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The Effects of Different Types of Form-Focused Instruction on Korean University Students' Writing Accuracy

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The present study investigated what combination of three form-focused options—explicit explanation, production practice, and corrective feedback—may be effective in helping low-proficiency learners improve accuracy in communicative writing. The subjects were 34 Korean university students enrolled in 'Business English 1' and the study lasted 11 weeks. The relative clause structure was selected as the target structure. The study found that the combination of explicit explanation, sentence-level production practice, communicative writing practice, and recasts had a significantly greater effect on improved accuracy than the combination of communicative writing practice and recasts and that of explicit explanation, communicative writing practice, and recasts. Because the second and third combinations didn't lead to significantly improved accuracy, it can be concluded that of the form-focused options forming the first combination sentence-level production practice made a decisive contribution to the significant increase in accuracy. It also found that the provision of self-correcting opportunities before providing recasts on errors committed in sentence-level production practice resulted in significantly greater accuracy in communicative writing than the provision of recasts alone on them. The results of the study suggest that we should make low-proficiency Korean learners have sentence-level production practice which is intensive and focused and make them self-correct targeted errors before providing them with narrowly focused recasts in order to help them to improve writing accuracy.

[Explicit explanation/Production practice/Corrective feedback/Writing accuracy]

I. INTRODUCTION

Dissatisfaction with the older traditional product approach that focuses on correctness has motivated the introduction of the process approach to English as a second language (ESL) composition, which focuses not on lexical and syntactic features but on the process of writing itself. Although the teaching of ESL composition has much improved through the process approach, this approach is not without its critics. Second language (L2) or foreign language writing is strategically, rhetorically, and linguistically different in many ways from first language (L1) writing (Silva, 1993), so that the process approach which has emerged primarily from observations of L1 composition students does not address ESL or EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students' needs. ESL or EFL students do not have enough control of English vocabulary or syntax to write fluidly. They often have plenty to say, but they don't know how to say it in English. Soh (1999) showed that Korean university students find grammar and vocabulary most difficult in their writing process. In Leki and Carson's (1994) survey of students' perceptions of writing instruction and writing needs, the most frequently expressed specific needs were vocabulary and grammar. Similarly, Hedgcok and Lefkowitz's (1994) survey concerning student response to feedback showed students' strong concern for lexical and grammatical accuracy. The process approach, in which writing accuracy is left to the end of the process, does not meet students' need for word usage and sentence grammar.

Many researchers have urged the importance of writing accuracy (Ferris, 1995b; Ferris, Chaney, Komura, Roberts, & McKee, 2000; Frodesen & Holten, 2003; Hedgcok & Lefkowitz, 1994; Leki, 1991; Little, 1994). For example, Little (1994) noted that a high level of correctness is needed for effective communication in written discourse. Frodesen and Holten (2003) viewed grammar as an essential element of all communication and argued that successful writing must conform to grammar. Based on the general agreement that accuracy is important in order to communicate more effectively in written language, it has been argued that grammar needs to be integrated into L2 writing instruction to increase writing accuracy. Muncie (2002) claimed that grammatical instruction is as important as content in EFL writing classes. Ancker (2000) recognized that grammar cannot be divorced from L2 writing instruction. Some researchers have, in particular, stressed the need for focus on form in conjunction with communicative interaction (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Lightbown, 1998; Frodesen & Holten, 2003). For example, Frodesen and Holten (2003) said,

"form-focused instruction remains an essential component in ESL writing curricular" (p. 148). Assuming that form-focused instruction needs to be incorporated into ESL or EFL writing instruction, the question is what type of form-focused instruction may be effective in helping learners improve accuracy in their writing.

The purpose of the present study is to compare the effects of several types of form-focused instruction on improved accuracy in communicative writing in the context of Korean university students learning business English. Ellis (1998) stated that form-focused instruction typically involves combinations of form-focused options because combinations heighten the effect of instruction. Because the subjects of the present study were low-proficiency Korean learners of English, it was necessary to optimize the potential effect of form-focused instruction. Therefore, several types of combinations of three form-focused options—explicit explanation, production practice, and corrective feedback—were chosen for this study. The relative clause structure was selected as the target structure. This selection was motivated by the following fact that relative clause structures are principal structures which are actively used in English writing but Korean university students, in particular low-proficiency students, make many relative clause-related errors in writing.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Recent Research on the Effect of Explicit Explanation

There have been many researches to investigate the isolated effect of explicit rule explanation on second language acquisition. Based on the results from grammaticality judgment tests, some studies have found that explicit rule explanation can facilitate acquisition (Ellis, 1993; Robinson, 1996, 1997). In addition, the results of controlled production tasks administrated in some studies have showed that the provision of explicit rule explanation has positive effects on the acquisition of specific language forms (Alanen, 1995; de Graaff, 1997; Dekeyser, 1995). VanPatten (VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993a; VanPatten & Sanz, 1995) has also shown that explicit rule explanation can help learners develop automatic access to the target language rule in comprehension and production tasks. White (1998), in particular, implied a positive role of explicit rule explanation in cases involving L1-L2 contrasts. She suggested that for learners with problems due to L1-L2 contrasts to progress to more advanced developmental stages, explicit focus on form instruction such as a brief rule

explanation might be beneficial.

