสอนด้วยการปรับแก้กฤตกรรมที่เน้นรูปสามารถทำให้นักเรียนที่มีความสามารถทางภาษาในระดับต่ำมีกฤตกรรมการพูดภาษาอังกฤษที่ดีขึ้นได้ โดยคะแนนรวมจากแบบทดสอบการพูดระหว่างสองกลุ่มแตกต่างกันอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติที่ระดับ .01 (t = 2.71) เมื่อเปรียบเทียบกับนักเรียนกลุ่มควบคุมพบว่าคะแนนในด้านรูปแบบการแสดงออกทางภาษา ความเหมาะสมในการเลือกใช้คำศัพท์ และ ความถูกต้องทางไวยากรณ์มีแตกต่างกันอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติที่ระดับ .01 และ .05 ส่วนนักเรียนในกลุ่มควบคุมภาพรวมคะแนนกลับลดลง สรุปได้ว่าการปรับแก้ที่เน้นรูปมีประสิทธิผลในการพัฒนากฤตกรรมการพูดของผู้เรียนมากกว่าการสอนที่เน้นการปรับแก้เฉพาะความหมาย และเป็นสิ่งจำเป็นอย่างยิ่งในการสอนการพูดแก่ผู้เรียนที่มีความสามารถทางด้านภาษาในระดับต่ำ

คำสำคัญ: การสอนการพูด การสอนที่เน้นรูป การสอนที่เน้นความหมาย การปรับแก้ นักเรียนไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษ

Introduction

        Teaching speaking in Thailand is always proven to be a challenge since Thai learners are in the environment with little chance to interact with English speakers. Thai teachers therefore need to equip learners with strategies to overcome these constraints (Khamkhien, 2010). Typically in EL classrooms, although teachers try to use English as a medium of instruction, many students have limited English competence to gain a proper understanding of what is being taught (Cho, 2008; Cho & Larke, 2010; Van Lier, 1988). There has been a focus in the past 20 years on using the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach to develop learners' communicative competence and fluency in language use (Chung, 2005). In contrast, while traditional teaching such as grammar translation was considered necessary for producing

correct sentences, it was questioned with the argument that language ability involves much more than just grammatical competence (Richard, 2005).

Language teaching focusing on form and accuracy was opposed to focusing on meaning and fluency (Doughty & Valera, 1998). Long (1991) observed that form-focused instruction is of two types: "Focus on Form" and "Focus on Forms." For the first type, students get linguistic elements from the lesson focused on meaning or communication. The second type, on the other hand, concerns the traditional teaching which treats grammar in a separate lesson. It is often the latter type that has been blamed for learners' classroom practice which lacked any kind of real-world meaning. The forms of language taught were reportedly not found in natural sequences occurring outside the classroom. Learners were often fossilized by uncorrected errors (Seedhouse, 1997) and could not make inferences even about basic language structure from their communication in the program not offering form-focused instruction (Lightbown & Spada, 1993). Learners' levels of language proficiency demonstrated that they cannot deliver the tightly-controlled communicative discourse of form-oriented context by themselves. Teachers still need to structure a meaning-oriented discourse in order to increase the learners' language proficiency (Pourhaji & Alavi, 2015).

Extensive research has also shown that focusing on meaning alone is not enough for learners to develop competency in their productive skill (Spada, 2011). Pica (2000), as well as Wong and Marlys (2012), maintained that communicative teaching without a form focus is not adequate for learners to attain native-like proficiency. Therefore, CLT scholars have supported form-focused instruction combining form and meaning in communicative activities (Spada & Lightbown, 2009). The teaching attention has been shifted towards combining the knowledge, skills of grammar and other language features for communicative purposes in real-life situations, such as making a request, giving advice, making suggestions, as well as describing wishes and needs (Richard, 2005).

The midway covering both form and meaning is believed to be a sensible way to facilitate second language learning (Lightbown & Spada, 1993). It has long been realized that the development of target language accuracy has to integrate focus on form (Doughty & Williams, 1998) or form-focused instruction (Ellis, 2001, Spada 1997) into content-based or other communicative activities, including teacher intervention in the form of interaction feedback. To enhance both accuracy and fluency through focusing on both form and meaning, Ellis (1994) proposed two possible approaches. First, the activities may require learners to communicate and pay attention to specific forms, and second the teacher may provide feedback on learners' errors during their communicative activities.

Form-focused instruction often occurs through repair during class interaction--a conversation mechanism thoroughly unveiled via Conversation Analysis (CA). According to Lier (1998) and Seedhouse (2004), repair as correction or error replacement is important for negotiating meaning in interaction. Repair in the classroom is often associated with corrective feedback produced in response to learners' errors--a natural part of the learning process (Tornberg, 2005). Since 1970s, the development of SLA research on feedback has been focused on categorizing its types and investigating the effectiveness of the teacher's feedback on learners' spoken language (Lynch & Maclean, 2003). Such types of form-focused feedback or prompts that lead learners to self-repair are often encouraged in the classroom. According to Long (1977) and White (1977), the learners gain benefits from communicative success in their target language use and require feedback on errors when they cannot discover how their interlanguage differs from the target language.

