

ข้อควรพิจารณาในการให้ข้อมูลย้อนกลับเพื่อ แก้ไขการเขียนในชั้นเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะ ภาษาต่างประเทศ

WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN THE EFL WRITING CLASS: WHAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED?

ศิริลักษณ์ เวชสุ่มังคะโล*

Siriluck Wechsumangkalo*

* รองคณบดีฝ่ายวิชาการ คณะศิลปศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยธุรกิจบัณฑิตย์

* Deputy Dean for Academic Affairs, Faculty of Arts, Dhurakij Pundit University

* Email address: siriluck.weo@dpu.ac.th

บทคัดย่อ

ผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศและผู้วิจัยด้านการสอนภาษาอังกฤษต่างเห็นความสำคัญของการให้ข้อมูลย้อนกลับเพื่อแก้ไขการเขียนว่ามีประสิทธิภาพที่จะพัฒนาการเขียนของผู้เรียนภาษา บทความนี้ทบทวนรูปแบบต่างๆของการให้ข้อมูลย้อนกลับเพื่อแก้ไขการเขียน และศึกษาประสิทธิผลของการให้ข้อมูลย้อนกลับแต่ละรูปแบบต่อผู้เรียนในชั้นเรียนการเขียนตามที่พบในงานวิจัยด้านการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ รวมถึงประเด็นสำคัญที่ผู้สอนควรพิจารณา บทความนี้ได้ให้ข้อเสนอแนะบางประการแก่ผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ เพื่อนำรูปแบบการให้ข้อมูลย้อนกลับเพื่อแก้ไขการเขียนไปใช้ในชั้นเรียนการเขียนต่อไป

คำสำคัญ: การเขียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ (EFL writing) การให้ข้อมูลย้อนกลับเพื่อแก้ไขการเขียน (Written Corrective Feedback) การแก้ไขข้อผิดพลาด (Error Correction)

Abstract

EFL teachers and researchers in ELT agree on the importance of providing written corrective feedback as one effective way to improve language learners' writing. This article reviews different types of written corrective feedback and explores the effectiveness of each type of feedback on learners in writing classes, as suggested in a number of ELT studies. Some important aspects need to be taken into teachers' consideration for the implementation of the feedback. This article provides EFL teachers with some suggestions on how to adopt written corrective feedback in their writing classes.

Keywords: EFL Writing, Written Corrective Feedback (Written CF), Error Correction

Introduction

In designing a writing course, many aspects are typically taken into consideration by the teacher. Those include what teaching approaches should be implemented, what tasks should be assigned to students, what marking criteria should be applied, etc. How to provide feedback on the students' writing is also agreed as one of the teachers' concern.

As reviewed by Bitchener and Ferris (2012), researchers in the early years of SLA studies investigated written corrective feedback (written CF) in order to find out the answers to such issues as the following: 1) whether learner errors should be corrected, 2) which errors should be corrected, 3) when the errors should be corrected, 4) how the errors should be corrected, and 5) who should correct the errors.

Whether corrective feedback helps learners improve the quality and accuracy of their writing or not is still controversial. Some studies (Farrokhi & Sattarpour, 2012; Maleki & Eslami, 2013; Sheen, 2007; Sheen, Wright, Moldawa, 2009; Xu, 2009) have suggested that it has positive effects on learners' writing ability, while it has been reported as ineffective in other studies (for example, in Truscott, 2007).

However, providing written CF is an essential stage in any writing class. As pointed out by Bitchener and Ferris (2012), knowledge of the forms of structures is what all language learners need, so how to develop this knowledge is one important goal of all language courses. Written CF is essential as it can be viewed as a response to learners' errors — learners can develop their linguistic knowledge of forms and structures through feedback.

Thus, it is important and interesting for writing teachers to investigate different types of written corrective feedback and to find out what types are most practical for their particular classes. In this article, some important aspects that teachers may need to consider are discussed and some suggestions are offered in applying the use of written CF in the writing class.

Types of written CF

Are some types of written CF more effective than others? Which types of feedback work best for students is probably one of the teachers' concerns. Language teachers provide feedback on students' writing in different ways—adopting different types of written CF. Different ways of providing feedback may have different effects on language learners. As discussed by researchers in second language acquisition and second language writing and as reviewed in Ellis (2009) regarding strategies in providing feedback to students, some major types of written CF are as follows:

- Direct CF and indirect CF
- Focused CF and unfocused CF
- Metalinguistic CF
- Electronic feedback
- Reformulation

It should be noted that when direct CF and indirect CF are integrated with focus and unfocused CF, we can categorize them into four types: direct focused CF, indirect focused CF, direct unfocused CF, and indirect unfocused CF. These types of written CF can be implemented in an integrated way in L2 writing classes.

