

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARD WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN WRITING CLASSROOM

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Abstract

The way to respond to students' drafting is still a controversial topic in Second Language Writing training and premise. Giving written corrective feedback in the process of teaching writing is a common practice by writing teachers because it is believed to be able to help students write better. The feedback may be given directly or indirectly. The feedback may be given in the form of comments, questions, suggestions, and or corrections. It seems to be no dispute about the first three kinds of feedback. But for the corrections as the feedback in the process of teaching writing, there are two opposing views; one view believes that correction is counter-productive while the other view believes that correction is helpful. This Study aimed to explore English Department Students' perception, beliefs, and attitude toward Written Corrective Feedback in writing classroom. Data were obtained from questionnaire and from follow up interview. The findings of an investigation on English Department Student of UIN Ar-Raniry showed that students' preferences for feedback and error correction on their writing. Most students wished their teacher to mark and correct errors for them and believe that Written Corrective Feedback was primarily the teacher's responsibility. Written Corrective Feedback definitely help the students in writing academic pieces better and more easily as they go through the writing process.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Written Correction Feedback is an essential aspect of any English language writing course. The goal of feedback is to teach skills that help students improve their writing proficiency to the point where they are cognizant of what is expected of them as writers and are able to produce it with minimal errors and maximum clarity. There are several faults that lie with traditional methods of correcting grammatical errors. The outright correction of surface errors has been found to be inconsistent, unclear and overemphasizes the negative (Fregeau, 1999; Cohen, & Cavalcanti, 1990). Moreover, when this type of feedback is given, students for the most part simply copy the corrections into their subsequent drafts or final copies. The vast majority of students does not record nor study the mistakes noted in the feedback. Having students merely copy teacher corrections into rewrites is a passive action that does not teach students how to recognize or correct errors on their own. Fregeau discovered that the method of teachers indicating the presence or types of errors without correction is also ineffective. Many times the students do not understand why the errors were indicated and simply guess the corrections as they rewrite. Other ineffective aspects of the marking of student errors are that it causes students to focus more on surface errors than on the clarity of their ideas, and it only stresses the negative.

Just as with feedback on form, many faults have been found with standard practices of providing feedback on content (Cohen, & Cavalcanti, 1990; Leki, 1990; Fregeau, 1999; Fathman & Walley, 1990).

Written Corrective feedback has also been found to be effective when it is coupled with student-teacher conferencing (Brender, 1998; Cavalcanti, 1990; Leki, 1990; Fregeau, 1999; Fathman & Walley, 1990). Fathman and Walley, as well as Fregeau report that teacher feedback on content in the form of teacher comments is often vague, contradictory, unsystematic and inconsistent. This leads to various reactions by students including confusion, frustration and neglect of the comments. Leki reports that when presented with written feedback on content, students react in three main ways. The students may not read the annotations at all, may read them but not understand them, or may understand them but not know how to respond to them. Teacher comments on content are of little use if students do not know what they mean or how to use them productively to improve their skills as writers. Finally, Fathman and Walley note, much like correction of grammar mistakes, comments on content tend to be negative and point out problems more than tell students what they are doing right. Despite these negative aspects, there are effective points to some of the common methods of teacher feedback.

Fathman and Walley (1990) discovered that when students receive grammar feedback that indicated the place but not type of errors, the students significantly improved their grammar scores on subsequent rewrites of the papers. This idea is echoed by Frodesen (2001), who notes that indirect feedback is more useful than direct correction.

Fregeau, 1999). As noted earlier, many students find understanding written feedback problematic. Conferencing allows both students and teachers a chance to trace the causes of the problems arising from student writing and feedback, and to develop strategies for improvement.

During these sessions, teachers can ask direct questions to students in order to gain a deeper understanding of student writings. Also, students are able to express their ideas more clearly in writing and to get clarification on any comments that teachers have made. Finally, teachers can use conferencing to assist students with any specific problems related to their writing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Three types of mistakes

Feedback may be defined as information supplied to learners concerning some aspect of their performance on a task, by a peer or a teacher, with a view to improving language skills. It includes not only correcting learners, but also assessing them. Both correction and assessment depend on mistakes being made, reasons for mistakes, and class activities. In linguistics, the definitions of “mistake” and “error” are rather diverse.

