Feature Article

Corrective Feedback: Sharing Ideas and Perspectives Teacher to Teacher

Jenell L. Rae

Sugiyama Jogakuen University

Writing instructors often lack consistency or a solid system for corrective feedback in second-language (L2) writing. Error correction is greatly affected by subjectivity, and many writing teachers struggle with the best approach to giving feedback on assignments. This becomes even trickier as writing occasions and student populations change from continent to continent. Whether in one's home country or abroad, texts and students vary according to context, and writing teachers need to be ready for a broad range of linguistic diversity. In this paper I will describe my presentation on corrective feedback at the 2015 CUE SIG Conference on Diversity: Communication and Education. I will first examine different schools of thought and approaches on error correction, including common grading styles and methods employed by writing instructors. I will then discuss some pedagogical concerns that writing instructors should address. In the latter part of this paper, I will describe and reflect on the workshop that I facilitated during the presentation. First, I will outline the procedure I used to run the workshop, then describe the discussion that ensued as the result of workshop participants sharing ideas and feedback on a common writing assignment. Lastly, I will conclude that sharing ideas and perspectives through professional development workshops assists in strengthening teaching methods and practices.

One point of discussion that comes up time and time again among educators is the challenge for teachers to give accurate or valued feedback on assignments in writing classes. Sharing ideas and perspectives on how we provide corrective feedback is a practice that is important for the growth of teachers because we are often stuck in a bubble due to individualized approaches to error correction. By attending conferences, workshops, and other platforms that offer professional development, we break out of this bubble when we share research, teaching ideas, and materials. Typically, teachers have their own approach to error correction.

However, as language teachers, we all know that linguistic and cultural differences exists and students studying a second language need more feedback on syntactical issues with grammar, patterns, and style. As a result, providing error correction and giving meaningful feedback becomes an even more challenging task. In addition, error correction can be daunting and overly time consuming, especially if a text is riddled with errors that obstruct meaning because of the absence or misuse of grammatical and syntactical conventions. As a result, language teachers and L2 writing instructors often search for various approaches to help students become better writers and overcome the challenges they face. The first logical step in giving effective feedback is to understand these challenges by studying the process of how L2 writing develops, and the various factors that affect output. Diana Ferris (2011) tells us in her seminal text *Treatment of Error in Second Language Writing*:

> Because L2 students, in addition to being developing writers, are still in the process of acquiring L2 lexicon and morphological and syntactic systems, they often need distinct and additional intervention from their writing teachers to bridge these gaps and develop strategies for finding, correcting, and avoiding errors (p. 9).

In this paper, I will describe a presentation and workshop that I gave and facilitated at the CUE SIG 2015 Conference on Diversity: Communication and Education in September 2015. The presentation covered my background as a writing instructor in various teaching situations in the U.S. and Japan, and my experience over many years with student response to corrective feedback. I then describe some pedagogical concerns with error correction, as outlined in the presentation. In the second part of this paper, I will describe the workshop that I facilitated and draw some conclusions based on the ideas and perspectives shared by workshop participants during and after the presentation.

Background

In the first part of my presentation, I described my teaching history and the methods I have espoused, mostly through trial and error. My journey began over

eleven years ago when I was hired out of graduate school to teach freshman English composition (English 101) and developmental English at several community colleges in the greater Los Angeles area. During this time, I was introduced to a broad range of linguistic diversity, including many *Generation 1.5* multilingual students, for whom English wasn't necessarily the primary language. Rumbaut and Ima (1988) coined the term *Generation 1.5* as a result of a study on Southeast Asian refugees who immigrated to California when they were young. Other scholars have described *Generation 1.5* as children of immigrants who arrive in the United States as children or teenagers, and share cultural and other values of both their home country and the new country (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999, p. 5). As can be expected, this negotiation of culture spills into language, especially oral and written communication in postsecondary institutions, such as community colleges.

