

## Unaccusative and Unergative Verb Acquisition: Effects of Implicit, Explicit, and Mixed Oral Corrective Feedback

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**Abstract.** Persian L2 learners of English over-passivize the unaccusatives. Therefore, it is necessary that teachers identify erroneous over-passivization of unaccusatives and provide the necessary explanation of the differences between unaccusatives and unergatives. Issues such as type of instructions provided by teachers in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) classrooms still suffers from unanswered questions. This study focused on the acquisition of the differences between unaccusatives and unergatives by intermediate and advanced learners before and after receiving oral Corrective Feedback (CF). 106 students who scored 1 standard deviation below and above the mean score of the quick Oxford placement test (SD= 6.11, mean= 36.94), and also passed an elimination test examining their knowledge of passive formation rules, were selected as the participants. They were divided into 4 groups (3 experimental and 1 control) according to the type of oral CF they were supposed to receive and the university courses they had to enroll in. A Written Elicited Production Task (WEPT) and a Grammaticality Judgment Task (GJT) were administered as the pre-tests. Each experimental group received one type of oral CF as the treatment (explicit, implicit, or mixed) and the control group received no CF. Then

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the WEPT and GJT were administered as the post-tests. The results revealed that while students had the ability to judge the grammaticality of the sentences with unergatives before receiving oral CF, they did not have such ability for sentences with unaccusatives, and it was only after receiving the oral CF when they acquired the required knowledge.

**Keywords:** Unaccusative verbs, unergative verbs, oral corrective feedback, L2 acquisition

## 1. Introduction

### Unaccusative and unergative verbs

Perlmutter (1979) proposed Unaccusative hypothesis as a syntactic hypothesis that divides the intransitive verbs into two classes: unergatives and unaccusatives. According to this hypothesis, while the unaccusative verbs are verbs whose subjects have no responsibility for the action of the verb and the surface subject is not the real subject, unergative verbs are verbs with real subjects responsible for the action of the verb.

### Logical problem of unaccusative and unergative verbs acquisition

As Sorace (1993) claimed, syntactic distinction between unaccusatives and unergatives varies in different languages. For example, Sorace explained that in Italian, unaccusative verbs select the auxiliary “be” while unergative verbs select the auxiliary “have”. Another example was given by KarimiDoostan (1997), elaborating that Persian lets its native speakers alternate between causatives and unergatives by replacing the “do/KARDAN” with “be or become/ SHODAN”. Therefore, Persian speakers can use many simple or compound transitive verbs intransitively in their L1. In English, however, this alternation depends mainly on the transitivity or intransitivity of the verb, and when L2 learners tend to resort to the verb “SHODAN” construction (NP-be-V-en) in English, it will result in over-passivization of unaccusatives (Abbasi Bagherianpoor, 2010).

As Abbasi Bagherianpoor (2010), Rezai and Ariamanesh (2012), and Abbasi and Mirjani Arjenan (2014) suggested, Persian L2 learners of English over-passivize the unaccusatives. Therefore, it is necessary that teachers identify such erroneous over-passivization of unaccusatives and

provide the learners with the necessary explanation of the differences between unaccusatives and unergatives.

### **Corrective feedback**

Errors are an inevitable part of language learning; learners of either the first or the second language may commit errors in their language production. George (1972) perceived children's errors as transitional forms. He referred to native speakers' errors as slip of the tongue and considered second language learners' errors as the unwanted forms. According to the existing literature, we can find different approaches toward errors in a second language learning context (James, 2013; Littlewood, 1984; Maicusi, Maicusi, & Lopez, 2000).

In the behaviorist approach, an error is considered as a negative element that should be avoided; it is a sign, showing teaching is not effective, and therefore teachers should systematically prevent error occurrence by intensive drilling, over-repetition, and over-teaching. Another approach, with Chomsky's (1965) ideas as its base, explains that errors lead to learners' progress. In this mentalist approach, learners gain the necessary knowledge of the language by a trial and error process rather than over-learning. While the behaviorist approach regards errors as negative, the mentalist approach considers it as positive. In a cognitive approach, errors are viewed as reflections of social norms as well as learners' cognitive processes; therefore, they are perceived as an outcome of the social-cognitive interaction.

Following these different approaches, different researchers perceive and define errors from different perspectives. For example, Hawkins (1987) elaborated on the concept of error from an intrinsically rational point of view. He demonstrated that errors are not fixed and they change according to the index that they refer to. Furthermore, he explained that errors can be identified through interaction. While Richards, Platt, and Platt (1992) considered errors of SLA as a linguistic misuse of an item which resulted from an incomplete learning, Selinker (1972) used the term interlanguage to refer to this misuse. In his view, interlanguage was a unique language system created and used by learners while learning a second or foreign language.

The way a teacher recognizes the causes and origins of errors committed by second/foreign language learners determines the attitude he/she may choose to deal with those errors. As Han (2002) and Lightbown and Spada (1999) described, behaviorists and audio-lingual proponents focused on the relationship between the negative transfer of the mother tongue experiences to the second language learning process. They believed that the causes of errors can be found in the failed habit formations that should be prevented; otherwise, errors may end with negative fossilization.