According to Ancker (2000), a mistake is a performance error that is either a random guess or a slip, it is a failure to utilize a word correctly, and an error is a noticeable deviation from the language of a native speaker. J. Edge (1989) suggests dividing mistakes into three types: slips, errors and attempts. “Slips” are mistakes that students

can correct themselves; “errors” are mistakes which students cannot correct themselves; “attempts” are student’s intentions of using the language without knowing the right way. In this article, either the most common linguistic term “error” or the students’ preferred term “mistake” will be used interchangeably.

Types of feedback

It is thought that that not all student errors should be corrected because errors are normal and unavoidable during the learning process. The nature of teacher feedback differs widely among teachers and classes and depends on such factors as course objectives, assignment objectives, marking criteria, individual student expectations, strengths, weaknesses, and attitude toward writing (Harmer, 2000). Current theories of how people learn languages suggest that habit formation is only one part of the process. There are many reasons for errors to occur: interference from the native language, an incomplete knowledge of the target language, or its complexity (Edge, 1989). Some researchers suggest that feedback to second language writing falls somewhere between two extremes—evaluative or formative feedback (McGarrell & Verbeem, 2007).

Evaluative feedback typically passes judgement on the draft, reflects on sentence-level errors, and takes the form of directives for improvement on assignments. Formative feedback, which is sometimes referred to as facilitative, typically consists of feedback that takes an inquiring stance towards the text. Most of the research on feedback has dealt

with the role of negative feedback in secondary education.

Student expectations on feedback

Perhaps not surprisingly, more research seems to be conducted on student rather than teacher expectations. To return to Brown (2009), “beginning-level students maintain unrealistic expectations and narrowly defined perspectives about L2 learning” (2009: 48); this in turn may adversely affect their perceptions of teacher feedback on grammar correction—or, at a minimum, how quickly they advance to be higher level students. Schulz (1996) has shown that “With few exceptions...students hold more favorable attitudes toward formal grammar study than do the teachers as a group” (Shultz, 1996: 345).

This positive attitude towards grammar instruction also carries over into student ideals relating to grammar correction: “responses indicate that students are surprisingly positive toward negative feedback” (Shultz, 1996: 346). These results create a conundrum for teachers evaluating corrective feedback, especially in light of other research such as Leki’s (1991), discussed earlier. So, as teachers we much decide how to deal with student expectations and the apparent results of mediocre (if not harmful, as Truscott would argue) changes in applied grammatical correction to students’ work. Other research has shown that student background plays a role in grammar correction: “learners’ perceptions about what

constitutes useful feedback vary considerably according to the educational context and students’ level of literacy...” (Hedgcock and Lefkowitz, 1996: 295). Even though students do request feedback, their application of this feedback is not always apparent or discernible. As often noted, extensive research is needed to create a course of action; yet, more current studies are shedding some directional light. Loewen, et al. (2009), probe into the constructs of L2 learners’ belief about the role of grammar instruction and correction.

Polling 724 students from varying L2 foreign language courses, they discovered that participants generated two distinct categories for grammatical instruction and grammatical correction (Loewen, et al., 2009: 101). Students were inclined to view grammar correction favorably. One aspect of this study is that it disclosed a distinction between the EFL student and the L2 student. For instance, EFL students were more interested in fluency and comprehension, whereas L2 students studying varying target languages appeared to favor more grammatical instruction and correction. This study suggests that this may be related to previous grammatical instruction in other L2 classes and also reveals that correction and expectation are closely linked.

One particular study has associated the lack of clear evidence in grammatical corrective feedback to classroom motivation and “the general hypothesis underlying this study is that for the classroom as a whole, error correction does not make a significant difference, but that it has significant positive

or negative impact on individual students” (Dekeyser, 1993: 504). The motivation level of the student becomes linked with the desire for corrective feedback; if a student wishes to improve in the class, i.e. get better grades, they feel that grammatical correction is one method of insuring enhanced performance, and vice versa for students with low motivation levels (Dekeyser, 1993: 505).

