

Written Corrective Feedback and Peer Review in the BYOD Classroom

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Abstract. Error correction in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing curriculum is a practice both teachers and students agree is important for writing proficiency development (Ferris, 2004; Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2012; Vyatkina, 2010, 2011). Research suggests student dependency on teacher corrective feedback yields few long-term benefits for the developing writer (Bruton, 2009; Lee, 2004). Encouraging the learners to manage grammatical mistakes, as part of the learning process, must be followed up with post-writing activities that help them become more accountable and more autonomous in developing accurate rewrites. In this project, technological resources combined with peer group support and teacher assistance were used to scaffold the learner approach to error correction that showed positive knock-on effects for writing accuracy.

Keywords: written corrective feedback, EFL writing, grammar, peer correction, BYOD, iPad.

1. Introduction

The popular use of computer-based feedback systems for the writing curriculum has placed a greater demand for CALL environments that not all universities can meet. The bring your own device (BYOD) trend of blending mobile technologies into the traditional classroom may be one solution though understandably limited (Kharbach, 2013). Studies into learner willingness to use Mobile Assisted Language Learning in general do exist, such as Stockwell's (2012) work. However, this study was more concerned with the learner's preparedness and skill in using smartphone technology to access materials from cloud services. This project reports on the use of smartphone technology and the effect of a

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written corrective feedback (WCF) approach on a process-oriented EFL writing program at a Japanese women's university.

Over the last few decades, research shows that many complex factors that go beyond the mere transfer of correct grammatical information from instructor to student affect the process of second language acquisition (Long, 1977; Truscott & Hsu, 2008). Some experts argue that written corrective feedback on grammar is ineffective for short-term grammatical accuracy (Krashen, 1984; Semke, 1984; Truscott, 1996). For example, the criticism of the article “Effects of the Red Pen” is that a complete canvassing of all errors is counterproductive and may even overwhelm or demotivate the learners from being open to a risk-taking attitude that is vital to the gradual improvement in accuracy in second/foreign language writing practices (Semke, 1984). Recent research suggests that a truly effective WCF system would have to incorporate different corrective feedback approaches for lexical, syntactic or morphological errors because each area represents a different cognitive process for correction (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Truscott, 1996; Vyatkina, 2010).

Although students prefer explicit WCF comments, research shows that the indirect feedback method of using a coded WFC code sheet is better for accuracy in the long-term because it engages the learner to problem-solve and reflect on form. Successful students realize the benefits of the trial and error process (James, 1998; Lalande, 1982; Reid, 1998). There is evidence that direct feedback (i.e. writing the correct form over the mistake) has largely been proven to be ineffective for more accurate performance beyond the beginner level (Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986).

Moreover, there is also the risk in direct feedback that the teacher may misinterpret the meaning intended by the writer (Ferris & Roberts, 2001). One way to minimize the WCF workload is to decide on error types that are in the students' ability to repair and to use a coded system effective for the learners to use.

This project aimed to address the following research questions:

- Which corrective feedback approach was most effective for grammatical accuracy from the students' point-of-view?
- Are learners prepared to use smartphones and cloud services as tools for learning in a writing program?

2. Method

2.1. Dropbox and the resources

For this project, 17 Japanese female students from an urban women’s college with a group average of 437 on the TOEFL PBT² participated. Prior to the beginning of the term, the instructor set up and shared a class Dropbox folder. Within the folder were individual folders for each of the students and a class folder with all the resources. The resources included a PDF copy of the correction symbols sheet and scanned pages from a bilingual grammatical reference book entitled *An A-Z of Common English Errors for Japanese Learners* (Barker, 2008).

Figure 1. A sample of the student’s corrected free writing text using numbers for the reference book pages

Free Writing#1

Name: Ayaka ID # Date: 4/23

CLASS: TOPIC: School Subjects

T
U

do not write here

Honestly.

✓ I weak in English.

⁴⁴ But I think that English is very important subject.

In job hunting, If I can use English, It is a big power.

✓ I heard that

⁴⁴ So, I hope that I want to like English.

Therefore, I am in English intensive course. In English intensive course member, of course, very positive. ⁴⁴ So I think I work hard to do. ⁴⁴ And I work at cram school. I teach many students English. This is a good chance, because I review English. I often notice ~~my wrong English~~ that I use a wrong English.

⁴⁴ And every Saturday ^{day} I go to volunteer in international center. In international center, I talk with foreign. These foreign, speak easy English. ⁴⁴ So, I can ~~hear~~ ^{listen to} it. -

2. The Test of English as a Foreign Language Paper-based Test

On the first day of class, the students downloaded the Dropbox app from either Google Play or the App Store depending on the operating system of their smartphone. A brief explanation about the contents of the folders and how the app was going to be used throughout the course followed. For the first assignment on paragraph writing, the students generated ideas doing a 10-minute free writing exercise on a topic. At the end of class, the teachers collected the free writes that were later scanned into PDF format. The scanned free writes were corrected focusing only on the bilingual reference book. Using an iPad app called GoodReader³, the errors on each student's free writing text were underlined and coded using only a number referring to a page in the reference book (see [Figure 1](#) above). The corrected work was transferred directly into the respective student folders in Dropbox.