On the other hand, Chomsky's (1965) universal grammar theory explained that human beings are equipped with a biologically language learning ability which brings them the creativity in language learning. This creativity can be explained by the systematic productions of learners which are perceived as a sign of progress in learning. So, errors made by language learners should not be prevented because they are indeed signs of learning, not symptoms of failure.

With errors being an inevitable part of learning a second language, teachers are driven into a pedagogical context in which providing learners with feedback is really essential. The first definition of feedback in language learning defined it as any type of information provided for the learner after receiving the learner's response to a question or to a task (Wager & Wager, 1985). This definition was too broad and included all post-response information given to the learner, therefore, researchers tried to find a more relevant definition which was more limited. As a result, it was defined as multiple strategies which do not immediately give the correct answers to students, and instead, provide elaborated responses that help learners complete the task successfully (Annett, 1969; Bilodeau, 1969; Narciss, 2008). Another was proposed by Lee-man (2007), he argued that feedback can be defined as a reaction to the learner's utterance, but evidence can be given to the learner at any stage of his/her production.

Researchers also found out that corrective feedback strategies can be provided for the learner in implicit or explicit ways. In an explicit corrective feedback, a formal explanation is provided after the error committed, and implicit corrective feedback involves some ways that indicate

the incorrectness of the learner's utterance and ask for a reformulation (Campillo, 2003).

### **Oral corrective feedback**

Lyster and Ranta (1997) drew on strategies from previous studies and added new strategies based on their analysis of teacher-student interactions and identified explicit correction, elicitation, clarification requests, recasts, metalinguistic feedback, and repetition of error corrective feedback. While the explicit correction is considered an explicit corrective feedback strategy, the latter strategies provide the corrective feedback implicitly. Since these feedback strategies proved to be useful in teacher-student interactions, the following strategies were selected to be used as oral corrective feedback strategies of the study: recasts (which involve the teachers' reformulation of all or part of the students' utterance minus the error part); explicit feedback (which refers to the explicit provision of the correct form); clarification request (which shows the student that either the teacher has misunderstood the utterance or the utterance is ill-formed and a reformulation is needed); metalinguistic feedback (involves comments or questions regarding the well-formedness of the students' utterance without explicitly mentioning the correct form); elicitation (which consists of three techniques: a. teacher utters a sentence then pauses and lets the student fill the required answer; b. teacher uses questions to elicit the correct forms; c. teacher occasionally asks students to reformulate their sentences.); repetition (is the teacher's repetition of the students incorrect utterance) suggested by Lyster and Ranta (1997); and prompt or negotiation of form (in which the teacher withholds the reformulation and the student is encouraged to correct the error himself/herself) proposed by Lyster and Mori (2006).

Unergative and unaccusative verbs appear in the learning materials at different levels of learning, and acquiring them is necessary. Since corrective feedback strategies proved to be effective on syntactic acquisition of L2 learners (Kawaguchi & Ma, 2012), this study focused on the effects of explicit and implicit oral corrective feedback strategies, on the acquisition of unaccusative and unergative verbs in an Iranian EFL context.

### Literature Review

Due to importance of corrective feedback in different language learning theories and the effects of feedback strategies on L2 grammar acquisition, many studies have been conducted on the issue (e.g., Bowles & Montrul, 2009; Kawaguchi and Ma, 2012; Zohrabi and Ehsani, 2014; Tamayo Maggi and Quishpe, 2017).

Bowles and Montrul (2009) investigated the possible role of explicit teaching and negative evidence on a-personal (a grammatical feature of Spanish) learning. They explained that form-focused instruction either in the form of grammatical explanation or in the form of corrective feedback, during or even before exposure to L2, could provide students with explicit information. The researchers conducted their study by 72 participants who were divided into two groups: one group consisted of 12 native speakers of Spanish who lived in different countries at the time of the study and another group consisted of 60 low-intermediate language learners whose L1 was English. The participants of the second group were divided into two groups, one received instructions on the targeted structure and served as an experimental group while the other did not receive any instruction and just took the pre-and the post-tests. The results of the obtained data revealed that the researchers' instruction had the desired effect, and after providing the learners with instruction and feedback, they were able to accept the grammatical forms more easily than the ungrammatical ones.

In another study, Kawaguchi and Ma (2012) investigated the role of oral corrective feedback and negotiation of meaning on L2 learners' grammar development. They followed an Interactionist Approach introduced by Long (1996). The participants of their study were 6 adult informants: two of them were English native speakers, two were non-native speakers with high proficiency level of English and the other two were non-native speakers with low proficiency level of English. The researchers used board game to elicit past tense marking in the sentences, interaction conversation to obtain all types of grammatical items and picture describing and drawing to elicit subject-verb agreement, noun plural forms and question formation. They observed that the provided lin-

guistic environment of non-native speakers and non-native speakers was comparable with that of native speakers and non-native speakers. The researchers concluded that the non-native-non-native combination either with high proficient learners or the low proficient ones provided a better outcome of corrective feedback compared with the non-native-native combinations. Kawaguchi and Ma also suggested that the low proficient level learners received the best type of corrective feedback along with the best type of negotiation of meanings from the high proficient level learners. Their results revealed that since all learners had fewer errors in their post-tests compared with their pre-test, the provided corrective feedback was considered to be positively effective.

