

DIFFERENT FORMS OF CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK AND THEIR EFFECTS ON L2 STUDENTS' WRITING ACCURACY: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This case study made an investigation on different forms of corrective feedback and their effects on L2 students' writing accuracy with the aim of, firstly, contributing a voice in the existing related literature and, secondly, finding out an experienced writing teacher's point of view towards this technique by an in-depth interview with her who has taught English as a second language. The interview was carefully recorded, transcribed and analyzed. The results have shown that she supported the application of corrective feedback in teaching writing skill because it was really helpful in her classes in different manners for different levels of students' language proficiency. She applied different forms of corrective feedback including direct, indirect, metalinguistic explanation and the combination of all these in her different writing classes. Based on the present study's findings, it is suggested that students can benefit from their teachers' using of corrective feedback in the way that corrective feedback helps them to improve not only their language accuracy, but also their presented ideas and that teachers need to be flexible in applying this technique depending on at which level of language proficiency their students are and which education environment they are in to promote its highest effectiveness.

Keywords: Corrective feedback, effects, writing accuracy, L2 students' writing.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is not easy; writing in a second language (L2) is even more problematic as it demands a certain amount of the language background knowledge, how the language works in a composition, what are the necessary connectors to link the ideas, what are the appropriate words to direct the author's indications (Zacharias, 2007). Therefore, there have been lots of research done for years in relation to L2 writing aimed at minimizing the obstacles as well as promoting students' motivation in writing courses. One of such attempts is providing corrective feedback (CF) towards students' writings. However when and how or what different forms of CF are big concerns of not only teachers, who are directly involved in the classroom, but also language researchers. Besides, the effectiveness of CF is still a controversial issue for ages. Some of researchers repudiate the role of CF including Truscott, who was considered the typical author against the efficacy of CF in students' writing improvement in an article called "The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes" in 1996; while most of other research in the related literature support the application of CF in improving L2 writers' accuracy (Van Beuningen, De Jong, Kuiken, 2012; Farid & Samad, 2012; Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami & Takashima, 2008 and Ferris & Roberts, 2001). That is the reason why this case study has been conducted to contribute a voice to the existing literature and to examine the effectiveness of CF in learners' writing development through an interview with an experienced writing teacher who usually applies CF in her teaching. This paper is going to look at some main points including (1) which main points of view are sitting in the related literature, (2) the participant's background and her writing teaching experiences, (3) methodology

and the reasons why certain types of questions were used in the interview, (4) findings and a critical analysis and comparison between the participant's experience and ideas and previous research and (5) limitations, ethical consideration and what is withdrawn from the interview.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Yeh and Lo (2009) defined CF as the responses to the texts containing errors. The responses can be an indication where the errors are, what types of errors those belong to; a provision of correct form of the target language; metalinguistic information about the errors in both written or orally or any combination of these. CF, through the literature, can be categorized into three main types involving direct and indirect and combination of each of these two types with any metalinguistic information about students' writing errors within two different manners including e-feedback (electronic feedback) (Tuzi, 2004; Yeh & Lo, 2009) and paper-based feedback (Van Beuningen, De Jong & Kuiken, 2012).

Initially, the debate about the effectiveness of CF in students' writing improvement was sparked by Truscott (1996) when the author denied the role of CF towards learners' writing accuracy development by providing the evidence from his own studies, Truscott (1996, 1999 & 2007), as well as from those of other researchers including Knoblauch & Brannon (1981); Hillocks (1986) (as cited in Truscott, 1996); Sheppard (1992); Polio, Fleck & Leder (1998); Hendrickson (1978); Krashen (1992); Leki (1990) and Van Patten (1986a, 1986b) (as cited in Truscott, 1996). All these research found no positive influence of CF on students' writing performance. Furthermore, one research (Fazio, 2001) even showed the harmfulness of CF on learners' writing accurateness.

