The Effects of Written Feedback on Second Language Writing

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Abstract: The present study explored the effectiveness of different types of written corrective feedback and error logs in L2 writing focused on English articles. For this study, during a semester, 25 undergraduate students in two intact ESL writing courses received implicit or explicit feedback while one of the classes were asked to keep error logs after receiving corrective feedback. To examine students' improvement, analysis of four writing tasks and a grammaticality judgment test were carried out. Statistical analysis of the data showed that corrective feedback was effective on the acquisition of English articles, and keeping error logs after receiving corrective feedback was effective to help students to better retain the received corrective feedback. The results also showed that implicit corrective feedback was more effective than explicit corrective feedback when students were asked to keep error logs after receiving corrective feedback while explicit corrective feedback was more effective when they did not keep error logs. The results suggest that receiving corrective feedback and keeping error logs can have a positive effect on L2 acquisition and the effectiveness of implicit and explicit feedback can be affected by other variables.

Keywords: feedback, written corrective feedback, second language writing, feedback effectiveness, error correction, direct and indirect feedback, focused feedback, comprehensive feedback.

Feedback is an integral part of any writing process. Writers don't write in a vacuum, especially in academic and professional contexts, where evaluation, review, and use of written work usually requires a number of people to be involved in the final product. Most students are familiar with peer review; similarly, scholarly articles are usually considered more trustworthy when they are double-blind peer reviewed, and writers in many workplaces usually get at least one colleague or boss's input.

The pages in this resource address providing, interpreting, and writing with feedback from a number of perspectives and in a variety of settings. The goal of this resource is to help writers of all types (student, teacher, scholar, practitioner, etc.) give useful feedback, understand and analyze feedback they're given, and then use that feedback to improve their writing.

Feedback is a vital concept in most theories of learning and is closely related to motivation. Behavioral theories tend to focus on extrinsic motivation such as rewards (Weiner, 1990). In language learning and teaching, varying types of feedback can be provided to students. As in other disciplines, feedback that motivates students' language learning should receive particular attention. On practical grounds, feedback for motivation and language correction are a key concern for language educators.

Feedback can be defined from various perspectives. Based on Hattie and Timperley's (2007) work, feedback can be defined as "information provided by an agent with respect to one's performance or understanding" Corrective feedback or error correction is probably one of the most common feedback forms used in ESL classrooms these days. However, despite its large usage, there has been ongoing debate on the effectiveness of written corrective feedback on the development of

implicit and explicit knowledge of language. After Truscott's claim (1996) that Corrective feedback is "ineffective" at best and even "potentially harmful" to students (p.328), insisting that such time and effort should be spent on alternative activities such as additional writing practice, there have been a number of studies which have tried to investigate the effectiveness of corrective feedback based on empirical experiments (Hendrickson, 1978; Semke, 1984; Truscott, 1996, 1999, 2004, 2007).

An important issue in the teaching of writing is how to give students feedback on their written work, when to give it, by whom, and how. Nothing is more discouraging for a teacher than to have the daunting task of reading and commenting on 40 or 50 students essays as a weekend chore. Some help is offered by word-processing programs if students prepare their writing on a computer, since software is available to identify spelling and simple grammatical problems. However intervention by the teacher cannot easily be avoided. Such feedback may include comments on any aspects of piece of written work, including spelling, grammar, style and organization. However the effect of such feedback is not always easy to determine. Do students learn from it or do they simply pay minimum attention to it and move on to their next assignment?

Some teachers use checklists in which a score is given for each different aspect of a composition, such as content, organization, vocabulary, language and mechanics (spelling, punctuation, paragraphing).

The kind of feedback the teacher gives may depend on what stage in the writing process the writing represents (e.g. drafting, composing, editing) and feedback should both encourage students (through praise for ideas, originality etc) as well as guide them towards needed improvements.

Peer-feedback is an alternative to teacher feedback and is an important feature of a process approach to writing instruction. With this approach student read drafts of each other's compositions and may use checklists or question sets to help them read and respond to their partner's writing. Not all teachers and students appreciate the value of peer feedback however. Teachers may feel that students comment on the wrong things or give incorrect feedback. Students may not value their partner's views or comments. However it does offer a more comfortable feedback process and is usually supplemented by teacher feedback as well.

Truscott (1996) claims that corrective feedback should be abandoned because

(1) it will be ineffective in cases where the teachers' corrective feedback does not fit to students' developmental sequences, which ignores the nature of interlanguage development;

(2) even if it is effective, it is likely to be beneficial only to the development of explicit or metalinguistic knowledge, and it is unlikely to affect students' implicit knowledge or procedural knowledge (e.g., DeKeyser, 2003; Ellis, 2004);

(3) the language learning process is not a linear information transfer from teacher to students but a gradual and complex process; and

(4) practically, it is not possible for teachers provide adequate and consistent feedback, and it is not certain whether students are able or willing to use such feedback effectively in their learning process (Truscott, 1996, 2007).