Focusing on the effects of different types of corrective feedbacks on grammar accuracy and learners' awareness, Zohrabi and Ehsani (2014) asked 60 pre-intermediate EFL students to translate simple present and simple past tense sentences from Persian to English. They taught present and the past tense before the administration of the translation test. After correcting the tests, they provided the explicit feedback group with explicit written feedback for their errors, and the implicit feedback group just had their errors specified and no corrective feedback was provided. Based on the obtained results, Zohrabi and Ehsani concluded that the Iranian EFL learners' English grammar improved after receiving the treatment.

Considering acquisition of unaccusative and unergative verbs, Abasi and MirjaniArjenan(2014) used 38 subjects with different educational backgrounds to investigate the translation challenges that the translators faced while translating English unaccusative verbs into Persian. The researchers argued that among the main problems that the translators usually faced was the translation of the passive voice and the unaccusative verbs. They used a corpus, and three available Persian translations of it, and also a questionnaire to obtain readers' responses to different kinds of translation. The results of their study revealed that passives and unaccusatives were treated differently by translators. Abasi and MirjaniArjenan concluded that readers preferred active translation of passive forms to the passive one, and unaccusative translation of the unaccusatives to other translated forms.

Tamayo Maggi and Quishpe (2017) investigated the effects of corrective feedback on grammatical accuracy of students' oral interactions. Their 18-week study involved twenty-eight participants in two classes. While class 1 received metalinguistic corrective feedback, class 2 received reformulation. The results revealed that the provision of the two types of corrective feedback led to a significant correction of statements produced by students in specific linguistic structures. The researchers claimed that the performance of the group of students who received the metalinguistic corrective feedback was better than the group of students who received reformulation. The findings of this study suggested that language teachers should use more metalinguistic feedback for the treatment of EFL students' errors when interacting orally.

Despite the studies conducted on the effectiveness of corrective feedback (e.g. Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Russell & Spada, 2006; Bowles & Montrul, 2009; Sauro, 2009; Tamayo Maggi and Quishpe, 2017), and the studies focused on acquisition of unaccusative and unergative verbs (e.g. Oshita, 1997; Hirakawa, 2000; Park and Lakshmanan, 2007; Mortazavi, 2012; Abbasi Bagherianpoor, 2010; Rezai & Ariamanesh, 2012; Abbasi & MirjaniArjenan, 2014), the existing literature lacks thorough research on the effects of oral corrective feedback on the acquisition of unaccusative/unergative verbs and the aim of the present study is to fill this gap in the literature.

### **Objectives and Research Questions of the Study**

Syntax acquisition plays an important role in second/foreign language acquisition. Although the literature on the use of corrective feedback strategies is extensive, it suffers from neglecting the role of feedback strategies on some specific parts of syntax like unergatives and unaccusatives in EFL contexts with a non-Roman language as the L1.

Hence, one of the objectives of this study is to provide the L2 pedagogical context with information about the effectiveness of oral corrective feedback. Furthermore, the study aims at informing L2 teachers of the most appropriate feedback strategies in teaching unergative and unaccusative verbs. It also tries to provide language instructors with



information on the possible differences between L2 learners with different levels of proficiency (intermediate and advanced) and the type of corrective feedback which is more effective for learners of each proficiency level. Based on the above objectives and to fill the present gap of the applied linguistics literature, the present study seeks to answer the following research questions:

**Q1.** Does providing oral corrective feedback affect the Iranian EFL learners' acquisition of unaccusatives and unergatives?

**Q2.** Which type of corrective feedback (implicit, explicit or mixed) is more effective in the acquisition of unaccusatives and unergatives?

**Q3.** At which level of language learning (intermediate or advanced) can learners best take advantage of the corrective feedback while learning unergatives and unaccusatives?

## Method

### Participants

Participants of this study were 137 Iranian EFL learners chosen based on a combination of random and nonprobability sampling procedures. The participants were studying either teaching English as a foreign language or English translation at the Islamic Azad University and Payam-E-Noor University of Shiraz, and their age ranged from 19 to 40 years. The researchers selected their classes randomly from among the courses that they were teaching at the time of the study. From among the 137 participants, those who gained %66.66 of the Elimination Test score and did not participate in any other English classes outside the university were chosen for the study (106 participants). The selected participants were then randomly divided into 4 different groups according to different classes they had to enroll in and according to the type of oral corrective feedback they were supposed to receive, based on a nonprobability convenience sampling.

### Instruments

**Elimination Test (ET).** The ET was taken from Mortazavi's (2012)

study and evaluated the participants' knowledge of passive construction in English. The test consisted of 9 fill-in-the-blank items and participants with 3 or more errors out of 9 were excluded from the study as their judgments were likely to be due to the lack of necessary knowledge of the passive forms. The reliability of the test was calculated at the pilot study stage of the study and the coefficient of equivalence was .94 which showed a high index of reliability.