A number of studies have examined and discussed the effectiveness of these types of written CF in different contexts. Teachers may need to review each type of feedback and then make decisions on which types should be provided to their students and how the feedback should be implemented.

Direct CF and Indirect CF:

As discussed by Bitchener and Ferris (2012), direct CF provides explicit correction of forms and structures; the teacher crosses out unnecessary morphemes/words/phrases, inserts missing morphemes/words/phrases, and provides the correct forms or structures. In contrast, when providing indirect CF, the teacher indicates the students' errors but does not provide a correction; students have to resolve and correct the errors themselves. Indirect written CF can be given through the use of codes or underlines. Direct CF and indirect CF are two main options in the delivery of written CF.

A study by Maleki and Eslami (2013), in the context of Iranian EFL students, reported that the learners that received direct feedback and those that received indirect feedback achieved more than those that received no corrective feedback in using the target linguistic feature (i.e. the simple past tense) accurately in their writing. It was also reported that the learners that received indirect feedback performed significantly better than the other two groups.

As direct written CF provides learners with explicit guidance, it is widely argued that it is appropriate when learners do not know what the correct forms are. That means that it is probably better than indirect CF for learners with lower proficiency. Jalaluddin's (2015) study, in which Hindi learners' attitudes were investigated, showed that the students preferred direct feedback, as it demonstrated the correct forms of the language and was easier for them to acquire the forms; however, indirect feedback seemed to be more effective in improving the students' spelling errors. In a study conducted by Baleghizadeh and Dadashi (2011), investigating high school students in Iran, indirect feedback was also found to be more effective than direct feedback in solving students' problems in spelling. Indirect CF is often preferred as it encourages learners to solve problems themselves and promotes long-term learning.

In the Thai EFL context, Puengpipattrakul (2013) studied the use of integrated feedback — the integration of direct and indirect corrective feedback — in order to improve undergraduate students' writing competence. The results from her study showed a significant improvement in the accuracy of the students' writing. Kaweera and Usaha's (2008) study investigating the effect of different types of written CF—direct, coded, and "uncoded"— on Thai EFL university students' writing also revealed a positive effect of the feedback on the students' writing quality.

Focused CF and Unfocused CF:

When providing written CF to students, the teacher can indicate all of their errors or select some specific error types for correction; that is, choose either focused or unfocused CF.

Both focused and unfocused written CF have been found to have a positive effect on learners' accuracy in the use of some targeted grammatical structures. Xu (2009) investigated the effects of two types of written CF, direct focused and direct unfocused, on the accurate use of grammatical forms among EFL secondary school students in secondary schools in Hong Kong. A positive influence was found in both types of feedback. However, the direct focused was found

to be more effective than the direct unfocused feedback in improving the students' accurate use of targeted linguistic forms; i.e. number agreement, subject-verb agreement, and prepositions.

The result from a study by Sheen (2007), investigating the effectiveness of focused written CF on the accurate use of articles among intermediate-level learners from different language and ethnic backgrounds, also showed a significant positive effect on the learners' acquisition of that particular linguistic feature. Sheen et al. (2009) also confirmed that focused written CF helps improve learners' grammatical accuracy in L2 writing. Farrokhi and Sattarpour's (2012) study, conducted with high-proficient EFL learners in Iran, suggests that, in improving high-proficient L2 writers' grammatical accuracy, focused written CF is more effective when uses of articles are investigated.

Whether focused or unfocused feedback is more effective in improving L2 learners' language acquisition and their quality of writing is still unclear. The results from a study by Fazilatfar et al. (2014), in which advanced EFL learners in Iran were investigated, reported the effectiveness of unfocused written CF—the improvement of syntactic and lexical complexity in L2 learners' writing. However, evidence on the effectiveness of unfocused CF is still limited. It has often been argued that when unfocused CF is adopted for students with lower proficiency, it may discourage them as they need to manage a large number of errors in their writing.

Metalinguistic CF:

When providing metalinguistic CF, the teacher gives explicit comments about the nature of errors. As discussed by Ellis (2009), the most common way of providing this type of feedback is the use of error codes, in which abbreviated labels for different kinds of errors are adopted. Moreover, this type of feedback is provided with metalinguistic explanations — brief grammatical descriptions — of the learner's errors. Ellis (2009) has argued that this is less common probably because it is very time - consuming for the teacher and it requires the teacher's sufficient knowledge for clear and accurate explanation of the errors.