The linguistic diversity I came across in Los Angeles sent me on a quest to find strategies and tools to help my students become better writers. Roughly eighty percent of the student population in my developmental English classes was *1.5 Generation* or L2 writers; the percentage was almost the same in English 101, as many of the students had progressed through the system. Many of these students were from Mexico or other Latin American countries, and a small percentage came from China or Vietnam. I struggled my first year of teaching because I was not prepared for the vast majority that lacked English skills. As a result of the cultural diversity and the variety of English levels that I encountered, I decided to go back to school and earn a TESOL certification to understand better the linguistic challenges of the population at hand. After completing the TESOL certification, I began to teach ESL writing at a university in Los Angeles, and then eventually all levels of ESL in an Intensive English Program at the University of Arizona. It was in this position that I began to reflect on the various methods available for corrective feedback in L2 writing.

Some Methods Used for Corrective Feedback

For many writing teachers, correcting every mistake often seems to be the logical way to give feedback on essays and paragraphs. However, it is often the case

that teachers have little consideration for the development of process and the linguistic challenges that carry over into writing.

Correcting every error. As a novice teacher, I was on a quest to correct every error, as I felt I had to, and I often overlooked structural attributes or the value of the message in the piece of writing. Ferris (2011) understands this dilemma when she mentions that many writing teachers, with red pens in hand, notice errors because they are focused only on grammatical and syntactical issues, not the overall message of the piece of writing. I fell into this category and quickly became overwhelmed with the amount of time I was spending on giving feedback, with no measure as to the value of ideas, nor the value students placed on my corrections.

Correction codes sheets. Another method I have experimented with is using correction codes sheets, which include a combination of codes, abbreviations, and editorial marks for identifying local and global issues in a text. I began using this system my second year of teaching, and instead of correcting every mistake, I used the codes and editorial marks listed on the sheet to indicate errors. Students were instructed to reference the sheet, and to decipher and correct their errors accordingly. While this did reduce the time I spent giving corrective feedback, students were often overwhelmed by the number of marks on a text or some of the codes called for more explanation. I still use correction codes sheets, but now I take the time to explain what the marks mean before I evaluate an assignment. As a supplement, I sometimes allow for an in-class editing workshop, in which students can ask me questions about the corrective feedback I have given.

Rubrics. Over the years, I have used rubrics as a tool for evaluation. Rubrics work hand and hand with corrective feedback in that points can be assigned to the focus and attention a student gives to the feedback provided by the teacher. For example, the rubric I use currently for a developmental writing class has a section that evaluates student effort on addressing teacher feedback. Moreover, another section gives the teacher an opportunity to evaluate grammar, spelling, and punctuation after students have made corrections to a text. I have found rubrics to be useful because they keep students accountable for the quality of their writing, and teachers have a basis for responding to a written text.

Student Response to Corrective Feedback

Many writing teachers ponder this common thought: Do students look at and value the corrective feedback I give them? However, how well teachers prepare students to pay attention to accuracy seems to be a key factor in giving feedback (Ferris, 2011). Through experience, I have found that the majority of students do not look at corrective feedback if a writing assignment calls for only one draft. Moreover, unless a teacher gives points for correcting mistakes, only a special few take the time to correct the errors noted. This common pattern has prompted me to reflect on different approaches to getting students to notice or pay attention to feedback on accuracy. One approach I have taken is to allow for peer-editing workshops in which students identify and correct errors in response to feedback from peers and the teacher. This approach creates a collaborative dynamic in the classroom, in that students help and motivate each other to improve the quality of writing.

Some Pedagogical Concerns with Corrective Feedback

In the next part of my presentation, I discussed some pedagogical concerns with giving corrective feedback on writing assignments. The three areas addressed in this section were fairness in giving corrections, time spent on corrective feedback, and different grading styles.

Fairness in giving corrections. Fairness and consistency should always be at the core of giving corrective feedback. Quite often students get mixed messages or are confused if teacher feedback veers from the model presented. For example, if a course curriculum revolves around process writing, a teacher should only consider global issues such as development, organization, unity, and awareness of audience on a first draft. However, many teachers cannot resist the urge to correct local errors in all drafts, which can confuse students about the importance of making global revisions before moving on to the editing stage. Also, if a teacher returns illegible scribbles, illogical corrections, or inappropriate corrections not relevant to the stage of writing, this is unfair. In other words, the feedback a teacher gives should be consistent and relevant to the assignment. It is imperative that writing instructors are fair when giving corrective feedback.