**Oxford Placement Test (OPT).** OPT is a standard language proficiency placement test, consisting of two different parts (a grammar test and a listening test), each with 50 multiple choice items which evaluate learners' correct use of English. Since the aim of the present study was to investigate the syntactic ability of the participants and not their listening ability, the grammar test of OPT was used and the listening test was eliminated. Reliability of the test which was calculated at the pilot study stage of the study revealed a coefficient of equivalence of .89, and a reliability index of .94 which showed a high index of reliability.

**Written Elicited Production Task (WEPT).** The WEPT was taken from Hirakawa's (2000) study and was designed to elicit information about EFL learners' ability to distinguish passive structures from unaccusative verbs in English. It targeted incorrect use of passive morphology to unaccusative verbs and consisted of 24 items. The test reliability was calculated and it was .81, which was acceptable.

**Grammaticality Judgment Task (GJT).** The GJT was adopted from Hirakawa's (2000) study and aimed at evaluating participants' ability of distinguishing between unaccusatives and unergatives. Pseudopassive and resultative constructions were the structures which were used in the GJT in order to determine the participants' ability to distinguish unaccusatives from unergatives and passives. The Cronbach's Alpha index of reliability for the GJT was reported .75.

## Procedures

**Data collection.** At the beginning of the study, the researchers explained the voluntary nature of the study, the anonymity of participants'

responses and also the purpose of the study to the participants. Then, the participants completed the OPT and the ET. The results of ET were used to eliminate the participants who did not know the passive rules. The mean score and the standard deviation of all participants' OPT scores were calculated (mean=36.94, SD= 6.11) and those participants who scored one standard deviation above and below the mean (i.e., participants with scores ranging from 43.05 to 30.83) were selected to complete the WEPT and the GJT. The participants of the study (N=106) were randomly divided into 4 different groups according to different classes they had to enroll in and according to the type of corrective feedback they were supposed to receive. While 3 groups were the experimental groups of the study and received implicit oral CF, explicit oral CF, and implicit and explicit oral CF, one group was the control group of the study and received no CF.

The participants of all 4 groups followed a similar procedure for data collection of the study. At the beginning they were all asked to complete the WEPT and the GJT in regular class hours. They had 40 minutes to answer the WEPT and 25 minutes for the OPT. The necessary instruction for the tasks was provided by the researchers and in cases of clarification requests, some explanation was provided in the participants' L1. For both tasks an additional 5 to 10 minutes were allowed in case the participants needed extra time to complete the task. The first administrations of the WEPT and the GJT were used as the pretests of the study. In the following sessions, the nature and concept of unergative and unaccusative verbs were taught to all groups, The WEPT and GJT were corrected and returned to the participants.

Participants of the groups chosen for the oral CF received their CF during a short one by one interview with the researcher. Each interview lasted 2-4 minutes and all interviews were conducted after the official class hours. Participants of the explicit oral CF received feedback in the form of comments regarding the well-formedness of the responses or the explicit provision of the correct response (Example 1).

**Example 1:**

Researcher: ... we don't use the passive structure here. As you remem-

ber, “increase” is an unaccusative verb, so the answer is “increased”.

Participant: Oh. I remember that.

– For this item, explicit corrective feedback was provided (i.e. the researcher provides the explicit provision of the correct form).

The implicit oral CF group received their CF in the form of recast, clarification request, repetition, elicitation, and metalinguistic feedback showing that a reformulation is needed (Example 2 and Example 3).

### **Example 2:**

Researcher: I can't understand. Why did you use “was died”?

Participant: Because she was dead [Pause and stop answering].

Researcher: Excuse me? Can you explain it more?

Participant: Ehh[pause and think], wait, oh I think the answer is just “died”. Is it right?

– For this item, the corrective feedback was provided in the form of clarification request (i.e. the researcher shows the student that she has misunderstood, or the utterance is ill-formed and reformulation is needed).

### **Example 3:**

Teacher: “Clothes were dried in the sun”? “were dried”?

Participant: Should I use present tense, or the sentence is not passive?

Teacher: Do you remember the unaccusatives?

Participant: Eeee, no, not exactly.

Teacher: [The teacher briefly explains the characteristics of unaccusatives], now can you answer the question?

Participant: Oooh, now I can remember! it should be “dried”

– For this item, the corrective feedback was provided in the form of repetition (i.e. the teacher repeats the incorrect part) followed by an explanation to encourage the student to correct the answer (i.e. prompt).

The mixed oral CF group received a combination of both explicit and implicit CFs. Participants of the group with no CF received their papers and did not receive any type of feedback at all.

After providing the experimental groups with the feedbacks, and the control group with no feedback, the researcher asked all participants to return their the WEPT and the GJT papers (the same session they received the paper and the feedback). Eight weeks after the first administration of the WEPT and the GJT, the tasks were administered again as the post-tests. Collecting the necessary data, the researcher checked and listed all the results for data analysis.

**Data analysis.** Items of the WEPT and the GJT had four types of verbs (transitive, unergative, alternating unaccusative and non-alternating unaccusative). The SPSS Version 16 was used to compare the participants' performance in each type of verb in both pre- and post-tests by the t-test and ANOVA analysis.