Furthermore, he adds that in cases where teachers provide corrective feedback on students' grammatical errors, there is the possibility that students might avoid using such forms so that they come to use only simply-structured sentences instead of more complex ones (Truscott, 2007).

Learning to write in a foreign language as an independent component of a practical goal has established itself in the domestic methodology for teaching foreign languages only in the last two

decades. First of all, this was due to the modernization language education in accordance with the requirements of the competence-based approach in the educational environment [1, p. 34].

The few studies that have looked beyond the immediate corrections in a subsequent draft, however, have noted improvements in students' language accuracy (Polio et al. 1998; F. Hyland 2003; Chandler 2003). Ferris (2006), for instance, showed that students made statistically significant reductions in their total number of errors over a semester in five major grammar categories with a particular reduction in verb and lexical errors. These results underline the importance of general language proficiency and metalingusitic awareness in writing development and support Yates & Kenkel's (2002) argument that both error correction and its effectiveness must be seen in the context of a student's evolving mastery of overall text construction.

It is also worth pointing out that many studies of feedback on error have ignored how language acquisition occurs, although the influence of feedback on the learner's long term writing developmentfits closely with the SLA research (Goldstein, p.c).

SLA studies indicate that second language acquisitiontakes place gradually over time and that mistakes are an important part of the highly complex developmental process of acquiring the target language. In fact, there may be a U-shaped course of development (Ellis 1997) where learners are initially able to use the correct forms, only to regress later, before finally using them according to the target language norms (e.g. Doughty & Long 2003). We cannot, in other words, expect that a target form will be acquired either immediately or permanently after it has been highlighted through feedback. Even though explicit feedback can play an important role in second language acquisition, it needs time and repetition before it can help learners to notice correct forms, compare these with their own interlanguage and test their hypotheses about the target language. Attempting to establish a direct relationship between corrective feedback and successful acquisition of a form is, therefore, over-simplistic and highly problematic (e.g. Carson 2001; Ferris 2003).

While feedback alone will not be responsible for improvement in language accuracy, it is likely to be one important factor. One key variable here is the type of error feedback that is given, and a number of researchers have compared direct feedback, where the teacher makes an explicit correction, with indirect forms where he or she simply indicates that an error has been made by means of an underline, circle, code, etc. The role of explicitness in student uptake, or response to feedback, is important as while indirect error feedback may encourage learner reflection and self-editing (Lalande 1982), lower proficiency students may be unable to identify and correct errors even when they have been marked for them (Ferris & Hedgcock 2005).

Findings on feedback type have been conflicting, largely due to the widely varying student populations, types of writing and feedback practices examined and the diverse research designs employed. Lalande (1982), for instance, reported a reduction in student errors with indirect feedback and Robb et al. (1986) discovered minimal long-term gains in accuracy compared with direct feedback practices. In a textual study of over 5,000 teacher comments, Ferris (2006) found that students utilized direct feedback more consistently and effectively than indirect types, partly as it involves simply copying the teacher's suggestion into the next draft of their papers. However, less explicit forms of feedback also led to accurate revisions most of the time and this occurred whether underlined errors were coded or not. Ferris notes, however, that students' short-term ability to edit some types of errors which were directly marked by feedback did not always translate into long-term improvement, while indirect feedback seemed to help them develop more over time. While this may be a discouraging finding for many teachers looking for evidence that their students are becoming more proficient writers, the importance of immediate improvement of drafts cannot be underestimated.

As a result, adjustments were made to the practice of teaching foreign language at school and university based on new educational standards. In the educational standards of higher education of the third generation, competencies are divided into three blocks: general cultural, general professional and professional.

Despite the difference in the areas of training to which the standards are addressed, the requirements for learning foreign languages are fixed in general cultural competencies, which are similar in all standards. As a result of learning a foreign language, students should have "the ability to communicate in oral and written forms in Russian and foreign languages to solve problems of interpersonal and intercultural interaction" (OK-4) [2, p. 6]. From this formulation it is obvious that both forms of communication are equivalent. initially evaluated in the educational process.

The essence of the training was to train written sentences on samples, in during which syntactic and lexical requirements had to be observed using substitution, expansion and transformation techniques. Letter Results were assessed in terms of literacy and adherence to these patterns. The main disadvantage of this approach to writing is considered to be the limitation of creative expression. thoughts [5]. Nevertheless, the sent letter as a methodological approach has existed for a long time, and its elements are still used today.

The principle of using patterns in teaching writing can be seen in the approach called rhetorical, shifting the focus from the sentence to the paragraph level. According to ideas of traditional rhetoric (R. Young), a written work is a product of a certain style: description, narration and argumentation, which determines the construction of a paragraph.

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