Feedback that lacks fairness and consistency devalues the writing process and may result in frustration on the side of the end receiver. As Zamel (1985) found in his famous study on how students perceive error correction, "ESL writing teachers often misread student texts, are inconsistent in their reactions, make arbitrary corrections…and view themselves as language teachers rather than writing teachers" (p. 86). It is up to writing teachers to reflect on corrective feedback practices and to adjust their methods accordingly to be fair in all aspects.

Time Spent on Corrective Feedback. Many writing teachers spend too much time on error correction. All writing teachers have all been guilty of this at one time or another. The result is an overabundance of corrections that ends up being time-consuming and overwhelming for the teacher, as well as for students. As mentioned earlier, for students to value corrective feedback at any stage, they need an adequate amount of time to reflect and respond to the suggestions the teacher gives. Ferris (2011) suggested that teachers ask students to respond to corrections as homework "to ensure that a teachers' time in providing corrective feedback is not wasted and that students will benefit more from the corrections" (p. 91). Another approach to offering valuable feedback is student-teacher conferencing, or offering feedback in longer intervals, so that the writer has time to digest the feedback in a longer amount of time.

Different Grading Styles. As mentioned earlier, writing teachers need to be fair and consistent when they give corrective feedback. This idea also applies to fairness and consistency when a teacher employs a grading style. Grading styles can vary depending on the writing occasion, but the method used should be identifiable and clear to the receiver of the feedback. Teachers should share their approach or explain their method for giving feedback with students. For example, teachers should think about whether they will give *indirect* or *direct feedback* to writing assignments. *Indirect feedback* means the teacher circles or identifies errors, leaving it up to the student to make the correction. However, if a teacher uses this method, it is important for he or she to think about support available for students who struggle to make corrections themselves. With *direct feedback*, a teacher identifies and corrects errors, usually in context. If a teacher

prefers to give *direct feedback*, will the feedback be *focused* on a single type of error? Or, will it be *unfocused*, which means the teacher will direct the feedback to a greater range of errors. Choosing the best style or method of correction is no easy feat, although student levels and the writing occasion usually dictate the method. Research has shown that direct feedback is almost imperative for low-level writers. Rod Ellis (2012) made this point in a lecture he gave in Korea on corrective feedback. He asserts that *direct feedback* is probably the best method for lower levels because for students who have a weak language ability, even showing them their mistakes may not be enough due to their inability to distinguish the right way to write. However, as many of us have learned, even advanced second-language writers can benefit from additional feedback, so corrective methods should be considered based on student need as well.

Holistic Grading. From my experience, holistic grading is a powerful method for comparing different approaches and styles for grading. Instructors can learn from each other, as well as give a more objective score to a final assignment. Holistic grading (scoring) involves a group of evaluators, mostly teachers, who rate the overall proficiency level of a piece of student writing according to a single summary judgment, which is typically a scale or rubric (Singer & LeMahieu, 2011). During this section of the presentation, I discussed my experience with holistic grading at a community college. I participated in a holistic grading session, during which three instructors worked together and rated the essays for each others' classes, per the rubric provided. The instructor for the course then averaged out his or her score with that of the other two instructors; thus, a common score was established. The last part of the session included an in-depth departmental discussion on some of the common issues found in the essays brought to the table.

Corrective Feedback Teacher Workshop

Lastly, I facilitated a workshop on corrective feedback, during which audience members were invited to evaluate a piece of writing, share their evaluations with other audience members, and discuss the rationale behind the evaluations. The workshop consisted of three parts.

Background and Materials

For the first part of the workshop, I distributed copies of an instructor-evaluated paragraph assignment (Appendix A) from a first-year university student in a developmental writing class, with the name of the student omitted. The prompt for the assignment asked students to argue for or against an issue. Topic sentences for various issues were provided on the assignment for modeling.