On the other hand, the results of some studies have indicated that explicit rule explanation is not necessary (Rosa & O'Neill, 1999; VanPatten & Oikkenon, 1996; Benati, 2004; Farley, 2003; Wong, 2004). The studies have suggested that when input is presented by means of practice, explicit rule explanation plays a minor role at most.

2. Recent Research on the Effect of Production Practice

Many studies concerned with traditional foreign language teaching methodology have expressed the view that practice in production is needed to gradually automatize explicitly learned knowledge and plays an important role in acquiring a language. (Chastain, 1971; Paulston & Bruder, 1976; Rivers & Temperley, 1978). However, some researchers have recently argued against production practice. Several studies by VanPatten and his colleagues have suggested that input practice called processing instruction, which excludes the production of target forms, is all that is necessary and output practice is not beneficial (VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993a, 1993b; VanPatten, Lee, & Ballman, 1996; VanPatten & Oikkenon, 1996; VanPatten & Wong, 2004). For example, in VanPatten & Cadierno's (1993a, 1993b) studies, it was proved that their input practice group significantly bettered the output practice group at comprehension tests, but both were almost equally good at production tests. DeKeyser and Sokalski (1996), however, showed that VanPatten and Cadierno's (1993a, 1993b) results can not be generalized.

Swain has strongly advocated production practice (Swain, 1985; Swain & Lapkin, 1995). Swain (1985) claimed that "output pushed learners from the semantic processing that comprehending input entails to the syntactic processing required to encode meaning" (p. 249). In Schmidt's (1994) study, it was argued that although production practice may not enable learners to integrate entirely new grammatical structures into their interlanguages, it may help them use partially acquired structures more fluently and more accurately. A number of studies (Harley, 1989; Spada & Lightbown, 1993; White, Spada, Lightbown, & Ranta, 1991) have shown that production practice can result in significant gains in knowledge. Most recently, Toth's (2006) study comparing processing instruction to communicative output tasks suggested a role for output in acquisition of L2 structure.

3. Recent Research on the Effect of Corrective Feedback

Since Truscott published his 1996 article titled "The Case Against Grammar Correction in L2 Writing Classes," debate on the value of corrective feedback on L2 writing has continued. Truscott (1996) strongly claimed that error correction feedback in L2 writing is ineffective and should be abandoned. Refuting Truscott's strong position, Ferris (1999) insisted that error correction can help some learners to improve writing accuracy. Though controversy has continued regarding whether error feedback is beneficial to improving writing accuracy (Fathman & Whalley, 1990; James, 1998; Kepner, 1991; Polio, Fleck, & Leder, 1998; Reid, 1998; Semke, 1984), there exist some studies that demonstrated that the students who received error feedback showed improvement in accuracy (Chandler, 2000; Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Ferris, 1995a, 1997; Ferris & Helt, 2000; Frantzen, 1995; Lalande, 1982; Lee, 1997; Ferris & Roberts, 2001). The studies found a significant effect for the learners who received error feedback, compared with the learners who did not.

In content-based and communicative classrooms, the most common type among six types of corrective feedback—explicit correction, recasts, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition of error—is recasts (Lyster, 1998; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Mackey, Gass, & McDonough, 2000). According to Long and Robinson (1998), recasts are "corrective reformulations of a child's or adult learner's (L1 or L2) utterances that preserve the learner's intended meaning" (p. 23). Recasts have been considered to draw learners' attention to the differences between the target input and the non-target-like output (Doughty, 1994; Doughty & Varela, 1998; Long, 1996; Long & Robinson, 1998).