## Results

### Results of WEPT

The WEPT was used to evaluate the participants' knowledge of unaccusatives and unergatives at the beginning and at the end of the study. To provide answer to the first research question of the study, Paired samples t-test was run. The results are shown in Table 1.

As the results in Table 1 show, the reported mean differences of all groups were negative, which indicates the score in the post-test was higher. The significant level of the no feedback group (the control group) was larger than .05, for the three verb types, indicating that the difference observed in no feedback group was not statistically significant. The significance level ( $p < .05$ ) of all experimental groups indicated that the difference was statistically significant.

**Table 1:** Paired-samples t-tests on alternating unaccusative verbs of WEPT

Verb	Group	Test	Paired Differences							t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Effect size
			Mean	SD	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference							
						Mean	Lower	Upper					
alternating unaccusative	EO CF	pre - post	-1.214	.787	.149	-1.519	-.909	-8.167	27	.000	.711		
	IO CF	pre - post	-1.229	.808	.136	-1.506	-.951	-9.001	34	.000	.704		
	MO CF	pre - post	-1.300	.675	.213	-1.738	-.817	-6.091	9	.000	.804		
	No CF	pre - post	-.091	.579	.101	-.296	.114	-.902	32	.374	-		
non-alternating unaccusative	EO CF	pre - post	-1.107	.629	.119	-1.351	-.863	-9.316	27	.000	.771		
	IO CF	pre - post	-1.457	.611	.103	-1.667	-1.247	-14.113	34	.000	.854		
	MO CF	pre - post	-1.600	.516	.163	-1.969	-1.231	-9.798	9	.000	.914		
	No CF	pre - post	-.152	.508	.088	-.331	.028	-1.715	32	.096	-		
unergative	EO CF	pre - post	-.929	1.152	.218	-1.375	-.482	-4.264	27	.000	.402		
	IO CF	pre - post	-.771	1.003	.169	-1.116	-.427	-4.552	34	.000	.378		
	MO CF	pre - post	-.900	.738	.233	-1.428	-.372	-3.857	9	.004	.623		
	No CF	pre - post	-.121	.696	.121	-.368	.126	-1.000	32	.325	-		

EO=Explicit Oral, IO=Implicit Oral, MO=Mixed Oral, CF=Corrective Feedback

The effect size was calculated for each experimental group to determine the relative magnitude of the difference between the scores of the pre- and post-tests of each group. The effect sizes of all experimental groups were considered as large effect sizes.

After comparing the pre- and post-test scores of each group and calculating the effect sizes, a One-way ANOVA with different types of corrective feedback received by the experimental groups as between-group factor (i.e. implicit, explicit or mixed), examined the difference in students' gain scores from one group to others to answer the second research question of the study (Table 2).

The summarized results of One-way ANOVA, as presented in Table 2, indicated that no statistically significant difference was found ( $p = .754 > .05$ ). The results suggested that providing explicit/implicit/mixed feedback has no significant effect on the participants' learning of unaccusatives and unergatives.

**Table 2:** One-way ANOVA analysis for mean of gain scores of all experimental groups

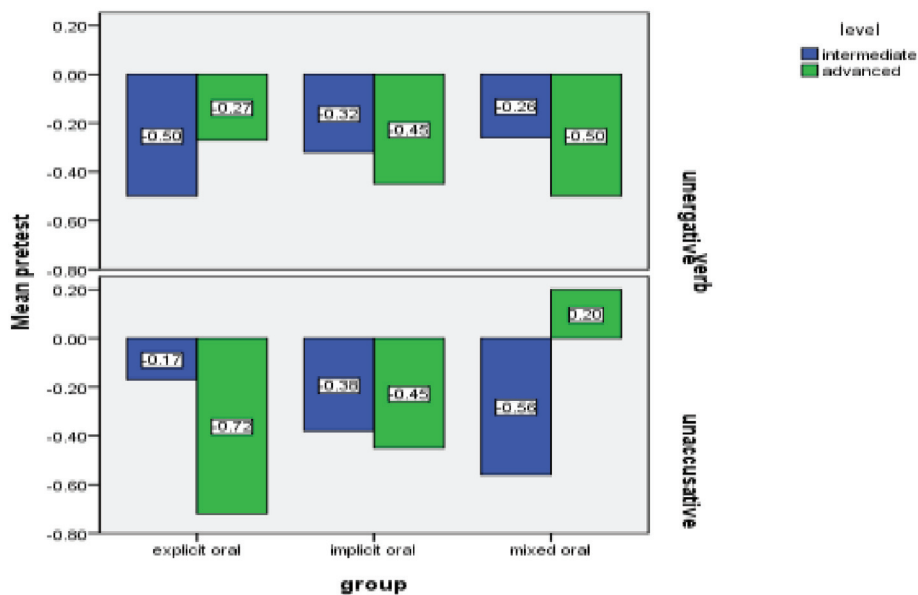
Alternating unaccusatives	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.051	2	.026	.296	.754
Within Groups	.520	6	.087		
Total	.572	8			

### Results of GJT

The GJT was used to determine intermediate/advanced students ability to differentiate unergative verbs from unaccusative verbs. While a scale of (+2) represented the maximum score accepting a sentence, a scale of (-2) represents the maximum score rejecting the sentence. Therefore, positive mean scores on the acceptable sentences and negative mean scores on the unacceptable sentences showed students' ability to judge grammaticality of the sentences correctly. Pseudopassive and resultative constructions were the structures used in the GJT in order to determine intermediate/advanced students ability to distinguish unaccusatives from unergatives.