In teaching speaking, form-focused instruction involves giving learners supportive cues to recognize errors in their interaction and teacher's speech (Norris & Ortega, 2001). Research has often examined how teachers' engaging students in the I(nitiation) R(esponse) F(eedback) sequence can help improving the accuracy of their speaking performance (Heritage, 2005, Schegloff, 2007). However, classroom interaction involves not only the IRF sequence but other types of sequences where students' interactional contributions can be given feedback. Feedback in the form of repair initiation in particular can take place at every stage of class instruction and it is not necessarily initiated by the teacher but by students themselves (Kasper, 1985, Mayi, 2014). Instead of the IRF sequence, subsequent studies therefore explored the conversational repair organization in the classroom with reference to the three components: the trouble/repairable source, repair initiation, and outcome (Grit & Jennifer, 2003). It was found that while self-initiated self-repair is more common in mundane discourse, other-initiated self-repair dominates in classroom interaction (McHoul, Rapley, & Antaki, 2008).

Repair initiation was shown to be an important resource for modified input and output in classroom setting which are essential for language acquisition (Spada, 1997, Musumeci, 1996). Repair allows learners to move closer to utterance-intended meaning and socially accepted forms (Elaine, 1980.). The immediate repair generated by learners which represented a kind of form-focused practice seems to help them acquire lexical and linguistic forms (Lyster, 1998, Hossein, 2010).

While in the western context most studies have investigated repair needs, effects of learners' repair, and the relationship between learners' self-repair prompted by feedback such as clarification requests and L2 acquisition (Loewen, 2005; McDonough, 2005; Nabei & Swain,

2002), in the Thai context, repair organization has been investigated as a practice characterizing class activities promoting natural or near-natural features in learners' talks (Chotirat & Sinwongsuwat, 2011). Most Thai teachers mainly explained class activities' procedures and gave feedback on word choices. In contrast, non-Thai teachers elaborated on more samples of interaction and repaired pronunciation and learners' contribution (Kongnin & Sinwongsuwat, 2016). However, there remains a need for studies to examine the effects of different types of repair treatment on improving learners' performance.

Using repairs in classroom interaction

Repair is a mechanism to resolve problems in speaking, hearing or understanding in conversation (Sidnell, 2010). It is a language phenomenon necessary for keeping communication smooth and accurate, being the treatment of trouble occurring in interactive language use (Fotovatnia & Dorri, 2013). It is a generic term for correction or error replacement (Seedhouse, 1999, 2004; Van Lier, 1998) and is subsumed under feedback in SLA. Repair can be described with respect to participants involved in the repair, typical repair trajectories, types of repair, and focus of repair.

The organization of classroom repair varies depending on the pedagogical focus, including form-and-accuracy, meaning-and-fluency or task-oriented-contexts. The sequential organization of repair or repair trajectory starts by a "repairable" or "trouble source," which occurs when there is a hearing or understanding problem. A repair is "initiated" when a participant recognizes the trouble is repairable, and then it is "repaired" by replacement of the error.

With reference to the two classes of participants involved in any social interaction, self or other, repair can be classified into 1) self-initiated self-repair, 2) self-initiated other-repair, 3) other-initiated self-repair, and 4) other-initiated other-repair (Schegloff et al, 1977). Shown in the literature, repairs can emerge in all four types through interaction in the second language classroom (Leftheriadou & Badger, 1999; Schegloff et al., 1977, Schegloff et al., 2007; Watterson, 2008). Kasper (1985), however, revealed that self-initiated self-completed repair was especially more important than other-initiated other-completed repair for successful language learning. Likewise, Kormos (1999) confirmed that self-repair is part of the mechanism to promote output and develop the learners' language. Nikoopour and Zoghi (2014) recommended that teachers give students a chance to correct themselves before correcting students' errors. Even when students fail to provide self-correction, the teachers can repeat students' utterance and pause before or after the errors in order to highlight the errors and

encourage them to correct the answer themselves. In speaking classes, the fact that teachers expect learners to speak as much as possible in L2 allows for various mistakes for feedback. If these errors are not corrected, it is easy for their oral English to become fossilized (Chu, 2014).

Prompts are feedback moves including a variety of signals that teachers use which can get learners to self-repair in negotiation of form (Lyster, 1998b; Lyster & Ranta, 1997) or form-focused negotiation. They are believed to be essential for L2 learning (Lyster, 2002). Prompting moves may be used separately or in combination to get the learner to correct forms and other signs needed to improve (Lyster, 1998), offering them an opportunity to self-correct by generating their own modified response.