However, most of other research up to now has illustrated the support for using CF in writing teaching because of its positive effects (Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2012; Farid & Samad, 2012; Ahmadi, Maftoon & Mehrdad, 2012; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami & Takashima, 2008; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Tuzi, 2004; Yeh & Lo, 2009 and Ferris, 1999). Although these research were different in terms of participants' language proficiency level, for example upper intermediate level in Bitchener, Young & Cameron (2005) and low proficiency in Bitchener and Knoch (2009); of the methodology and the targeted features of language, say the uses of verbs in Farid and Samad (2012) and the uses of preposition, simple past and definite article in Bitchener, Young & Cameron (2005); of the focus on different types of CF such as direct and indirect CF in Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken (2012) and the comparison among indirect CF, written metalinguistic explanation and a combination of written metalinguistic and oral form-focused in Ahmadi, Maftoon & Mehrdad (2012), all found optimistic influence of CF on students' writing performance at a certain level.

Yet, as Ferris (1999) stated, any conclusion about the effectiveness of CF should be withdrawn from a specific study in a specific context to avoid any premature assumption without supported evidence. That is the reason why this study has been carried out in the form of interviewing an experienced writing teacher who often gives CF to students' writing product to find out what her position in the effects of CF on learners' writing performance. The study will focus on answering the following questions:

- Does the participant think CF can help to improve the students' writing accuracy performance?
- What is the most effective CF type to her and her students? In which teaching situations?
- Is there any drawback of CF towards students' writing accuracy?

- Does she has different or the same point of view with what is sitting in the literature and what leads to the differences or similarities?

METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANT

The participant and ethical consideration

The interview was conducted with R, 29 years old, an English teacher from Indonesia, who had been teaching writing skill for four years before she came to Australia to study her master degree. R was selected because of some reasons as follows:

Firstly, she is now a teacher who has used CF in her teaching and she, also, used to be a student of English education program, who received CF from her teachers, especially in her previous writing classes. From these points of view to CF, it is believed that she is going to state valuable evaluation or at least her opinion of the effects of CF in writing development as a learner and a teacher as well.

Secondly, enjoyable is a right word to describe what she thinks of her job as a teacher. Although at the beginning she had to struggle with her psychological preparation when she had adult students in her class, she overcame that feeling so well thanks to her good preparation of teaching materials, of her professional style and of her knowledge. She said that she loved talking and teaching seemed to be the best job that fitted her interests. Besides, she usually worked with high level students with good motivation as well as well-defined goals of learning English. Furthermore, she has been working for private school that includes around 20 students in each class, a perfect number, which stimulated and created favourable conditions for her in her job. That is the reason why in her CF towards students' writing, it is easy for her to apply different types from direct to indirect and they all work.

Thirdly, she is a self-motivated, very active and creative person. In spite of growing up in a countryside area without any exposure to foreigners, starting learning English from elementary school but took it seriously only from bachelor study, she had a big aim to study abroad, which stimulated her to study English and practiced it on her own. Besides, she actively gathered her friends, who also loved English, into groups and practiced English together. Also, her activeness was shown through her promotion of herself as a freelancer. She established her own website as well as a Facebook page for the purpose of her teaching. Although she has not given CF on these pages, but she did upload every material that she found useful for her students. Similarly, she did join an organization to collect second-hand books here in Australia to send back to her home country for students in remote areas or schools, which could not afford for new English book. Although this information is not directly related to this study, it is thought that with her active and creative characteristics, she is expected to have brilliant ideas of applying CF in her teaching.

Last but not least, she has been an experienced English writing teacher, who usually applies CF in her teaching. Through four years of teaching English for students who were in the class for the profession purpose, she almost taught a writing class every day or at least she integrated writing skill in some parts of the lesson. Furthermore, she applied CF in her writing teaching. Therefore, it is supposed that with her experience of teaching writing skill and her use of CF, she could be a right candidate for this study.

In terms of ethical consideration, the participant is necessarily voluntary and is fully informed about the purpose and procedure of the research and she can withdraw at any point during the study. All the related documents such as Participant Information Statement, Consent Form and Withdrawal of Consent are

clarified before the study starts. The participant's experience and their ideas are used only for the purposes of this research only and are anonymous. Besides, she is free to review the study's results. Also, it is ensured that there are no risks, harms or discomfort to the participants.

METHODOLOGY

In terms of methodology, unlike previous researchers (Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2012; Farid & Samad, 2012; Ahmadi, Maftoon & Mehrdad, 2012; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami & Takashima, 2008; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Tuzi, 2004; Yeh & Lo, 2009 and Ferris, 1999), who mostly applied quantitative methodology to analyse the effectiveness of CF on students' writing, the present study is going to employ the qualitative methodology via an in-depth interview around 45 minutes with a writing teacher to explore her experience as well as her own opinion on the effects of CF towards writing performance. The interview is going to be recorded, transcribed and analysed in details to explore her position.