Ferris (2004) also supports similar claims: “from an affective standpoint, students’ strongly held opinions about this issue may influence their success or lack thereof in the L2 writing class. Thus, the existing research on student views predicts that the presence of error feedback may be beneficial and its absence may be harmful” (Ferris, 2004: 55). Much caution is stressed when approaching grammar correction and students’ expectations. The potential for positive or negative influence on student achievement is, on the micro-level, hard to determine and perhaps even harder to manage; on the macro-level, as many of the studies mentioned here have demonstrated, it is unclear how to go about a precise method of incorporating corrective feedback that meets the needs of an entire classroom of diverse language students.

RESEARCH METHOD

This is a qualitative research design which is primarily called as exploratory research. It is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. It provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas or

hypotheses for potential quantitative research. In this study qualitative research is also used to uncover English Department Students’ perception, beliefs, and attitude toward Written Corrective Feedback in writing classroom.

In collecting data unstructured or semi-structured techniques was used. It focuses on students’ interviews, and questionnaire. An interview and a questionnaire were designed to discover students’ perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about Written Corrective Feedback in Writing. The questionnaire contains statements about teacher’s written corrective feedback practice and students’ own beliefs and attitudes toward error correction.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The results indicated that Written Corrective feedback was considered helpful and was more appreciated. Students believe that in order to improve their writing skills, it is necessary to receive teacher feedback on written work. They prefer immediate correction of errors in spite of its impracticality and claim that individual correction of mistakes by teacher is useful. The students’ questionnaires indicated that all the students valued receiving feedback from their teachers. The students provided several reasons for their wish to receive Written Corrective Feedback, mainly related to the importance of Written Corrective Feedback in identifying their errors and improving their writing in the future.

As one student said, 'by receiving feedback I can be aware of my errors and correct them.' Another student said, 'indicating my writing errors by my teacher can help me to avoid them in subsequent writing.' As for the extent of Written Corrective Feedback, 94% of the students preferred to receive comprehensive Written Corrective Feedback. One student explained that if he were not to receive feedback on all his errors, these errors would remain. Thus he wanted comprehensive feedback 'in order not to fossilize wrong information in my mind.'

The main reasons were related to the advantage of the immediate identification of the correct form and also the certainty of the correct answer. As one student put it, 'It is because it would be clearer for me when revising my writing.' Students were concerned that an error code may not lead them to the correct amendments. As one student said, 'If my teacher does not provide the correct answer, then I may not be sure that the one I write can be correct.' The students who preferred indirect coded feedback (32%) noted its benefits in terms of learner autonomy. For example, one student said, 'it will help me in learning from my mistakes and to be more independent in identifying my errors.'

Differences between the responses of students who study two disciplines were slight. Attitudes to feedback do not differ significantly specialization is not very relevant. Criticism isn't meant to undermine self-esteem, though some students were more confident than other students. All the things

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considered might help learners be successful in improving language skills. It is generally believed that by making the students aware of the mistakes they make, and by getting them to act on those mistakes in some way, the students will assimilate the corrections and eventually not make those same mistakes in the future. The students state that the most important aspect while giving feedback is adopting a positive attitude to their writing. While marking mechanically the teacher may not realize that she/he is showing the student only mistakes – negative points. Consequently, if the student receives only negative feedback, he may easily be discouraged from trying to form complex structures and using new vocabulary. However, feedback sessions can be a beneficial experience for the student if the teacher shows the strong points as well.

CONCLUSION

This study was designed to figure out English Department Students' perception, beliefs, and attitude toward Written Corrective Feedback in writing classroom. The results indicated a positive attitude toward Written Corrective Feedback as one strategy of error correction in writing. Most of the students reported that they want their teacher to correct all the errors they make. The results indicated that Written Corrective feedback was considered helpful and was more appreciated. Students believe that in order to improve their writing skills, it is necessary to receive teacher feedback on written work.

They prefer immediate correction of errors in spite of its impracticality and claim

that individual correction of mistakes by teacher is useful. These findings concerning the students' preferences for comprehensive direct feedback mainly on grammar are similar to those of previous studies conducted in EFL

educational contexts (e.g., Halimi, 2008; Hamouda, 2011). Their expectations were only partially met. They received comprehensive Written Corrective Feedback, but most of it focused on mechanics rather than grammar.

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