The results of recent L2 studies regarding the effects of recasts on learning are mixed. Some researchers have argued that recasts are ambiguous and may be perceived by the learner as confirmation of meaning rather than feedback on form (Mackey, Gass, & McDonough, 2000; Lyster, 1998); others have found that recasts are often followed by a low rate of learner uptake (i.e., learners' attempts to repair their own errors) (Lyster, 2001; Lyster & Ranta, 1997). However, some experimental studies of recasts have showed that they are effective in improving accuracy or consistency in the use of target forms. (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Han, 2002; Long & Robinson, 1998; Mackey & Philp, 1998; Oliver, 1995). Doughty and Varela (1995), for example, reported that the learners given recasts focusing on past tense errors showed gains in terms of both their use of correct target language forms and their use of various interlanguage forms used to mark pastness. Similarly, Ishida (2004)

showed that recasts had a positive effect on the significant increase in accuracy in the learners' overall use of the Japanese aspectual form *-te i-(ru)*.

In relation to corrective feedback, one issue frequently discussed is the difference of effects between direct and indirect teacher feedback. Direct feedback occurs when the teacher provides the correct form, while indirect feedback is given when the teacher indicates that an error exists but does not provide the correction, thereby letting the student make corrections. Several studies have reported that indirect feedback is more effective than direct feedback in helping learners to make progress in accuracy because it leads learners to problem solving (Ferris & Helt, 2000; Frodesen, 2001; Lalande, 1982).

III. CHOICE OF FORM IN FOCUS

Language learners have to learn to process language forms to produce them without difficulty in their written communicative performance. It is not easy, however, because the grammar of the target language can pose various processing difficulties. Izumi (2003) noted that "one grammatical structure that sheds great light on such processing difficulties and has received considerable attention in the literature is the relative clause" (p. 286). Nakamori (2002) claimed that relative clause structures are one of the most difficult grammar targets for Japanese learners of English to master. We can predict that Korean learners of English also have difficulty in acquiring English relative clause structures because Korean and Japanese have similar grammatical structures.

As we can see in the examples such as (1) and (2), there are some differences between English and Korean relative clause structures.

(1) a. The man you saw yesterday is a famous professor.
b. nega eoje mannassdeon sarameun yumyeonghan gyosuida.
you yesterday saw man famous professor is
(2) a. The woman who is reading a book is my wife.
b. chaekeul ilkkoissneun yeojaneun naui anaeida.
book is reading woman my wife is

The examples in (1) show that a Korean relative clause precedes the head noun it modifies, whereas an English relative clause follows the head noun it modifies. In

addition, as we can see in the examples like (2), there are relative pronouns such as *who* in English, whereas there are not any relative pronouns in Korean. Korean learners of English frequently make errors of modification direction: they incorrectly place a relative clause before the head noun, illustrated in (3).

(3) * You saw yesterday man is a famous professor.

According to the head-complement parameter in the theory of grammar proposed by Chomsky (1980, 1981, 1982, 1986), the pattern of error such as (3) can be explained by the difference in head direction between Korean and English. English is a head-initial language, so that noun-complement structure; Korean is a head-final language, yielding complement-noun structure. Flynn (1989) argued that speakers from languages that do not match English in head direction have significant structural difficulty with sentences with relative clauses. According to Flynn (1989), acquisition of relative clause structures are significantly disrupted for Korean speakers learning English, as L1 and L2 do not match in head direction.

From teaching experience, the researcher knows that a lot of Korean university students make many errors associated with relative clause structures, even though they have been studying English for a number of years. Relative clause structures are principal structural devices and are actively used in writing but are often used incorrectly. Therefore, the relative clause structure was selected as the target structure for this study.

IV. METHODOLOGY

1. Research Questions

The present study intended to answer the following questions:

1) What combination of form-focused options is effective in helping low-proficiency learners improve accuracy in their use of sentences with relative clause structures in communicative writing?
2) Which of the form-focused options forming the combination proving effective in improving accuracy is the most responsible for improved accuracy?

2. Subjects

The subjects for this study were 34 students enrolled in 'Business English 1' course at a university located in Seoul, Korea. All of them were juniors majoring in business administration. A total of 38 students were enrolled in 'Business English 1', which was required for these students in their junior year, but 4 students, who demonstrated considerable writing ability of the target structure prior to instruction, were eliminated. The English language proficiency of the subjects was low (TOEIC score 305-508). The goal of 'Business English 1' is for students to achieve a fair degree of written communicative competence in English. The instructional approach of this course is within the communicative orientation of language teaching, with a strong emphasis on communicative skills in business reading and writing. This course consisted of two hours a week of business English writing and two hours a week of business English reading and lasted 15 weeks. Emphasis in business writing instruction was on practicing writing business letters for various business work. The present study was conducted during the business writing classes over a period of 10 weeks in the first semester of the 2006 academic year.

