

A COMPARISON BETWEEN PEER AND TEACHER FEEDBACK ON LEARNERS' LANGUAGE ACCURACY: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: This study examines how peer and teacher feedback help learners improve their grammatical accuracy in their written work. It is a longitudinal case study with twelve participants of an EFL Grammar class. They did two self-editing tasks and three self-correction tasks on the same written work. In doing the self-correction activities, the learners received three kinds of feedback: direct peer feedback and two kinds of indirect feedback from the teacher. The study found that indirect teacher feedback, in the form of metalanguage comments and underlining errors, gave the biggest contribution to the learners' language accuracy. However, in regard to the consistently corrected errors, peer feedback outperformed teacher feedback in its contribution. The result showed that both direct and indirect feedbacks were beneficial for the learners to raise their awareness towards becoming independent self-editors.

Key words: peer feedback, teacher feedback, language accuracy

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INTRODUCTION

Until now there has been a disagreement among teachers and researchers on the role of feedback in helping learners to correct errors in their writing. Truscott (1996) argues that written corrective feedback is ineffective since it may enable students to eliminate the errors in a subsequent draft but it does not help them improve their accuracy in a new piece of writing. On the other hand, Ferris (1999) believes if correction is clear and consistent, it will work for acquisition. In spite of the opposite opinion, both of them agree on at least one thing: that research on error correction in L2 writing is insufficient to give a strong conclusion on the usefulness of feedback because the research done can not be compared one to the other due to the inconsistencies in the research design and the absence of research replication (Ferris 2004). This controversy in fact triggered me to do a research in my class, since error correction was always done in my class as it was part of the exercises written in the textbook.

The study focused on intentional learning which occurred in an EFL grammar classroom, which was a blended learning class. In the face-to-face meeting students were paying attention to teacher's explanation of grammar rules and doing meaningful, contextual exercises, while on the virtual discussion forum the teacher researcher posted eight topics during a thirteen-week semester and asked the students to respond to the topics in the form of written work. The teacher never corrected the errors which appeared in their writing and she never graded the students' written work.

This written interaction was done to support the goal of the grammar class, which is to provide the students with the opportunities to implement the grammatical knowledge they have studied in their writing as their product or output. However, in achieving that goal, the students could not avoid making errors in their writing because they were still in the process of learning a foreign language. Errors, then,

should not be seen as something detrimental since errors are commonly made in the learning process of foreign language learners (Allwright and Bailey 1991).

In addition to the written work, the learners were used to doing an error correction exercise provided in every unit of the textbook. This error correction exercise was both done as an individual task and as a pair work for one academic year, during Grammar III and Grammar IV classes, the two highest levels of Grammar classes in the undergraduate program of the English Department. After the learners completed those two grammar courses, during the holiday they were sent their written work done in Grammar III class to be self-edited and self-corrected for five times: the first self-editing (without feedback), self-correction after given peer feedback, the first teacher feedback, the second teacher feedback and the second self-editing (without feedback). Thus, in this study the students received direct feedback from their peers and indirect feedback from the teacher.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT FEEDBACK

When learners self-correct their writing, they pay explicit attention to form. It may also enable students to have more autonomy in learning since they take responsibility in the process of monitoring their own errors. Makino (1993) investigated how far learners could correct the grammatical errors when they were given teacher feedback. He compared the ratio of correct answers from three self-editing activities: when the learners were not given any feedback, when the feedback was given in the form of a mark written in front of ungrammatical sentences, and when the feedback was in the form of underlined errors. The result showed that the learners could correct the errors successfully when they received more detailed feedback which was in the form of underlined errors. Therefore, he proposed

two pedagogical implications of self-editing: (1) learners' awareness of form may increase when they reflect on their own composition; (2) it may activate learners' linguistic competence because they try to use their existing knowledge about the second language when they corrected grammatical errors.

Another researcher, Ferris (1995: 45) conducted a semester-long study of ESL university freshmen and found that 28 out of 30 students were able to significantly reduce their errors over time as they practiced self-editing strategies. However, Ferris (1999, 2004) points out that most students want their writing errors to be corrected and that it is the job of L2 writing teachers to attend to their needs.

According to Long (as quoted in Makino 1993: 338), there is a difference between error correction and feedback. Error feedback is meant to help students detect grammatical errors and correct them. In this study, direct feedback is more closely related to error correction than error feedback. Hendrickson (1984) distinguished indirect to direct feedback; indirect feedback refers to the identification of the error location, while direct feedback means not only the identification of the presence of errors but also suggesting the correct forms. Thus, if students receive only direct feedback, they only note the errors identified by the feedback giver and they do not have any opportunity to reflect and correct the error for themselves.