To serve this purpose, some certain types of questions were designed. First, a group of questions in relation to her previous education and her English teaching environment was proposed to address if she had advantage of being exposed to CF in essay writing. Second and also the skeleton part of the interview, a set of questions directly related to how she applied CF in her writing teaching and the effectiveness of CF in her students' writing development. The questions of this part focus on how she defined CF, what types of CF she usually applied, what was the most effective type for her students, whether she applied different kind of CF to different groups of students in various situations and whether any drawbacks exist when using CF in writing teaching. Her answers to these questions are going to be compared with what exists in the related literature to see if she has different or the same points of view. Also, the paper is going to analyse her background and her teaching situations to address if these lead to the differences or similarities in her conclusion.

In terms of the occurrence of the interview, it is believed that some certain elements did make it effective. First, the close relationship between my interviewee and me made it quite easy and open for both of us to ask and to share our opinions with the other person. Although she and I came from different country and cultural background, we get along well with each other. Besides, we are attending the same course, so more or less we have something in common such as background knowledge of the course; both of us are teachers of English language; therefore it is easier for us to sit together and discuss about our teaching, among them giving CF is also our both concern. Last but not least, we both receive CF from our teachers for our essay writing in our present course and she has had her own experience of using CF in her writing. All these factors made it convenient for the interview. The only obstacle of the interview was that she did not apply CF, but she did not really concern the name of CF types such as direct, indirect or written metalinguistic explanation. However, it did not influence a lot on the interview because with my leading or suggested questions, she then could classify them and the interview went smoothly then. Also, the names of CF types are not the focus of this interview, but their application and their effectiveness in stead.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

As an experienced teacher, most of her sharing is in line with the literature. Firstly, in terms of its definition, she, throughout the interview, defined CF as a kind of suggestion such as "fixing the mistakes", giving students advice on their writing, pointing out where the errors are and what types of errors they belong to providing a correct form or explaining to her students. All of these factors in her definition,

although she did not state them systematically in one statement when she was first asked about the definition of CF, it was synthesized by the researcher of this study in stead, are really in accordance with what Yeh and Lo (2009) stated in their study. Therefore, towards the notion of CF, it can be said that the interviewee is sitting in the same point of view with the previous researcher, Yeh and Lo (2009) specifically. A question rising is that whether this similarity leads to other resemble conclusions about the effectiveness of CF on students' writing accuracy? The next part is going to find out the answer for this issue.

Two different views of the value of CF on learners' writing performance are sitting in the literature including the protesters (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1981); Hillocks, 1986 (as cited in Truscott, 1996); Sheppard, 1992; Polio, Fleck & Leder, 1998; Hendrickson, 1978; Krashen, 1992; Leki, 1990; Van Patten, 1986a, 1986b (as cited in Truscott, 1996) and Fazio, 2001), who refuted the positive influence of CF and the supporters (Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2012; Farid & Samad, 2012; Ahmadi, Maftoon & Mehrdad, 2012; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami & Takashima, 2008; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Tuzi, 2004; Yeh & Lo, 2009 and Ferris, 1999), who strongly suggested teachers to apply CF in their writing teaching to help students in their performance. These two points of view are still controversial because they both have their own research and supported evidence. The interviewee in the present study was standing in between, but more biased on the supporter group. For about 4 years of applying CF in her teaching, she cannot deny its positive influences on her students' writing outcome. By applying different types of CF in various kinds of students and in dissimilar situations, she found that CF had its effectiveness in different manners. For example, to low proficiency level students, she normally used direct CF by using a red pen to circle the errors and wrote the correct form next to the errors, which was like what Yeh and Lo (2009) mentioned in their research. The participant found this quite helpful to the students at this certain level because they could recognize their errors as well as see what was correct then. This manner was also supported by Van Beuningen, De Jong & Kuiken (2012) and Ryoo (2013). To higher proficiency students, she then used peer correction and applying code in the process. Specifically, students would exchange their writing and they used codes, which was presented by the teachers before they did the CF, to identify their peer's errors by pointing out where the errors were and what types they belonged to. Students then corrected the mistakes themselves. Although Bitchener & Knoch (2010) denied this manner of CF because they worried that students were not sure if what they corrected by themselves were right or not, she believed that this could foster students' writing development in a long run, which was also supported by Ahmadi, Maftoon & Mehrdad (2012).