3. Design

The focus of the study was to determine what type of form-focused instruction has a significant effect on improving accuracy in the use of sentences with relative clause structures in communicative writing. Three types of combinations of three form-focused options—explicit explanation, production practice, and corrective feedback—were tested. The subjects were randomly divided into three experimental groups: (a) Group A that had communicative writing practice and received recasts, (b) Group B that had communicative writing practice and received both explicit explanation and recasts, and (c) Group C that was provided with sentence-level production practice in addition to communicative writing practice, explicit explanation, and recasts. Group C was randomly split in half: Group C-1 and Group C-2. Groups C-1 and C-2 differed in the type of feedback they received when they made errors in sentence-level production practice. Group C-1 received recasts without self-correcting opportunities and Group C-2 had opportunities to self-correct errors underlined by the lecturer before receiving recasts.

A Korean-to-English translation test was used to exclude the students who have the written ability to accurately produce the target structure. In order to determine the

effectiveness of three types of form-focused instruction, it was necessary to employ a pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest design. Three business letters each week written in the second, sixth, and tenth week served as the pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest, respectively. The researcher excluded the test scores of any student who did not submit all of the nine letters used as the tests. Accordingly, four students who scored 80% on the sentence translation test were eliminated and three students who did not hand in all of the letters were excluded from the data analysis. Table 1 shows the form-focused instruction each of the four groups received and the distribution of the subjects over the four groups.

TABLE 1

Form-Focused Instruction Groups

Group	N	Communicative Writing Practice	Recasts	Explicit Explanation	Sentence-Level Production Practice	
					Self-Correction +Recasts	Recasts
A	10	∨	∨			
B	10	∨	∨	∨		
C-1	5	∨	∨	∨		∨
C-2	6	∨	∨	∨	∨	

4. Procedure

The students learned business letter form, letter styles, and letter parts during the first week of class. In addition, in order to eliminate the students who have the ability to write sentences with relative clause structures correctly prior to form-focused instruction, a sentences translation test was administrated to all the students. Because the researcher wanted a clear focus on relative clause structures, a sentences translation test was chosen. The test consisted of 10 items. The students were instructed to translate sentences with relative clause structures written in Korean into English. When taking the test, they were permitted to ask for any vocabulary they needed.

From the second week of class, the learners practiced writing business letters

related to each-week class's thematic business situation. The topic covered during the second week of class was describing a company. They read and analyzed a sample letter with the researcher to know the contents, organization, letter form and vocabulary. Mention of language form was brief and there was no mention of relative clause structures in particular. Following it, the researcher and the learners wrote a letter like the sample letter on the blackboard together. Then they were asked to write three letters related to the topic. The researcher gave them not only information about the context such as a purpose of writing, an intended reader, and a writer's identity but also the contents. In addition, the researcher attached the condition that a relative clause structure must be used twice in the body of a letter. When writing the letters, they were instructed to ask for any vocabulary they needed. Because the length of a letter was not long, 50 minutes were enough time to write the three letters. The three letters written during the second week of class served as the pretest. To write a letter based on the context and contents given is a kind of communicative writing. As stated above, the business letters written during the second, sixth and tenth week of class served as the pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest. Therefore it was in communicative writing that the learners were tested on their writing ability to accurately produce relative clause structures. Recasts on the errors made in the three letters submitted to the researcher were provided to all the students. The researcher gave them recasts not only on the incorrect forms of the relative clause structure but also on other form errors. They received their marked letters back during the third week of class.

From the third week to the fifth week, an extra lesson for this study had been given to each of the groups after a regular class is over. The extra lesson was conducted by a different lecturer in a different classroom by the groups. The researcher explained the object of the extra lesson and how to conduct the lesson to the three lecturers, who were part-time lecturers in English. The extra lesson was based on the business contents which were covered during the regular class. The lecturers made the learners recognize explicit explanation and sentence-level production practice implemented during the extra lesson as instruction aiming at writing successful business letters rather than only at learning relative clause structures. The learners in Group A had to write another letter with a relative clause structure used twice in the body and received recasts on it. The learners in Group B received the handouts covering explanation on relative clause structures and the lecturer gave a full and explicit explanation of them. The sentences with relative clause structures have been explained by means of two-sentence connections. However, because the grammatical function is determined by word order in English and Korean EFL learners have difficulty in acquiring the

word order of English relative clause structures, the lecturer gave an explanation of them based on word order. For example, the sentences in (4) were not explained as the connection of the two sentences but the relative clause structures in boldface were treated as the grammatical patterns.

(4) a. This is **the catalogue I received yesterday**.
b. **The person who is in charge of the matter** is out of office today.
c. We are **a company that produces home electric appliances**.

