

Measures for Instructors to Provide Corrective Feedback in L2 Writing Classes in High School

Hongchun Zhu

School of Public Foreign Language, China West Normal University, Nanchong, China

Email: 1029936719@qq.com

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Abstract

Writing holds a crucial role among the five basic language skills for its complex construction and meaning in written language. The present study aims to tackle the issue of error in written texts by Chinese learners from a macro perspective. Although previous research has demonstrated the significance of positive feedback and effective correction in the realm of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), little consensus has been reached regarding its practical implementation in pedagogy. Based on the theory of error-correcting feedback in language teaching and the practice of English writing teaching in senior high school, this paper discusses three questions: “what kind of error-correcting feedback should be given”, “how to provide corrective feedback” and “what should pay attention to when giving feedback”, and puts forward corresponding teaching suggestions.

Keywords

Measures, Corrective Feedback, High School, Writing Classes

1. Introduction

1.1. The Importance of Corrective Feedback

Most studies on error correction in L2 writing classes have provided evidence that students who receive error feedback from teachers improve in accuracy over time. Chandler (2003) carries out a ten-week experiment to investigate whether corrective feedback can improve the students' writing and proves it to be useful with both the students' writing accuracy and fluency. Ferris (2006), based on the data from an ESL composition class in an American university, also finds that after receiving teachers' feedback students can significantly reduce their errors during one semester and that they can improve their writing in the long run as

well. In addition to the research done by the scholars abroad, researchers in China have also provided convincing evidence for the positive effect of corrective feedback. [Chen and Li \(2009\)](#) in her 16-week experiment and [Zhang and Deng \(2009\)](#) in her 8-week experiment both reveal a significant progress in the English writing accuracy of the Chinese university students after they get the teacher's written corrective feedback. [Song \(2011\)](#) investigates 118 English major students' attitudes towards the feedback by a questionnaire survey and also proves its positive role in teaching English writing.

1.2. Purpose and Significance of the Paper

The role of corrective feedback is to enable both teachers and learners to measure their own performance and reflect on their own development. The role of written corrective feedback (WCF) is critical, both as a corrective action and for the durability of future references. The role of Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) is vital as both a corrective measure and durability for future reference. At the same time, what makes it effective is the way it is communicated. In order to cultivate students' five language skills and promote their key competence, instructors should find appropriate ways to provide corrective feedback in L2 secondary writing classes. The purposes of this paper are 1) discussing contents of written corrective feedback; 2) distinguishing ways of written corrective feedback; 3) giving warnings for written corrective feedback. This paper hopes to assist new researchers planning to explore this varied domain to understand the classification of corrective feedback, the direction of corrective feedback content and some matters need attention.

2. Teachers' and Students' Attitudes toward Corrective Correction

Comparing teachers' and students' attitudes towards corrective feedback is a fruitful activity in classroom research on language education and second language acquisition. Alizadeh Salteh designed a controlled experiment to facilitate this line of inquiry, showing significant differences in teacher and student preferences and attitudes towards writing essay grading questions in **Table 1**. As is shown in the table, there is a significant difference between the preferences of teachers and students. In other words, in the secondary school second language writing classroom, the teacher's choice of corrective feedback needs to be careful in order to be successful.

3. Measures for Instructors to Provide Corrective Feedback

Based on the theory of corrective feedback analysis in language teaching and the teaching practice of English writing secondary school, the author gives corrective feedback strategies suggestions from three aspects, they are 1) classification of written corrective feedback, 2) ways of written corrective feedback given, and 3) warnings for written corrective feedback.

3.1. Classification of Written Corrective Feedback

Ferris (2002) used five error categories to study the difference in self-correction ability of students with different error types. The results show that these five error categories are reasonable and suitable for students to self-edit. These five error categories include verb errors; noun ending errors; article errors wrong word; sentence structure, found in **Table 2**.

Thus, teachers could give feedbacks from semantic, grammatical, mechanic, and lexical features. Semantic features include unclear or incomplete-meaning; grammatical features like subject-verb agreement, article missing (*a/an/the*) and wrong verb form etc; mechanical features include wrong pronoun, spelling,

Table 1. Frequencies of teachers/students' responses to amount of corrective feedback.

Choices	Teachers		Students		Total
	<i>F</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%	
Teacher should mark all the errors.	12	40	29	29	41
Teacher should mark all the major errors but not the minor ones.	4	133	23	23	27
Teacher should mark most of the major errors, but not necessarily all of them.	7	233	26	26	33
Teacher should mark only a few of the major errors.	2	6.7	6	6	8
Teacher should mark only the errors that interfere with communicating ideas.	22	733	18	18	40
Teacher should mark no errors and respond only to the ideas and content.	16	53.3	5	5	21
Teacher should not mark any errors.	0	0	23	23	23
Total	63	209.9	130	130	193

Table 2. Description of error categories used for feedback and analysis.