Since both form-focused instruction and repair have been shown to enhance learners' communicative performance, it would be interesting to investigate the effectiveness of form-focused repair in improving the speaking performance, especially of low-proficiency learners. The present study therefore attempts to determine differences in speaking performance between low-proficiency learners treated with form-focused repair and those without such treatment, and to identify features of the performance differences between the two groups.

Research Purposes

This study examined speaking performance of low-proficiency learners' treated with other-initiated form-focused repairs. The purposes are twofold:

1) To determine the effectiveness of form-focused repairs in improving the speaking performance of low-proficiency students

2) To identify features of the performance differences between the two groups with and without form-focused repair treatment

Research Questions

1)Can form-focused repairs help enhance low-proficiency learners' speakingperformance? If so, how?

2) Are there any differences between the performance of low-proficiency learners' treated with form-focused repair and that of the group without the treatment? If so, what are they?

Research Methodology

1. Participants

The participants were 60 learners in Mathayom 4 at Nampud School, Trang province, Thailand. The ages of the students ranged from 16 to 17 years old. These learners were enrolled in the English for communication 2 course. The participants were low-proficiency students selected by the average scores from a speaking pre-test assessed by two teachers. They were divided into two groups: the experimental group intervened by using form-focused repair in the classroom and the control group taught without such repair. The students in both groups were tested with the same oral pre- and post- test. Their oral performance was video– recorded and scored by two raters including an English speaking class teacher and a Thai native teacher using the rubric developed from Mohtar (2005) and Underhill (1998), which combines language features including correct pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, fluency in speaking, appropriacy of word choice, and style of expression.

2. Data collection procedure

2.1 Video recording of speaking performance

The first set of data includes scores from pre- and post- interview tests. The students' speaking performance was scored by two raters: an English speaking teacher and a Thai teacher. A rubric was used to assess the students' oral performance in the pre- and post-tests. The features assessed included pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, fluency in speaking, appropriacy of word choice, and style of expression. The performance was rated on a five-point rating scale, ranging from 5 (excellent), 4 (very good), 3 (good), 2 (fair), to 1 (poor). The scores from both tests were compared using *t*-test statistics. To observe students' oral performance development, their oral interviews also were video-recorded for subsequent close analysis.

2.2 Classroom observation

Ten 50-minute classes were taught by a Russian, English speaking teacher following ten lessons selected from *Fifty- fifty book 2,* including *Can you speak English?, That's personal, Time to learn, It's that way, All dressed up, Family portrait, Like it or not, About Tomorrow, About Yesterday,* and *Let's eat out*. Each lesson was taught following five stages: warm up, introduction, presentation, practice and evaluation, and intervened with form-focused repair in the practice and evaluation. Before the lesson, the researcher trained the teacher to intervene students' conversation practice with form-focused repairs of the other-repair type with prompts. The sequential organization of repair or repair trajectory

started with the teacher identifying a turn with a "repairable" or "trouble source," which requires a fix on forms, and then in the next turn, repair was initiated to get the students to recognize the trouble via prompts such as elicitation, metalinguistic clues, clarification requests, and repetition and to eventually perform self-repair. The teacher was encouraged to make the students in the experimental group aware of the repair strategies and perform peer repair themselves. The students' interactions in the practice and evaluation stages were also randomly sampled for recording and close analysis. The conversations were transcribed using the transcription convention adapted from Seedhouse (2004) and Schegloff (2007). On the other hand, in the control group, the teacher intervened only when problems with meanings and content arose, obstructing a smooth flow of the students' conversation.

2.3 Data Analysis

To answer the first question, the scores from the pre- and post- tests of the experimental group were compared to examine the speaking proficiency of low-proficiency learners treated with form-focused repairs. The pre- and post-test performance differences in each of the features assessed were then compared with those of the control group to answer the second research question.

Results

Illustrated in table 1 below are the differences between the pre- and post- test scores of the students in the experimental group.

Table 1: *Performance differences in pre- and post- tests of experimental group*

| | Experimental Group (n=30) | | | | | | Sig. (2- | |
| | Pre-test | | Post-test | | | | | |
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	t		df	tailed)	Effect size
Pronunciation	2.79	0.88	2.80	1.04	0.051		32	0.96	0.011
Accuracy	2.54	0.86	2.94	1.09	2.131	*	32	0.04	0.414
Fluency	2.38	0.85	2.76	1.19	1.895		32	0.07	0.367
Appropriacy	2.23	0.78	2.81	1.12	3.145	**	32	0.00	0.609
Style	1.13	0.66	2.44	1.17	7.972	**	32	0.00	1.435
Total	11.07	3.56	13.71	5.45	3.183	**	32	0.00	0.587

** Significant at 0.01 level

* Significant at 0.05 level

The total mean scores obtained from the post- test, which are significantly higher than those in the pre-test, suggested that form-focused repair can really enhance the overall speaking performance of low-proficiency learners. It can significantly help enhance the learners' performance especially in three aspects including style of expression, appropriacy of word choices at a 0.01 level, and grammar accuracy and at a 0.05 level. Noticeably, the students treated with form-focused repair were able to respond to questions in the interview appropriately and accurately.