That is, the lecturer made the learners recognize the grammatical patterns such as the following.

(5) a. noun+**subject+verb**...
b. noun+**who+verb**...
c. noun+**that+verb**...

The noun is followed by the words in boldface in the fixed order as in (5), which modify the head noun, thereby giving more information to it. This type of explanation gives learners the explicit information that an English relative clause follows the head noun it modifies and that if a modifying clause begins with a verb without a subject, a relative pronoun—*who, that,* or *which*—is required in English. Other types of relative clause structures were also explained as grammatical patterns based on word order in the same way as (4). The learners in Group C received the same explicit explanation as Group B. The explanation was briefer without the handouts, but they had sentence-level production practice and received feedback on it. The aim of the practice was to promote accuracy in the use of the target structure by having the learners concentrate on it. Accordingly, because the sentence-level production practice had to be focused and controlled practice, a sentence translation task was employed. The task was to translate Korean sentences with relative clause structures into English. The learners had to translate five Korean sentences into English. Both of Groups C-1 and C-2 received some type of feedback on English translations of Korean sentences from the lecturer. Group C-1 had all errors recast and Group C-2 had them underlined. The learners in Group C-2 were required to self-correct underlined errors. After they self-corrected them, the lecturer provided recasts.

The regular class each week was conducted in the same way as the second week of class described above. That is, writing three letters in which relative clause structures

have to be used and receiving recasts on them had continued. The subjects of all the groups had attended the extra lessons for three weeks, from the third week to the fifth week. To sum up, all the subjects had communicative writing practice and received recasts during the regular classes. During the extra lessons, Group A had additional communicative writing practice. Group B received explicit explanation on relative clause structures and Group C received explicit explanation and had sentence-level production practice. As mentioned earlier, the three letters written during the sixth week of class served as the posttest and those written during the tenth week of class as the delayed posttest. During the interval between the two posttests, the subjects did not have to use relative clause structures when writing three letters during the regular classes and were not given the extra lessons.

5. Scoring

The learners were required to use a relative clause structure twice a letter, so there were six sentences with relative clause structures for scoring on the pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest, respectively. Two points were given to each targetlike use of a relative clause structure, so the highest score was twelve.

The rightward modification direction, no deletion of the relativized noun, omission of the subject relative pronoun, and choice of the wrong relative pronoun illustrated in (6) were deemed nontargetlike use.

(6) a. * The company launched last year product was successful.
b. * This is the project which we are working on it these days.
c. * The business sought too much profit helped its competitors.
d. * The man whom established this company is alive.

Brown (2000) divided errors into global and local errors. Global errors influence the overall organization of a sentence such as sentence structure, word order, or sentence connector errors, whereas local errors affect single elements in a sentence. The rightward modification direction and omission of the subject relative pronoun as in (6a) and (6c) are global errors because they affect overall sentence structure; however no deletion of the relativized noun and choice of the wrong relative pronoun as in (6b) and (6d) are local errors. Zero point was given to global errors, whereas one point was given to local errors because they usually do not hinder communication. Errors involving articles, tense, and spelling were ignored.

IV. RESULTS

A one-way ANOVA was conducted on the pretest scores to make sure whether the groups showed no significant difference prior to form-focused instruction. Table 2 shows the results of the pretest in each group.

TABLE 2
Results of Pretest by the Groups

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F	P-value
A	10	0.5	0.7071	0.110	0.953
B	10	0.6	0.6992		
C-1	5	0.4	0.5477		
C-2	6	0.5	0.5477		

The analysis revealed that there was no significant difference between the groups on the mean scores, indicating that the groups were equivalent in terms of their ability to write sentences with relative clause structures at the outset. The significance level was set at $p < .05$. This result suggests that any difference found on the posttest can be attributed to the instruction.

To test for a statistically significant difference between the pretest score and the posttest score, paired *t*-tests were conducted. The results are shown in Tables 3 through 6.

TABLE 3
Test Results of Group A

Test	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Difference	Correlation Coefficient	t	P-value
Pretest	0.5	0.7071	0.3	0.598	1.406	0.193
Posttest	0.8	0.7888				
Delayed Posttest	0.6	0.6992	-0.2	0.846	1.500	0.168

TABLE 4

Test Results of Group B

Test	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Difference	Correlation Coefficient	t	P-value
Pretest	0.6	0.6992	0.8	0.815	1.633	0.137
Posttest	1.4	2.0656				
Delayed Posttest	0.9	0.8756	-0.5	0.516	0.889	0.397