Therefore, indirect feedback has received more support among researchers (Lalande 1982, Hendrickson 1984, Robb et al. 1986, Ferris 2002). Lalande (1982) reported that indirect feedback may be more beneficial than direct feedback because indirect feedback can help students solve their own problems, in this case self-correcting their errors. Hendrickson (1984) noted that the combination of direct and indirect feedback was beneficial for the students in their revision since some types of errors could be more readily corrected by the students and others could not. However, the students had some

difficulties to choose appropriate words in context and to use acceptable structure if only the location of the errors indicated without any guidance on how to correct the forms (Ferris et al. 2001).

Some research reveal that both students and teachers prefer direct,explicit feedback to indirect feedback (Ferris and Roberts 2001; Komura 1999, Roberts 1999) and indirect feedback is reported to have a greater or similar level of accuracy over time (Ferris et. al. 2000, Lalande, 1982, Lee 1997). However, Lalande's study (1982) did not have control groups which received no correction and it did not find statistically significant differences between the treatment conditions. On the other hand, Lee's study had control groups who received no corrective feedback. She did a research among EFL college students in Hong Kong and she found that the group who received underlined feedback improved significantly in their language accuracy, compared with the groups who received no corrective feedback or only a marginal check.

Ferris and Roberts (2001) examined the effects of three different feedback treatments (errors marked with codes; errors underlined but not marked; no error feedback) and found that both error feedback groups significantly outperformed the no feedback control group, but, like Robb et al. (1986), they found that there were no significant differences between the group given coded feedback and the group not given coded feedback. Both Ferris and Roberts (2001) investigated text revisions rather than new pieces of writing over time. The one study that dealt with the effects of various kinds of teacher feedback on accuracy of both revision and subsequent writing (Ferris et. al. 2000) claimed that direct correction of error by the teacher led to more correct revisions (88%) than indirect feedback (77%). Fathman and Whalley (1990) had three groups that either received feedback on form (FF), feedback on content (FC) or a combination of both, and a control group receiving no feedback. In

that study, groups receiving both FF and FC showed improvement in formal accuracy. With a similar design, Ashwell (2000) obtained similar results: all groups receiving feedback made gains in formal accuracy.

DATASOURCES

The data of the study were taken from the learners' written work: written responses to the teacher's topics posted on the virtual discussion forum of Grammar class. In the Grammar class, which was a blended learning class, twenty-eight Indonesian sophomores studying at the English Department of a private university in West Jakarta, responded to eight topics posted during one semester (thirteen weeks), covering wise words, quotations, and short articles. However, only twelve learners were selected for the present study since they wrote at least five responses, each of which was more than one hundred words in length, and they voluntarily participated for this study. Most of the learners were in their early twenties; they ranged in age from 18 to 27 years old, and they were three males and nine females. With regard to nationality, language background, and educational level, the learners could be considered homogeneous.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The following table describes the research procedure of the study. It included twelve Indonesian students in an EFL grammar class who voluntarily did all the treatments: first self editing, three-time self-corrections after receiving direct feedback from peers and two kinds of indirect feedback from the teacher and second self-editing. The duration of the study was two years, from September 2005 until June 2007.

In the study, peer feedback was given in the form of direct correction, which indicated the location of an error on the student's text and the provision of the correct form by deleting and / or replacing the error or by adding a linguistic element. Unlike the peer feedback, the first teacher feedback given was indirect feedback in the form of metalinguage comments beside the students' sentences without indicating the location of the error, such as S-V agreement, tenses, countable nouns, depending on the errors the students made in their writing. The second teacher feedback was still indirect feedback, given in the form of metalinguage comments and underlined errors.

Step	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Setting	Grammar III class	The last week of Grammar IV class	During holiday – outside regular class		Outside regular class		
	Sept 2005 – Jan 2006	Jun 2006	25 Jul 2006	7 Aug 2006	2 Oct 2006	17 Oct 2006	25 Jun 2007
Partici- pant	28 learners – the whole class		12 learners – volunteers				
Activi- ties	Respond to T's topics – virtual discussion forum	Correct others' writing – peer feedback	Self - edit their original	Self - correct their original writing again + peer	Self - correct their original writing + 1 st teacher	Self - correct their original writing + 2 nd teacher	Self - edit their original writing (2 nd self - editing) € no

			writing (1st self - editing) € no feedback	feedback € peer feedback	feedback € 1st teacher feedback	feedback € 2nd teacher feedback	feedback
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Table 1:
Types of correction

The data of the study were coded based on five correction types : (1) Correct (C), if learners could identify their errors and correct them; (2) Correct rephrasing (C-R), when learners could identify the errors and correct them by using different word or structure; (3) incorrect rephrasing (InC-R), if learners could identify their errors, but gave incorrect rephrasing as the correction; (4) Incorrect (InC), when learners could identify the errors but could not correct them; (5) No change (No ch), when learners could neither identify nor correct the errors (Table 2).