Procedure

Workshop participants were asked to evaluate the piece of writing in seven minutes, using their preferred method or style of correction. I also provided the rubric for the assignment (Appendix B), and I requested that participants use the rubric for the assignment to give a final evaluation. The rubric included four areas for evaluation: paragraph (elements and organization), grammar, formatting, and the overall communicative quality of the piece of writing. I also distributed a correction codes (Appendix C) sheet that was distributed to students. I encouraged participants not to correct every error; however, I did ask that they be prepared to justify or explain their score to a partner or group member. After the review time, participants paired with other workshop attendees or worked in small groups to compare their corrections and evaluations of the piece of writing. Participants were given seven to ten minutes to compare corrections and evaluations, and then the floor was opened up to a general discussion.

Discussion

As I expected, methods for correcting and evaluating varied between group members. One group reported that evaluations were opposite, with one evaluator giving high marks and the other one low marks. One group averaged out their scores because they had similar outcomes for the evaluation of the assignment. Another group included the course coordinator for the writing class, and because of her familiarity with the program, she tended to be the strictest of group members. At the end of the discussion, most groups agreed that sharing their ideas in a group setting was a powerful tool for recognizing and examining different styles and approaches to corrective feedback and methods of evaluation.

For the last part of this activity, I showed audience members the teacher's

corrections for the same piece of writing, as well as the rubric evaluation she gave. The rubric score the teacher gave was surprisingly lower than most of the scores given by workshop participants. This observation brought up an interesting point for discussion. Some noted that the corrective feedback provided by the teacher was unfair or could be potentially overwhelming for the student writer. For example, some of the correction codes used to give feedback were not stated on the correction codes sheet distributed to the student. At the sentence level, an average of two words per sentence was marked as erroneous.

To conclude this presentation and workshop, I summarized the points made earlier in my presentation and made some clear connections between the pedagogical concerns brought up earlier and how they applied to the content of the workshop. For example, I reiterated that teachers should be fair, consistent, and transparent when they give corrective feedback on writing assignments. It is important that students have a clear understanding of feedback given on assignments, in a sufficient, yet realistic, amount of time. Instructors should not spend unnecessary time on error correction either. If there are too many corrections or corrections are illegible or beyond the grasp of the student receiving them, then an adjustment needs to be made. I again recommended that teachers participate in a holistic grading workshop, if possible, to experience sharing evaluative methods and other ideas related to college writing, just as they did in this workshop.

As an educator who has taught writing across the globe, the main motivation for this presentation and workshop was for me to share my experiences as a writing instructor with other academics, and in turn, for audience members to share their experiences as well. As mentioned before, it is easy for teachers to get trapped in a teaching bubble due to time constraints and other duties, so workshops such as this are paramount for professional development. Comparing methodology and approaches to teaching is a solid way for teachers to strengthen pedagogy. I observed that in this workshop, participants felt at ease sharing ideas, which created a dynamic and engaging atmosphere for participants and the workshop facilitator. For example, in one group, the teachers had similar evaluations, although their approach to correcting the assignment was completely different;

one focused on global issues and the other on a combination of both. In another group the teachers were on opposite sides of the spectrum but took the time to discuss in length their differences in approaches.

Moreover, this presentation and workshop enabled me to reflect on my pedagogy, as I was prompted to review my history with corrective feedback. I also developed a deeper understanding of the process by noting suggestions and comments shared by audience members. The reciprocal environment I created in this presentation energized and motivated me to become an even better writing teacher, and I have since reflected on different approaches to corrective feedback from the different views and angles shared by the academics in the audience.

Conclusion

As teachers, we need to think deeply about the feedback we give in all academic contexts. We are guides for building a foundation for students, and the foundation should be well informed and researched. Of course, it takes many years of experience to find the best approach or practices for teaching, always considering the student population at hand. As a teacher who has taught in the U.S. and in Japan, I know firsthand that it is not always easy to adjust one's instruction to fit the context at hand, especially in the area of error correction. We should constantly be asking ourselves how we can apply our experience to the present context and be prepared to make adjustments when necessary. As Casanave (2009) wrote in her chapter on teacher training and writing, we need to ask ourselves why we approach writing feedback the way we do. Otherwise, she contends, "without asking the hard 'why' questions and attending the local realities of our writing instruction, we risk fomenting ideological clashes and spreading Western hegemony and arrogance" (p. 256). This approach to teaching is a pitfall that many of us have fallen into, and one way to avoid this is to access the situation through conversations and discussions with other teachers experienced in the current context, as I hoped to accomplish in this presentation and workshop.