TABLE 5

Test Results of Group C-1

Test	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Difference	Correlation Coefficient	t	P-value
Pretest	0.4	0.5477	6	0.963	13.416	0.000
Posttest	6.4	1.5166				
Delayed Posttest	4.2	1.3038	-2.2	0.834	5.880	0.004

TABLE 6

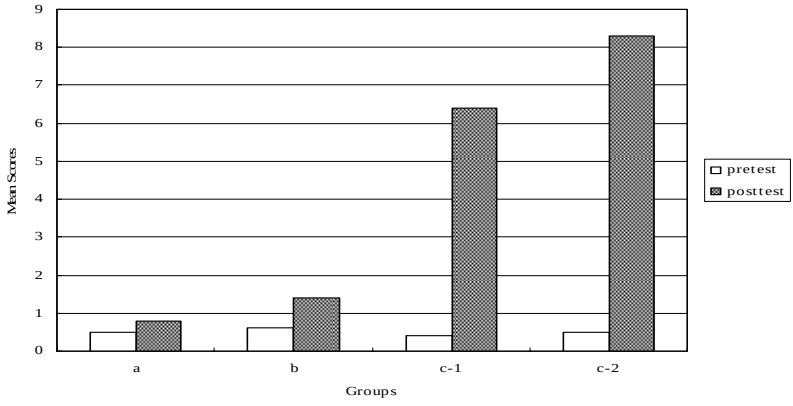
Test Results of Group C-2

Test	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Difference	Correlation Coefficient	t	P-value
Pretest	0.5	0.5477	8.3	-0.447	-16.413	0.000
Posttest	8.8	0.8165				
Delayed Posttest	7.0	3.1623	-1.8	0.930	1.348	0.235

As can be seen in Tables 3 through 6, all the four groups showed increase from the pretest to the posttest, but there was a big difference in the amount of increase between the groups. The increase was the largest in Group C-2 (+8.3) and the smallest in Group A (+0.3). The comparison of increase is well represented on the graph in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1

Comparison of Mean Score Increase



Group A's mean improved slightly on the posttest but, in fact, the mean remained almost the same as that on the pretest. Group B showed greater increase than Group A, but there was no statistically significant difference between the means. Both of Groups C-1 and C-2 markedly improved from the pretest to the posttest, showing significant difference between the pretest and posttest. A one-way ANOVA on the posttest scores revealed a significant difference among the groups (Table 7).

TABLE 7

Results of Posttest by the Groups

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F	P-value
A	10	0.8	0.7888	52.947	0.000
B	10	1.4	2.0656		
C-1	5	6.4	1.5166		
C-2	6	8.8	0.7528		

However, a Tukey's post hoc pairwise comparison (Table 8) showed no significant difference between Group A and Group B. Other comparisons proved statistically significant.

TABLE 8

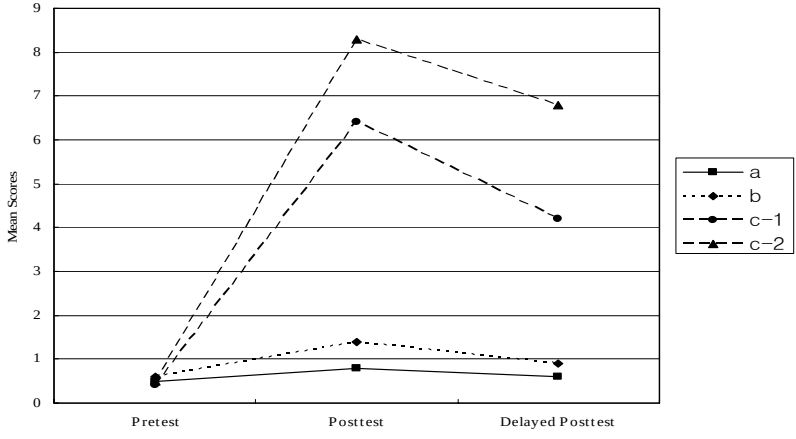
Pairwise Comparison of Posttest Mean Scores

Comparison		Mean Difference	Standard Error of Means	P-value	99% Confidence Interval	
					Lowest Values	Highest Values
A	B	0.6	0.5416	0.297	-2.3601	1.1601
A	C-1	5.4	0.6000	0.001	-8.1625	-2.6375
A	C-2	7.5	0.5000	0.000	-9.8032	-6.1968
B	C-1	4.4	1.0296	0.013	-9.1402	.3402
B	C-2	7.1	1.2494	0.002	-12.2046	-2.1287
C-1	C-2	2.4	0.7483	0.033	-5.8454	1.0454

As seen in Tables 3 through 6, the delayed posttest data were analyzed in the same way as the posttest data. Figure 2 shows the change of the group mean over the three test administrations.