A study by Sheen (2007), in which focused written CF targeting one linguistic feature was investigated, showed that the feedback can improve learners' ability to write accurately, especially when the teacher's metalinguistic feedback is provided. A clear advantage of metalinguistic CF is that it promotes the learner's understanding of errors. Beuningen (2010) suggested that when students are engaged in metalinguistic feedback, written CF tends to be effective for the students' development of accuracy.

Electronic feedback:

Electronic feedback can be viewed as a tool for providing written CF. As suggested in Bitchener and Ferris (2012), if the students' writing assignments have been produced with a word processor, it might be easier for the teacher to provide his or her feedback online. According to Ellis (2009), the teacher can adopt a software program with extensive corpora of written English as a form of feedback. Milton (as cited in Ellis, 2009) adopted a software program called Mark My Words as a form of feedback. This program provides a store of approximately 100 errors frequently found in Chinese students' writing with brief comments and links to resources for correct forms. With the program, the teacher can insert brief comments into the students' text. The text is then returned to the students for them to self-correct. The successful result of the students' revision was reported (Ellis, 2009).

Yoke et al. (2013) investigated the effect of using MS Word and email as an alternative way of providing written CF to EFL learners—Malay students at the tertiary level. The results showed that the learners that were given online corrective feedback performed better than those that were given conventional corrective feedback when correction and comments were given using a red pen. The students' preference for online corrective feedback was also reported.

Reformulation

When this technique of written CF is given, the learner's writing is reformulated. Then, the learner himself or herself needs to identify the changes that have been made. Reformulation as a type of written CF was developed from a procedure of error analysis called reconstruction — a procedure in which the teacher needs to construct a native-like text containing errors (Ellis, 2009).

Kozlova (2010) pointed out that this type of written CF is in contrast to indirect written CF, as it provides the solution to the problem (but not the detection), whereas indirect written CF provides the detection (but not the solution).

A study by Ibarrola (2013), conducted with Spanish EFL learners in a school context, in which two correction strategies — reformulation and self-correction—were compared, showed that the reformulation helped learners do better in error detection with a higher percentage of reported errors. However, the study suggests that the use of reformulation for every individual student's work might not be practical for the teacher for classroom practice due to time constraints and task difficulty.

The applications of written CF in L2 writing classes

Some important factors need to be considered when teachers make decisions on the implementation of written CF in their writing classes. When applying the use of written CF in writing classes, teachers may have to prepare themselves, get their students prepared, and consider many other aspects. The following suggestions may help.

- Identifying the linguistic proficiency level of learners

Whether learners are at a lower or higher proficiency level is necessary to be considered. Some types of written CF may be more appropriate for learners with lower proficiency levels while others may not.

In Kozlova's (2010) article, students' ability to detect the errors in their writing, referred to in the article as "problem detection," was pointed out. Kozlova suggested that the teacher should determine how much help should be provided: students with greater knowledge may need less help.

Direct and focused written CF is suggested for those learners with a lower level of proficiency as their linguistic knowledge and their ability to correct the errors in their work tend to be limited.

- Analyzing the students and the errors in their writing

Student analysis may also be needed. Getting to know each student's linguistic proficiency level will help the teacher determine which types of feedback are appropriate.

As suggested in Guénette (2012)'s article, the types of errors found in each individual student's writing also need to be considered when choosing the type of feedback. Direct correction

might be more appropriate than indirect correction for some types of error, e.g., word choice, whereas indirect correction can be more effective for other types of error, e.g. rule-governed items (Bitchener and Ferris, 2011, as cited in Gu  nette, 2012).

- Identifying types of linguistic forms and structures to focus on

When assigning a writing task to students, the teacher may need to identify the types of errors to focus on. Bitchener and Ferris (2012) suggested that teachers may target the types of error that are frequently made and decide whether to target either only rule-based forms or more complex structures. When more complex items are targeted, metalinguistic feedback may also be appropriate. Certainly, the important factors, such as the linguistic proficiency level of learners, need to be taken into consideration.

- Identifying the amount of written corrective feedback

When the amount of written CF is not appropriate, it may have negative effects on learners. For example, giving too much feedback might be discouraging or de-motivating for some learners. At this point, Bitchener and Ferris (2012) suggested that teachers should first consider whether to adopt focused or unfocused written CF. If the decision is on focused written CF, what is to be considered next is the number of error categories on which to focus. As mentioned earlier concerning the linguistic proficiency level of learners as a factor to be considered, it might be noted that learners with a lower proficiency level may not be able to manage a large amount of feedback on their errors.