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Author bio

***Jenell Rae** is from the U.S. and has been teaching ESL, EFL, and English for about 12 years. She was the coordinator of First-year Grammar and Third-year Reading and Writing at Sugiyama Jogakuen in Nagoya, Japan, but recently returned to Los Angeles, California, where she is a full-time ESL instructor at East Los Angeles College. cordelia68us@yahoo.com*

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Appendix A

2014/12/10

Smoking in Restaurants (4.3)

I think that smoking in restaurants should not be allowed. I have three reasons. First, I think that people do not enjoy the smell of the dish if smoke. I think that it is a very bad thing. We enjoy the food not only by taste, but also by the smell, so I think that I am sorry bad that I can not enjoy a smell. If you want to smoke, you should go out of the restaurant. The person of the smoker may smoke unconsciously, so I think more consciousness to have. Secondly, there may be someone who feels bad because of the smoke. I don't like cigarettes, so I feel bad when I smell cigarettes. I think that there is not it only in me. Other non-smoking people may have the person worsening a feeling. People can not enjoy a precious restaurant. Thirdly, a rough person smokes after one of a meal, so they do not leave the seat. Then it is annoying to a person waiting for a seat. Finally I think that it is really annoying if they smoke as for several, so I think that the smoking person thinks about more rotations, and all people should make better environment.

WC:204

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- smell spoils food
- smell
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Appendix B

Teacher Rubric for Assignment Four

Name		Student #		Group		
Assignment Four Rubric				Yes	No	Points
Paragraph	Topic sentence with topic and controlling idea					4
	At least 3 supporting sentences with relevant details					4
	Meaningful concluding sentence or restates topic sentence					4
	Appropriate use of signals words					4
Grammar	Correct use of articles					1
	Correct verb form					1
	Appropriate word choice					1
	Correct part of speech					1
	Correct use of singular & plural					1
	Correct use of conjunctions					1
Format	Proper format & everything submitted					1
Overall	Communicative quality of writing			1 2 3 4 5		
Total	**Grades: S≥25 (90%), A≥22 (80%), B≥19(70%),C≥16 (60%)**					/28
Comments						

9

Appendix C

Writing Correction Codes

Code	Meaning	Marked Mistake	Corrected Mistake
#	singular/plural	I have three car.	I have three cars.
⇒	tab	⇒This is my topic sentence.	This is my topic sentence.
WT	word tense	When I woke up I see snow.	When I woke up I saw snow.
WF	word form	I'm very sleep.	I'm very sleepy.
WC	word choice	She is angry to me.	She is angry at me.
V	add something	I went the moon.	I went to the moon.
	delete something	I often go to shopping.	I often go shopping
WO	word order	My house near is Chikusa station.	My house is near Chikusa station.
F	sentence fragment	For example, cats, dogs and llamas.	For example, I won't eat cats, dogs and llamas.
Sp	spelling	Conbini stores are expensive.	Convenience stores are expensive.
So	spell out	5 people rode the same bike.	Five people rode the same bike.
P	punctuation	Where is Nemo.	Where is Nemo?
O	capitalization problem	I love english.	I love English.
?	meaning is unclear, rewrite	I watered the violin.	I played the violin.
Ro	run-on sentence	I love homework, he loves homework.	I love homework, and he does too.
C	begins with a conjunction	And then they sang.	Then they sang.
/	two problems	Yesterday, he see TV all day.	Yesterday, he watched TV all day.
Rp	repetitive	I like pizza very much because it is very tasty.	I like pizza very much because it is delicious.
Ir	irrelevant	Eating a lot of vegetables is healthy because today is sunny.	Eating a lot of vegetables is healthy because they have vitamins.
S/V	add a signal word	Wash your hands. Then, eat.	First, wash your hands. Then, eat.
W	wrap your sentences	I like you. W Do you like me?	I like you. Do you like me?
^	spacing problem	Sanfrancisco	San Francisco
‿	combine sentence or word	news paper I like apples. I like oranges.	newspaper I like apples and oranges.
T/V	add a transition	No examples for these codes. Ask your teacher if there is something here that you don't understand.	
NP	start a new paragraph		