FIGURE 2

Mean Score Change over Time



All the groups showed decrease from the posttest to the delayed posttest. Group C-2 greatly exceeded the pretest score on the posttest (M=8.8) and then arrived at a slightly lower score on the delayed posttest (M=7.0), showing no significant difference between the two posttests. Meanwhile, for Group C-1, the score on the

delayed posttest was significantly different from that on the posttest.

V. DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 3, Group A's subjects did not make progress in their written ability to produce sentences with relative clause structures over the period of 3 weeks during which they had communicative writing practice and received recasts. This finding indicates that they did not benefit from communicative writing practice and recasts. The result is contrary to those of relevant recast studies suggesting that the provision of recasts has beneficial effects (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Han, 2002; Long & Robinson, 1998; Mackey & Philp, 1998; Oliver, 1995). The ineffectiveness of recasts in this study may be attributed to the fact that the subjects did not receive recasts focusing on one aspect of English use—namely, relative clause structures. Han (2002) identified consistent focus as one of conditions for effective functioning of recasts. He said, "this focus may have facilitated the learners' awareness of the intent of the pedagogical instruction and may have in turn propelled them to align their output with the target as signaled by the researcher." In the present study, the researcher and lecturer gave recasts not only on relative clause-related errors but also on other errors, so the subjects' attention may have not been drawn to recasts on their production of relative clause structures. As a result, the recasts may not have positively affected the written production of the target structure. Moreover, the subjects might find understanding the recasts given to them problematic because they did not have explicit knowledge of the target structure.

Tables 7 and 8 showed that Group B performed better than Group A on the posttest but the difference was not statistically significant. This finding suggests that the provision of explicit explanation on relative clause structures in combination with communicative writing practice and recasts did not have substantially beneficial effects on accuracy in the use of them in communicative writing. This result is in agreement with VanPatten and Oikkenon (1996) and Sanz and Morgan-Short (2004). These studies demonstrated that explicit rule explanation does not necessarily play a facilitative role in second language acquisition. It appears that grammaticality judgement tests which can be answered using explicit knowledge favors learners receiving explicit rule explanation (Dekeyser, 1994, 1995; N. Ellis, 1993; Robinson, 1996), but there is no clear evidence that explicit explanation leads to increased accuracy in using a target form in communicative language use (Ellis, 1998).

Furthermore, Frodesen and Holten (2003) claimed that if we expect students to use their grammatical explicit knowledge, they must practice grammatical structures productively. From Frodesen and Holten (2003), it can be inferred that the ineffectiveness of explicit explanation on Group B may be due to the shortage of opportunities for the subjects to practice producing output to which their explicit knowledge acquired through explicit explanation is transferred.

Groups C-1 and C-2, who had sentence-level production practice in addition to having communicative writing practice and receiving recasts and explicit explanation, significantly bettered Groups A and B on the posttest (Table 7), showing a significant difference between the pretest and posttest (Tables 5 and 6). This result indicates that the sentence-level production practice certainly played a role in increasing accuracy in the subjects' written production of the target structure. Swain (1985), who proposed 'Output Hypothesis', claimed that the lack of opportunities for "pushed output" results in inaccurate use of the target language. She has the view that output "pushes" learners to syntactic processing, which may lead to increased accuracy. The result of the present study shows that in the case of low-proficiency learners, it is effective in promoting writing accuracy to push learners to produce a target structure through sentence-level production practice focusing on the target structure before using it in communicative writing. As seen in the case of Groups A and B, pushing learners to produce a target structure in communicative writing without sentence-level production practice doesn't seem to have a significant effect on increased accuracy.

It is important to note that the production practice which Group C had was followed by feedback and the average accuracy performance varied according to the type of feedback provided. The significant difference between Group C-1 and Group C-2 on the posttest (Table 8) proved a significant effect for the group who received recasts after self-correcting the errors underlined (Group C-2), compared with the group who only received recasts (Group C-1). The difference in instruction between the two groups was whether or not there was self-correcting. Therefore, the discrepancy of the results of the two groups could be due to the opportunity for self-correcting given to Group C-2. The self-correcting opportunities given in sentence-level production practice may have contributed to resulting in significantly greater accuracy in using relative clause structures in communicative writing. This view is supported by McDonough (2005), whose research on L2 English question formulation found that the learners engaging in self-correction in response to negative feedback more often demonstrated development in their use of the target structure than the learners who were only exposed to negative evidence without opportunity to self-correct.