**Resultative structure.** Resultatives aimed at examining students' deep knowledge of unaccusative and unergative verbs. While resultatives are compatible with transitive objects and alternating unaccusative subjects, they are not compatible with unergative subjects. Therefore, a mean score of (-2) for unergative verbs and (+2) for unaccusative verbs showed the students' maximum acquisition of unergative and unaccusative verbs, respectively.

In Figure 1, the bar-graphs of the pre-test mean scores of the intermediate and advanced level students of each group are illustrated.

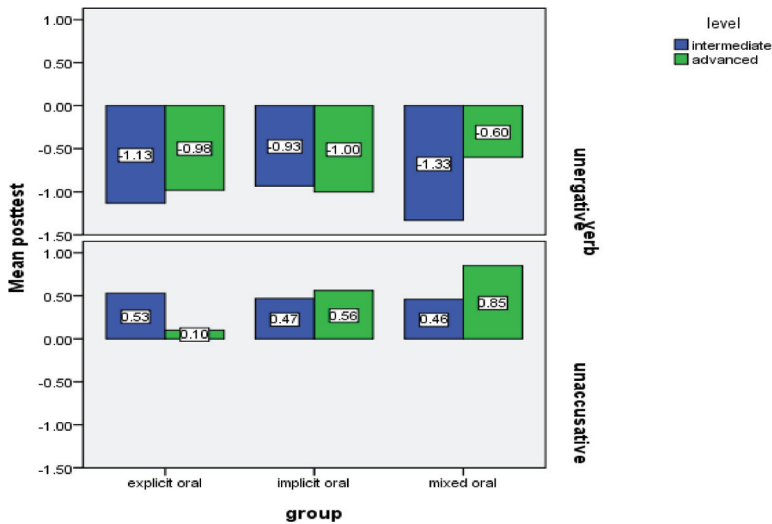


**Figure 1.** Pre-test mean scores of verbs with resultative structure

As it is illustrated in Figure 1, the mean scores of the pre-test items focusing on unergative verbs indicate that all groups had the ability to determine the ill-formedness of the sentences with unergative verbs with the resultative structure. On the other hand, regarding the group performance on unaccusative verbs with resultative structure in the pre-test, the bar-graphs indicate that except the advanced level students of the mixed oral groups, all other groups failed to identify the well-formedness of the sentences.

As the focus of the study was on the effects of corrective feedback, mean of the post-test scores of students was also calculated for each group. Figure 2 illustrates the performance of each group after receiving the corrective feedback.





**Figure 2.** Post-test mean scores of verbs with resultative structure

As it is illustrated in Figure 2, the mean scores of students' judgments on the well-formedness of sentences with unergative verbs are higher compared to mean scores of the students' judgments on the pre-test. Regarding the unaccusative verbs, Figure 2 illustrates that while students' judgments on pre-test indicated no or little ability of identifying the well-formedness of sentences, the bars of the post-test are in the positive side which showed students ability to differentiate the correct forms from the incorrect ones.

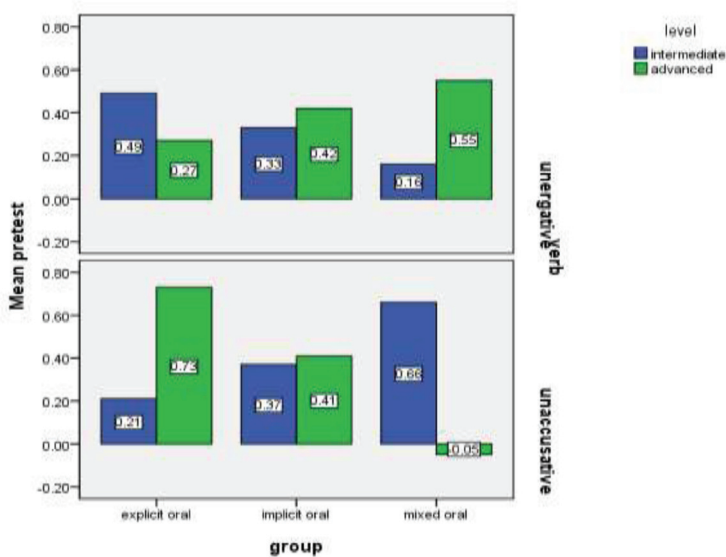
As the comparison of the bars direction and their magnitude from the pre-test to post-test indicate an improvement in all experimental groups, the mean differences of the pre- and post-tests of the different levels of the experimental groups were calculated (Table 3).