- Considering options for giving feedback

Computer-mediated corrective feedback is one option regarding electronic feedback. For example, in the study conducted by Al-Olimat and AbuSeileek (2015) with EFL secondary school students in Jordan, the feedback was given using Microsoft Word 2010 techniques. The effectiveness of this type of feedback was confirmed.

Gu  nette (2012) suggested that in providing feedback, the teacher may target some common errors made by the students in class and provide mini-lessons for them. This can be an alternative way of providing feedback. The teacher may provide a lesson for groups of students that produce the same types of errors in their writing (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012).

Student-teacher conference is a good option. The study conducted by Baleghizadeh and Gordani (2012) with graduate students in Iran showed the effectiveness of student-teacher conference feedback, in which the whole class discussed the errors found in their writing and suggested alternatives for those errors. However, the students and the teacher require sufficient metalinguistic knowledge for the implementation of student-teacher conference feedback.

- Indicating sources of the feedback

The teacher is not the only source of the feedback, and careful consideration may be needed when sources are indicated for the feedback. As suggested in Bitchener and Ferris (2012), other options include self-evaluation (self-editing), experts (or tutors), classmates (peer feedback), and electronic tools (word-processing packages or web-based editing services).

Students need to develop their self-editing skills so that they can edit their own work. The teacher can provide them with some tools—such as strategy training and linguistic knowledge — and self-editing opportunities through a multi-draft writing process (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). The teacher may consider having their students obtain additional help from experts outside the classroom; however, the help should not replace the teacher’s feedback (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012).

Peer feedback is an additional alternative source. Although teacher feedback can lead to greater improvement of students' writing, peer feedback promotes learners' autonomy (Miao et al., 2006). The effectiveness of peer feedback on the improvement of EFL learners' writing performance was reported in a study by Soleimani and Jamzivar (2014), which was conducted with Iranian learners at the pre-intermediate level. Through the implementation of peer feedback, students are assigned to do two parts of the writing task—as a provider and receiver of the feedback (Tsai and Lin, 2012, as cited in Soleimani & Jamzivar, 2014). However, whether students should be assigned to correct their peers' errors or not is still debatable. Students may worry that they will not produce and obtain accurate feedback due to their limited linguistic knowledge. Bitchener and Ferris (2012) suggested that at least students may be assigned to locate the errors they can find in their peers' writing.

Electronic tools such as word processors and Internet search engines can also be used as a source of feedback, for example, as spelling and grammar checkers (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012).

- Preparing students

Students should be prepared. In order for students to gain the most benefits from written CF, the teacher may have them revise or rewrite their own writing (Günnette, 2012). It is important for the teacher to provide grammar lessons and training on strategies so that the students will be able to edit their own writing (Ferris & Helt, 2000, as cited in Lee, 2003). Moreover, students' motivation may also need to be encouraged as students are required to give some degree of attention to the teacher's feedback.

- Providing written comments

An article by Salteh and Sadeghi (2012), in which good strategies in giving teacher's corrections and comments were proposed, suggested that the teacher provide supportive comments to students as the comments tend to positively affect their attitudes toward writing. Salteh and Sadeghi (2012) further suggested that teachers avoid giving students too many comments on too many features as that may overwhelm them.

- Follow-up to written CF

The teacher may give students an assignment asking them to analyze their errors and make revisions (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). This will encourage students to be responsible for editing their own work.

In an article by Muncie (2000), an interesting technique was suggested: ask the students to write a list of items concerning "How I can improve future composition." After each process of writing is completed, they can add more points to their list. This is one way to ensure that they will learn from the feedback or comments. Fewer and fewer points are expected over time.

Moreover, teachers may assign students to get involved in outside class learning; for example, teachers can provide them with more grammar practice. This may help them develop their linguistic knowledge for improvement of their writing.

Conclusion and discussion

Written corrective feedback has been widely discussed and its benefits have been confirmed in several recent studies. An increasing number of studies in the context of EFL learners have reported the effectiveness of written CF in relation to L2 acquisition and L2 writing development

and have suggested that direct written CF is more effective, especially for students with a lower level of English proficiency. Feedback can benefit learners even more when certain linguistic features are targeted or focused on. Teachers are suggested to consider different options for the delivery of the feedback, and the options can be implemented in an integrated way.

The suggestions given by studies in different EFL contexts can certainly be applied to Thai EFL writing classes. However, when making decisions on the application of written corrective feedback for particular classes, a number of aspects may need to be taken into careful consideration.

In order for written CF to be implemented effectively in L2 writing classes, teachers need to be prepared. As suggested in Bitchener and Ferris (2012), teachers need to develop their skills so that they can effectively provide feedback and additional instruction to their students; the time and effort that the teachers spend will then be meaningful.

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