Besides giving direct and indirect CF, the interviewee, in her teaching, also combined with metalinguistic explanation, but she did in a different way than Bitchener, Young & Cameron (2005), Bitchener & Knoch (2009) and Bitchener & Knoch (2010) did. After giving either direct or indirect CF, she picked out typical errors that were made by most of the students in a class and explained them to the whole class. She stated that by explaining them to the whole class, her students could learn from others' mistakes as well and it helped her to save time as well. Reflecting back to my own situation, this should be a good suggestion because in a 45-minute writing class with more than 40 students, it is impossible for me to give metalinguistic explanation to each of my student though I am aware that it could be more specific and helpful to them.

In terms of the manner of giving CF, although she acknowledged the development of modern technologies as well as admitting their power in any aspects of modern life and in teaching career in particular, she preferred applying face-to-face and paper-based CF. The reason was that the Internet connection was not

fast enough in her area and more importantly, she found traditional method worked well for both her and her students. Even though Tuzi (2004) and Yeh & Lo (2009) concluded that e-feedback could work better than paper-based CF, the interviewee said that it depended on who and where the teaching and learning process happened. This view really convinced me because this was also what I concluded from looking back my own teaching environment. I used to apply e-feedback on my students' writing on a system called "Blackboard", which works in a similar way with LMS of La Trobe University and I found it really useful and convenient; however, some of my colleagues did not want to use it at all because of their information technology knowledge and maybe they got more comfortable with traditional manner. Therefore, the manner of giving CF actually depends on the involved people and the facility availability in their area.

Despite of stating the positive influences of CF, she did not deny its existing drawbacks. Not totally agree with Truscott (1996, 1999 & 2007) and other protesters (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1981; Hillocks, 1986 (as cited in Truscott, 1996); Sheppard, 1992; Polio, Fleck & Leder, 1998; Hendrickson, 1978; Krashen, 1992; Leki, 1990; Van Patten, 1986a, 1986b (as cited in Truscott, 1996) and Fazio, 2001), but she objectively accepted that CF could have drawbacks at certain extent... Specifically, she said if teachers always corrected students' errors even they were simple, students then could ignore the errors and the CF and could become "spoiled" because they, the students, might think that "ok my teacher always fix it for me". Unlike what Fazio (2001) concluded that CF was harmful to students' writing accuracy, the interviewee just warned that teachers needed to be careful when giving CF and should aware when and how to give CF to promote its positive effects.

CONCLUSIONS & LIMITATIONS

Although the interview was short, focused questions and thoughtful answers of an in-depth interview have addressed the questions of this study. Firstly, in spite of stating some drawbacks of CF at certain extent, the interviewee has confirmed the effectiveness of CF in her writing teaching to different levels of students' proficiency in various teaching environments. Therefore, she implicitly supported the application of CF and she herself also continues to use it in her future teaching. Unsurprisingly, the author of this study, also a teacher of writing for more than 4 years, has the same position with this interviewee. Some similarities between us may lead to this resemble point of view. We come from Asian area, which has similar education environment, educational system and students' characteristics. Also, we are at the sane age and years of teaching experience. These resulted in what we look at CF in our teaching.

Secondly, she did not mention which type of CF was the most effective one because as she clarified that it really depended on who the teacher and students were as well as which teaching environment and the educational institution's policy. For example, to low proficiency students, direct CF seemed to be more effective than others; or for higher-level students and for long-term development purpose, indirect CF worked better. Therefore, a researcher or a teacher cannot say this type of CF is better than the other, but they need to consider other related factors in terms of teaching and learning environment.

All in all, in spite of the existing limitation of the study such as it cannot be generalized because of its number of the participant and limited time of studying, its results benefit the author in some aspects, in general and contribute a voice to the existing literature, in particular. It is concluded that using CF in writing teaching does help students to improve their writing performance; however the teachers need to consider which proficiency level their students are at and other factors such as available facilities, the comfort of teachers and students to identify the most suitable type of CF in practice.

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