As it is shown in Table 3, the intermediate-level students, who received a combination of implicit and explicit oral corrective feedback, had the highest improvement in judging the grammaticality of sentences with unaccusative (1.02) and unergative verbs (1.07).

**Table 3:** Mean differences of pre- and post-test scores of verbs with resultative structure

		Group		
	Level	Explicit oral	Implicit oral	Mixed oral
Unaccusatives	Intermediate	0.70	0.85	1.02
	Advanced	0.82	1.01	0.60
Unergatives	Intermediate	0.63	0.61	1.07
	Advanced	0.71	0.55	0.10

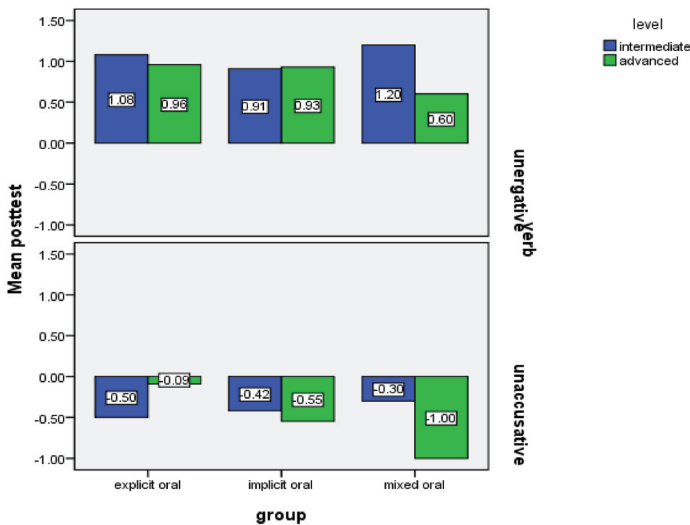
**Pseudopassive Structure.** Pseudopassive structures, like resultative structures, aimed at examining the students' deep knowledge of unaccusative and unergative verbs. Unlike resultatives, the pseudopassive structure is allowed with transitive and unergative verbs' subjects, but not allowed with unaccusative verbs' subjects. Therefore, a mean score of (+2) for unergative verbs and (-2) for unaccusative verbs showed the students' maximum acquisition of unergative and unaccusative verbs, respectively. In Figure 3, the pre-tests mean scores of the intermediate and advanced level students of each group are illustrated.

**Figure 3.** Pre-test mean scores of verbs with Pseudopassive structure

As it is shown in Figure 3, both intermediate and advanced level students had the ability to judge the grammaticality of the sentences with unergative verbs and pseudopassive structure. The bar-graphs of students' judgments on sentences with unaccusative verbs illustrates that all groups but the advanced-level students, who were supposed to receive a combination of implicit and explicit corrective feedback, failed to judge the grammaticality of sentences with unaccusative verbs and pseudopassive structure.

As the focus of the study was to compare the students' judgments before and after receiving corrective feedback, Figure 4 illustrates the performance of each group after receiving the corrective feedback.

The bar-graphs of Figure 4 indicate a change in students' grammaticality judgments for both unergative and unaccusative verbs. However, the students' grammaticality judgment of unergative verbs in the pre-tests revealed that the judgments' scores were on the positive side of the axis. The post-test results indicated that the students' ability to judge the grammaticality of sentences with unergative verbs had improved.



**Figure 4.** Post-test mean scores of verbs with Pseudopassive structure

As the comparison of the bars' direction and their magnitude from pre-test to post-test indicates an improvement in all groups, the mean differ-

ences of the pre-and post-tests of the different levels of all groups were calculated (Table 4).

**Table 4:** Mean differences of pre-and post-test scores of verbs with pseudopassive structure

	Level	Group		
		Explicit oral	Implicit oral	Mixed oral
Unaccusatives	Intermediate	0.71	0.79	0.96
	Advanced	0.82	0.96	0.95
Unergatives	Intermediate	0.59	0.58	1.04
	Advanced	0.69	0.51	0.05

As it is shown in Table 4, the intermediate-level students, who received a combination of implicit and explicit oral corrective feedback, had the highest improvement in judging the grammaticality of the sentences with unaccusative (0.96) and unergative verbs (1.04).

To provide answer for the third research question of the study, and to find out at which level of language learning (intermediate or advanced) can learners best take advantage of the corrective feedback, an independent samples t-tests was run for intermediate-and advanced-level learners' performance on resultative and pseudopassive structures in all experimental groups (Table 5).

As it is shown in Table 5, none of the structures (i.e., resultative & pseudopassive) revealed no significant difference between the performance of advanced-and intermediate-level students. Therefore, despite of the different mean scores obtained by different groups, no significant difference was found.