Verb errors	All errors in verb tense or form, including relevant subject-verb agreement errors.
Noun ending errors	Plural or possessive ending incorrect, omitted, or unnecessary; includes relevant subject-verb agreement errors.
Article errors	Article or other determiner incorrect, omitted, or unnecessary.
Wrong word	All specific lexical errors in word choice or word form, including preposition and pronoun errors. Spelling errors only included if the (apparent) misspelling resulted in an actual English word.
Sentence structure	Errors in sentence/clause boundaries (run-ons, fragments, comma splices), word order, omitted words or phrases, unnecessary words or phrases, other unidiomatic sentence construction.

punctuation and capitalization etc.; lexical features are wrong word choices.

3.2. Ways of Written Corrective Feedback Given

Different written corrective feedback strategies may have different effects in students' writing skills. There four types of strategies, each of them has its own features. However, there are some comparative differences among these strategies, which give instructors some suggestions when they are giving corrective feedback strategies.

3.2.1. Direct and Indirect Feedback

With the recognition about the effectiveness of corrective feedback, some scholars have differentiated direct feedback from indirect feedback in **Table 3** (Walz, 1982; Ferris, 2002). Direct feedback strategy, also referred to as direct correction (DC), means that the teacher clearly indicates what is incorrect and provides the correct form at the same time. In contrast, indirect feedback strategy means that the teacher only points out the errors and the students are expected to reflect on their errors and make corrections by themselves (Ferris, 2002).

In the middle school stage, students' language level is relatively low, and sometimes they do not accumulate enough language knowledge to correct some language mistakes. At this time, teachers should appropriately use direct feedback to demonstrate how to make corrections to students. In addition, for some interlingual errors or errors that are more complex in themselves, direct feedback may be better.

3.2.2. Written and Oral Feedback

Written feedback is time-saving and convenient, but it is not easy to attract enough attention from students; oral feedback takes time, but this face-to-face communication can get more done with less effort. In oral feedback, teachers discuss the mistakes in their work with students in a deliberative tone, so as to better understand the students' thinking process and provide targeted feedback and suggestions for follow-up learning. For example, for students who often misuse connectives, oral feedback can help teachers better understand students' difficulties in using connectives and guide them accordingly.

3.3. Warnings for Written Corrective Feedback

This section sketches some general insights from the field that teachers should

Table 3. Examples of direct/indirect feedback.

Direct Feedback	The teacher provides the correct form for the student writer; if the student revises the text, s/he needs only to transcribe the correction into the final version.
Indirect Feedback	The teacher indicates in some way that an error exists but does not provide the correction, thus letting the writer know that there is a problem but leaving it to the student to solve it.

pay attention to when evaluating student writing and offering feedback, including three warnings.

3.3.1. Appreciate the Writing

Teacher feedback can fall under ranking, evaluating, or liking (or a mix of these). Liking a student's writing, regardless of its grade, can help mitigate some of the negative associations and effects students have on writing feedback. When students receive reviews, they are often criticized, especially when the writing is something personal and fragile (which is often the case, regardless of the actual subject matter). Engaging with students in a friendly and approachable way in certain parts of the feedback, appreciating the writing and their work in the feedback, can help students accept and use the feedback.

3.3.2. Overdo the Reason

Students often have difficulty understanding the teacher's comments to help them revise the writing at hand and future writing, often because they are unsure why the teacher made a particular comment. Over explaining, including describing what you saw as a reader and assessing how it plays out in other writing contexts, can help address this issue and help students transfer what they learned from this round of feedback to current and future revisions. It can also help students relate assignments to learning outcomes and subject areas.

3.3.3. Focus Certain Aspects

Students often become overwhelmed if there are too many comments on a paper, especially if they are all referring to different aspects of the writing. They may not be able to implement all the requested changes, may struggle to interpret all the comments, and may not be able to tell which comments are most important. This often leads to students focusing on comments that are "easy" to address, usually lower order concerns such as grammar or sentence structure, and missing out on learning opportunities with higher order concerns such as content and organization. So, teachers should try to keep comments engaged with just three or four major elements to be revised.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of error feedback is to improve students' writing quality, but it is only one of the means to promote writing, and can't be regarded as the main means for teachers to guide students' writing. The feedback given by teachers to students should be more about how to improve the writing level of opinions and suggestions. There are many aspects to effective error feedback. In addition to the objective factors of feedback itself, there are also many subjective factors, such as students' trust in teachers and students' initiative, which require teachers to grasp and regulate reasonably in teaching practice.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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