2.2. BYOD and peer review

In the next class, the teacher divided the students into pairs, and they received a worksheet (see [Figure 2](#)) that contained three examples of the most common errors from their free writes. The students were encouraged to work independently to try and find the errors. After a reasonable amount of time had elapsed, they shared their knowledge with their partners. The instructor circulated amongst the pairs facilitating the peer correction process. After peer correction had elapsed for some time, the learners were encouraged to look up the explanation to each error in the grammatical reference textbook. The page numbers are written next to each error on the worksheet. The teacher demonstrated how to access the reference book on an overhead projector using an iPad and Dropbox app. The students read the explanation in either English or Japanese, confirmed the correction of the errors on their worksheets with their partners. Using the GoodReader app and an iPad connected to the overhead projector, the teacher encouraged students to share their corrections with the whole class. At least one corrected passage was typed out for the rest of the class to see, but variations on the corrections were also discussed.

The free writes from the week before were returned to the students and they looked up the corrected PDF versions in their Dropbox folders. The teacher asked the students to use the returned free writing assignment and the grammatical resource to make the necessary grammatical changes for writing the first draft of the paragraph. The received first draft of the paragraph was corrected using the grammatical resource and the corrections symbols sheet (see [Figure 3](#)). Once the corrected work was returned to the students, a group email was sent out with instructions for students to look at their work. In the next class, students worked in

3. itunes.apple.com

groups of three and peer corrected their work. While moving from group to group, the teacher provided assistance, and gave advice on corrections. The second drafts were submitted online later that week.

Figure 2. A worksheet with three of the most common grammar mistakes from the students' free writes

Name: Shiho

Correct the grammatical error in the following passage: p. 236

Student: Second, in my elementary school grade six, our class played "Jinsei no meri go land" in "Hawka no Ugat Shilo". I thought that I want to be a music leader.

It made me want to do music leader.

Student B: p. 44

I think music is high school. But when was very difficult. Because I was happy when I could compensation and, so, but ^{it}

I liked music in high school, but music was very difficult, because I was happy when I ~

Student C: p. 85 & p. 213

I want to go to study abroad living I am teenage student. So I want more technical of English.

I want to go to study abroad while I'm a college student, so I need more technical of effective English.

Figure 3. A sample of a first draft with corrections symbols

Shiho

Teacher: D.Ferreira

My favorite teacher

My favorite teacher in my high school was my English teacher. She was always smiles for us sometimes sold she has her kindness to us. She was in charge of us for four years. We were taken care of so long time. She got married and had to go Aichi, so we could not spend other two years. However, there are three reasons, why she was my favorite teacher. First, my classmates were so friendly, but so noisy and crazy. That's why, teaching us was probably very hard, but she never desert, if any thing she loved us very much. We could feel her big love, so all of us loved her too. Second, her teaching style was good, because it was easy to understand. Thanks to her English class, we got high English score in the tests. Finally, after she left the school and even after had a baby, still there was her love for us. She sent each of us letters, and there were words of encouragement. We were the first students for her, so she taught us carefully. We were always loved, and there was a sense of security. I appreciate her thoughtfulness. Consequently, my favorite teacher was my English teacher.

3. Discussion

There were some notable concerns regarding the use of smartphones and accessing cloud services. At the beginning of the term, the students complained that the display of their devices were too small. Encouraging users to change their viewing mode to landscape instead of the preferred portrait view rectified part of that problem. However, as the students became more and more dependent on accessing their Dropbox documents throughout the term, low battery power became a major obstacle. Late into the term, two students reported still having problems accessing corrected documents that the teacher returned to their folders. However, other students in the class were quick to assist and promptly rectified the situation.

Overall, the short-term benefits of post-writing activities that focused on accountability of grammar errors were apparent. The reappearance of the common errors that the instructor marked for correction significantly diminished in later free writes and paragraph writing assignments. Whenever a common error reappeared in later assignments, the learners easily accessed the grammatical reference, the correction symbols sheet or older assignments during the peer review process, thus freeing the teacher to focus on other writing features that needed more extensive explanations such as content or lexical choice.

4. Conclusions

Consistent with the findings of recent research on writing, combining the use of indirect WFC with peer review seemed to have some positive effects in the short-term (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Robb et al., 1986; Vyatkina, 2010). Unfortunately, due to the limit of the scope of this research, it remains unclear whether the changes in grammatical accuracy would resist attrition in the long-term (Truscott & Hsu, 2008). Nevertheless, it is hoped that some of the ideas presented in this project will be of benefit to instructors who may have a similar teaching context.

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