**Table 5:** Independent Samples t-test for intermediate- and advanced-level learners

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Differenc e	Std. Error Differen ce	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper	
Resultative	Equal variances assumed	.306	.592	1.213	10	.253	.18167	.14976	-.15201	.51535
	Equal variances not assumed			1.213	8.548	.258	.18167	.14976	-.15986	.52319
Pseudopassive	Equal variances assumed	1.314	.278	.715	10	.491	.11500	.16085	-.24340	.47340
	Equal variances not assumed			.715	7.785	.496	.11500	.16085	-.25772	.48772

## Discussion and Conclusion

Considering the findings from the WEPT, the scores of the post-tests of all three groups who received oral corrective feedback were significantly different from the scores of the pre-tests. Regarding the unergative verbs, the results revealed that the post-tests performance of all groups indicated an improvement and the effect sizes of all three groups who received oral corrective feedback, were considered as large. The results also revealed that the effect size of the group who received a combination of implicit and explicit oral corrective feedback was larger than the other two groups who received either explicit or implicit oral corrective feedback. Although the groups who received oral corrective feedback had different effect sizes, the results of the One-way ANOVA revealed no significant difference between the explicit, implicit and mixed oral strategies.

A comparison of the results of the present study with those of Kawaguchi and Ma (2012) showed that in both studies oral corrective feedback was found to be effective for L2 learners' grammar development. Kawaguchi and Ma evaluated the participants' performance on noun plural forms, verb past tense, subject-verb agreement, and question formation. They stated that oral corrective feedback and negotiation of meaning resulted in better performance by the participants. The result of the present study also revealed the same findings for the effectiveness of oral corrective feedback for the acquisition of unergative and unaccusative verbs.

The results of the present study were also in-line with the results of the studies conducted by Bowles and Montrul (2009) in that both studies revealed that a combination of explicit and implicit oral corrective feedback would result in the acquisition of grammar. Findings of Russell and Spada (2006) were also compatible with the findings of the present study in that both studies found that oral corrective feedback would help L2 learners of English acquire the grammar.

Although the results of the present study showed agreement with the studies which found the positive effects of corrective feedback, the present study provided the literature with information on the fact that the three types of oral corrective feedback can equally result in the acquisition of unergative and unaccusative verbs.

The results of the GJT revealed no significant difference between the performances of advanced- and intermediate-level students. Therefore, despite of the different mean scores obtained by the different groups, no significant difference was found. Regarding the unaccusative verbs, the results of the pre-test revealed that all of the students had no or little ability of judging the grammaticality of sentences with unaccusative verbs. A comparison of these results with those of unergative verbs showed that sentences with unaccusative verbs (either with resultative or pseudopassive structure) were problematic for our students. Although students had no or little ability of judging the grammaticality of sentences with unaccusative verbs at the beginning of the study, after receiving instruction along with corrective feedback, their results improved. The results of all groups' post-tests indicated an increase of

ability to judge the grammaticality of sentences with unaccusative verbs. The results of this study provide further support for the results of the previous studies such as the one done by Rezai and Ariamanesh (2012), as both studies indicated that Iranian EFL learners had difficulty with judging the grammaticality of sentences with unaccusative verbs before receiving instructions. Since Rezai and Ariamanesh did not provide their participants with instructions or corrective feedback, comparison of post-tests results is not applicable.

Results of Abbasi Bagherianpoor's (2010) study supported the findings of the present study, indicating that learners had difficulty in structures with unaccusative verbs and although learners were screened into intermediate and advanced levels, their performance was not significantly different. Compared with AbbasiBagherianpoor's findings, the present study revealed that students of intermediate and advanced-levels had difficulty with unaccusative verbs. However, what makes the results of the present study different from the previous ones is that in the present study the students' performance is also evaluated after receiving the corrective feedback and explicit instruction. According to the results of the post-test, although both levels' ability to judge grammaticality of sentences increased, advanced-level learners had slightly outperformed intermediate-level learners for items with unaccusative verbs; however, this difference was not considered significant.

Since the body of research points to universal acquisition challenges for unaccusatives (Zobl, 1989; Oshita, 1997; Hirakawa, 2000; Abbasi-Bagherianpoor, 2010; & Mortazavi, 2012), these findings provide a further support for the afore-mentioned challenges and also suggest solution (i.e., explicit instruction & oral corrective feedback) to overcome and reduce the effects of those challenges on L2 acquisition.

Although the results did not indicate any difference between implicit, explicit, mixed oral corrective feedback strategies, a comparison of different groups revealed that a combination of implicit and explicit strategies resulted in the highest mean differences from the pre-to the post-test. So, it can be argued that using a combination of explicit and implicit corrective feedback strategies can help the students understand unaccusative and unergative rules better. It can also be concluded that

since there is not any significant difference between the different corrective feedback strategies, it is teachers' decision to determine which type or types of corrective feedback can help the students.

### **Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research**

The present study, which targeted Iranian EFL majors, has some limitations in relation to the participants and the instruments. Since the participants of the present study were chosen based on a nonprobability sampling and from among an accessible population, they were Persian speakers. As Abbasi Bagherianpoor (2010) and Hirakawa (2000) claimed that unaccusative/unergative acquisition in L2 English follows from L1 universals, it is recommended that future research replicate the present study using participants with different L1 backgrounds. Another limitation of the present study was unavailability of computer-assisted corrective feedback. Since technology plays an important role in education, the incorporation of computer-assisted feedback into classes may provide the learners and teachers with its advantages/disadvantages. Therefore, there is a need for studies which focus on the incorporation of such programs into EFL classes.

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