

Responding to Corrective Feedback in L2 Writing: Voices from Students

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Abstract

This exploratory study investigated to what extent error codes can help high-intermediate/advanced ESL learners to correct grammatical errors in their compositions and if the success in revising and long-term accuracy development is related to learners' attitudes towards the importance of linguistic accuracy in L2 writing. Three types of data (four essays, a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview) were collected from nineteen participants over a semester. The results indicate that: 1) all participants demonstrated higher accuracy in the final draft (D3) after they received corrective feedback (CF) in terms of error codes on the previous draft (D2). Attitude did not appear to have an impact on the effectiveness of CF as editing tool; 2) participants with higher attitudes seemed to make more progress in the last writing task; 3) no significant were observed between attitudinal scores and the revision of different error categories; 4) among the high attitude participants, existing linguistic accuracy appeared to have influenced the extent to which they had benefited from error codes. Further research is needed to shed more light on the issue.

Key words: second language writing, corrective feedback, learners' attitude

Background

Learners' individual differences have been regarded by L2 researchers as important variables that moderate the effectiveness of corrective feedback (e.g., Hyland, 1998; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010). SLA feedback scholars have started to investigate the impacts of learners cognitive, metacognitive, and attitudinal factors (e.g., Dekeyser, 1993; Li, 2013). L2 writing feedback researchers seem to have lagged behind. To contribute this domain of research, in the 2013 fall semester, I conducted an exploratory study to investigate the relationship between ESL learners' attitudes towards corrective feedback and the extent to which they benefit from it to improve accuracy in English academic writing.

Research Questions

Three research questions were addressed:

- 1) Is there a relationship between ESL learners attitudes towards CF and their improvement in writing accuracy both in the short term (editing) and long term (pretest-posttest)?
- 2) Is there a relationship between ESL learners' attitudes towards CF and their accuracy development with respect to specific error categories?
- 3) What are some potential factors that influence ESL learners' attitudes towards CF?

Methods

Participants were nineteen students from Level 5 and 6 Writing Course who signed the PIE consent form. To answer the three RQs, three types of data were collected and analyzed: four essays (3 drafts for each) from the participants, their responses to an attitude questionnaire, and audio recordings of interviews on the potential factors influencing their attitudes towards CF.

Results

RQ1: All participants demonstrated higher accuracy in the final draft (D3) after they received CF in terms of error codes on the previous draft (D2). Attitude did not appear to have an impact on the effectiveness of CF as an editing tool. For the long-term effectiveness of CF, different patterns were observed between the high and the low attitude groups. Specifically, all participants in the high attitude group showed lower error rate (error per 500 words) in the posttest than in the pretest. In contrast, only one participant in the low attitude group showed lower error rate in the posttest compared with the pretest.

RQ2: Among all three error categories (lexical, morphological, and syntactic), lexical errors are most common, followed by morphological, and then syntactic errors. In general, lexical errors seemed to be more amenable to CF, followed by morphological and syntactic errors. However, no clear differences were observed between the high and low attitude groups.

RQ3: The results seem to suggest that among the high attitude participants, existing linguistic accuracy may influence the extent to which they benefit from error codes. Specifically, if students have acquired the rules of certain grammatical structure, error codes are useful. In contrast, if students are not developmentally ready, error codes may be meaningless and useless.

Relevance to PIE and Second Language Learning

The results from this exploratory study were used to further refine the attitude questionnaire and the error codes for a follow-up pilot study for my dissertation. My hope is that the short questionnaire can be used in Level 5 and 6 Writing class in the future to help teachers understand students' needs of CF and the error code can be used as an efficient tool for writing teachers to give feedback on students' language use in English academic writing.

References

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