Nobuyoshi and Ellis (1993) also found that the learners who responded with self-correction following clarification request improved in accuracy more than the learners who did not modify their output following the feedback. The finding of the present study as well as those of Nobuyoshi and Ellis (1993) and McDonough (2005) suggests that uptake, which is defined as "a student's utterance that immediately follows the teacher's feedback" by Lyster and Ranta (1997, p. 49), is likely to contribute to the development of target language accuracy. The subjects in Group C-2 were required to self-correct the errors underlined after receiving indirect feedback. In other words, they had to generate uptake, which may have resulted in significantly greater accuracy, as compared with the subjects in Group C-1, who did not have to produce uptake.

Based on Table 6, it can be said that on the delayed posttest which was carried out 4 weeks after the posttest, the subjects in Group C-2 maintained increased accuracy in using relative clause structures in communicative writing they exhibited on the posttest because the score on the delayed posttest was not significantly different from that on the posttest. Therefore, the effects of the form-focused instruction given to Group C-2 were found to be retained. On the other hand, for Group C-1, a change in accuracy is evident because there is a significant difference between the two posttests (Table 5). However, the score on the delayed posttest is still significantly higher than that on the pretest, so it can be said that the durability of the effects of the form-focused instruction given to Group C-1 was not as robust as that of the effects of the instruction provided to Group C-2 but they were durable in some degree. The result suggests that the opportunity for self-correcting after receiving indirect feedback, i.e., the requirement to generate uptake, not only results in significantly greater accuracy but also makes the effects of the instruction more durable.

VI. CONCLUSION, SUGGESTIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

The present study investigated what combination of form-focused options may be effective in helping low-proficiency Korean university learners improve the accuracy in their use of sentences with relative clause structures in communicative writing. The study found that the combination of explicit explanation, sentence-level production practice, communicative writing practice, and recasts had a significantly greater effect on improved accuracy than the combination of communicative writing practice and recasts and that of explicit explanation, communicative writing practice, and recasts.

Because the second and third combinations didn't lead to significantly improved accuracy, it can be concluded that of the form-focused options forming the first combination sentence-level production practice made a decisive contribution to the significant increase in accuracy. It also found that the provision of self-correcting opportunity before providing recasts on errors committed in sentence-level production practice resulted in significantly greater accuracy in communicative writing than the provision of recasts alone on them. Based on the results of the study, several suggestions can be offered.

It seems that if we expect students to produce grammatical structures more accurately by using the explicit knowledge they have acquired through explicit explanation, we have to make them have sentence-level production practice. The sentence translation task used as sentence-level production practice in the present study provided the learners with intensive opportunities to repeat use of the target structure brought to a focus, which may have led to promoting accuracy. In the study, all the subjects practiced using the target structure in communicative writing practice, but the practice did not focus on only one feature of English use—namely, the relative clause structure and the opportunities to use the target structure were not as intensive as those in sentence-level production practice, so that communicative writing practice doesn’t seem to have had a significant effect on promoting accuracy. Therefore, it is suggested that to help learners, in particular low-proficiency Korean learners, to improve writing accuracy, we should make them have sentence-level production practice which is intensive and focused.

As discussed above, the lack of effects of recasts on the errors made in communicative writing practice may be due to the fact that recasts were not focused on relative clause-related errors. In addition, the function of recasts may be related to their ineffectiveness. Because recasts reformulate learner utterances by providing learners with target forms, they are not required to self-correct errors. As a result, they often pay little attention to them, as stated by Lalande (1982). As above-made mention of feedback on errors made in sentence-level production practice, the learners who self-corrected errors underlined before receiving recasts significantly bettered those who received recasts without opportunities to self-correct errors. This finding indicates that making learners correct their own errors helps them to make progress in accuracy more than the teacher's providing correct forms without self-correcting opportunities. It is probable that by prompting learners committing errors to self-correct, they are pushed to notice problems in their output and to reflect upon what corrections to make, which results in increased accuracy in their production.

Moreover, as shown above, the provision of self-correcting opportunities improved the durability of instructional effect. Therefore, it is suggested that it is good to make learners self-correct targeted errors before providing them with narrowly focused recasts in order to help them to improve accuracy in their writing.

There are some limitations of the present study. The researcher made low-proficiency Korean learners of English the subjects of the present study and chose the relative clause structure as the target structure. Future studies would need to be conducted to investigate whether the findings of this study apply to Korean learners at other proficiency levels and whether they are also true for other linguistic forms. Structured input, which is among form-focused options, was not incorporated into the form-focused instruction conducted in this study. There is a need for research to examine the effect of a combination of form-focused options including structured input.

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Examples in: English
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