Table 2: *Performance differences between the experimental and control groups*

Post-test	Control Group (n=30)		Experimental Group (n=30)		t		df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Effect size
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.					
Pronunciation	1.48	1.15	2.91	0.91	5.388	**	58	.000	1.391
Accuracy	1.72	1.09	3.15	1.08	5.090	**	58	.000	1.320
Fluency	1.54	1.13	2.91	1.21	4.497	**	58	.000	1.171
Appropriacy	1.87	1.21	3.04	1.19	3.748	**	58	.000	0.972
Style	1.06	0.95	2.48	1.21	4.999	**	58	.000	1.322
Total	7.67	5.20	14.43	5.29	4.967	**	58	.000	1.290

** Significant at 0.01 level

* Significant at 0.05 level

To answer research question 2, the post-test scores of both groups were compared to determine the performance differences between students in the two groups. As shown in table 2, the total score of the experimental group is higher than that of the control group with the significant degree of difference at a 0.01 level (t= 4.967). This indicates that overall the students treated with form-focused repair in classroom interaction outperformed those without form-focused repair. The former performed especially better in all the five features including pronunciation, grammar accuracy, fluency, appropriacy of word choices, and style of expression at a 0.01 level. The latter on the other hand failed to improve overall. As shown in table 3 below, the control group got a total lower score in the post-test.

Table 3: *Performance differences in pre- and post- tests of control group*

| | Control Group (n=27) | | | | | | | | |
| | Pre-test | | Post-test | | | | | Sig. (2- | |
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	t		Df	tailed)	Effectsize
Pronunciation	1.99	0.98	1.52	0.87	-2.660	**	26	0.01	-1.04
Accuracy	1.90	0.86	1.69	0.85	-1.197		26	0.24	-0.47
Fluency	1.64	0.89	1.54	0.89	-0.495		26	0.62	-0.19
Appropriacy	1.73	0.84	1.77	0.90	0.192		26	0.85	0.08
Style	1.01	0.57	1.20	0.80	1.133		26	0.27	0.44
Total	8.27	3.86	7.72	4.08	-0.677		26	0.50	-0.27

** Significant at 0.01 level

* Significant at 0.05 level

Discretely, the control group especially underperformed in their accuracy, fluency, and especially in their pronunciation, which significantly decreased at a 0.01 level. This suggests that it could really be counterproductive to provide students only with meaning-focused repair when teaching speaking. Although their scores on appropriacy of word choice and style of expression were a little higher in the post-test, they were not significantly different at all from the pre-test scores. It can therefore be maintained that meaning-focused repair alone failed to improve students' speaking performance, supporting the claim that accuracy, fluency, and overall communicative skills must be developed through instruction integrating form-focused activities and correction (Ellis, 2005). Form-focused instruction within a communicative context is essential for promoting higher levels of linguistic knowledge and performance in overall communicative skills (Pienemann, 1989; Swain, 2005).

Based on the statistical results, style of expression, appropriacy of word choices, and grammar accuracy seemed to be improved more than the rest of the features via form-focused repair which was mostly found in the form of other-initiated, self-repair. This is in line with the claim that more other-repairs appear in language-centered phases of the class interaction and more self-repairs appear in content-centered phases (Seedhouse, 1997; 2004). In addition, it was found that most of the prompts used in form-focused repair were repetition and clarification requests. The students often paused after the form-focused prompts and tried to complete repair by themselves in the next turn.

Conclusion

This study shows using form-focused repair can enhance low-proficiency learners' speaking performance. The students treated with form-focused repair could substantially improve, especially in such features as pronunciation, grammar accuracy, fluency, appropriacy of word choices, and style of expression. It was suggested that form-focused repair via prompts such as repetition and clarification requests not only be integrated into the form-and-accuracy context but also the meaning-and-fluency context. While teachers can prompt repair in the teaching stage, peers can do so in the practice stage, allowing learners to repair their trouble source. For L2 learners with limited linguistic competence, focusing on form helps them become aware of salient features of appropriate language input and feel more confident when speaking. Focusing on meaning alone apparently does not suffice as it can contribute to the persistence of inaccurate linguistic forms.

Further studies should examine a larger group of learners and investigate whether form-focused repair also benefits learners with higher proficiency.

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