No	Correction types	Description	Coding system
1.	+ identify + correct	Learners could identify errors and correct the errors successfully	Correct (C)
2.	+ identify + rephrase	Learners could identify the errors and correct them by using different words or structure (rephrasing)	Correct rephrasing (C-R)
3.	+ identify - rephrase	Learners could identify the errors but gave incorrect rephrasing	Incorrect rephrasing (InC-R)

No	Correction types	Description	Coding system
4.	+ identify - correct	Learners could identify the errors but could not correct them	Incorrect (InC)
5.	- identify - correct	Learners could neither identify nor correct the errors	No change (No ch)

Table 2:
Corrected errors

Note: Corrected errors in the study are comprised of correct (C) and correct rephrasing (C-R)

DISCUSSION

The following table shows the number of corrected errors after four kinds of revisions: first self-editing (without feedback), self-correction after peer feedback, self-correction after first teacher feedback, and self-correction after second teacher feedback. From the table it can be seen that even though the location of errors was identified and the correction was described in the metalanguage comments, not all errors could be corrected (2nd teacher feedback task). There were still 16.75% errors that could not be identified and 13.61% errors could be identified but could not be corrected or rephrased (Table 3).

Correction types	Number of corrected errors			
	1 st self - editing task	Peer feedback task	1 st teacher feedback task	2 nd teacher feedback task
+identify +correct	20.94%	31.94%	37.70%	62.30%
+identify +rephrase	5.23%	6.28%	6.28%	7.33%

Correction types	Number of corrected errors			
	1 st self editing task	Peer feedback task	1 st teacher feedback task	2 nd teacher feedback task
+identify -rephrase	1.57%	2.09%	2.62%	1.57%
-identify -correct	65.45%	47.12%	37.70%	16.75%

Table 3:
Comparison of corrected errors in four tasks

If every revision is compared to each other, we can see that in T2 task the learners could correct more errors than those done in other revisions because they only needed to correct the errors which had been identified. However, in the first teacher feedback task (T1 task), the number of errors that could be identified but not corrected (18.33% errors) was bigger than those in T2 task (13.61% errors). This means that T1 feedback outperformed T2 feedback for identifying errors because possibly learners were more challenged by the metalanguage comments in T1 feedback. In T2 feedback, each error was clearly underlined so the learners would leave it as it was when they could not correct it since there was nothing they could do. Even when T2 feedback is compared with peer feedback, the peer feedback surprisingly excelled 1.04% errors for identifying (Table 3).

When the result of the first revision is compared to that of the second revision, one can see that the second revision outperformed

21.47% (Table 4), meaning that there were 21.47% errors which were successfully corrected in the second revision but they were not in the first revision. In fact, when the students were given peer feedback, they had the freedom to take their peer's suggestion or not. Thus, if the students did not take the suggestion, there were two possibilities: they did not notice the suggestion or they noticed them, but they did not trust their peers. In this study, we do not know which possibility occurred to the students.

Therefore, if the students could not correct their errors during the first self-editing task (S1 task) but they successfully corrected them in the second revision after receiving peer feedback (P task), the difference in the number of corrected errors in S1 task and P task is considered as peer contribution in this study. As a result, it can be concluded that the contribution of peer feedback is 21.47% (Table 4).

Correction types	Result of 1 st self-editing task (S1 task)	Result after peer feedback (P task)	Contribution of peer feedback
+identify +correct	14.66%	31.94%	21.47%
+identify +rephrase	2.09%	6.28%	

Table 4:
Contribution of peer feedback

The following tables show the contribution of first and second teacher feedback to the improvement of the learners' language accuracy:

Correction types	Comparison of the same corrected errors			Contribution of first teacher feedback (T1- Peer)
	S1	Peer	T1	
+identify +correct	12.56%	19.89%	37.70%	17.81%

Correction types	Comparison of the same corrected errors			Contribution of first teacher feedback (T1- Peer)
	S1	Peer	T1	
+identify +rephrase	1.05%	2.09%	6.28%	4.19%
+identify rephrase -	0	0	2.62%	
+identify correct -	2.09%	2.62%	15.71%	
-identify correct -	22%	13.09%	37.70%	
Total				22%

Table 5:
Contribution of the first teacher feedback (T1 task)

Correction types	Comparison of the same corrected items		Contribution of 2 nd teacher feedback
	1 st teacher feedback	2 nd teacher feedback	
+identify +correct	34.55%	62.30%	54.97%
+identify +rephrase	5.76%	7.33%	1.57%
+identify-rephrase	1.05%		
+identify-correct	8.38%		
-identify-correct	18.32%		
Total			56.54%

Table 6:
Contribution of the second teacher feedback (T2 task)

Table 6 shows that when the result of the first teacher feedback (T1 task) is compared with that of the second teacher feedback (T2 task), there is a significant increase of 56.54%. This means that the

second teacher feedback is the feedback that gave the s means that most contribution to the learners' grammatical accuracy. The comparison of the contribution of peer feedback, first teacher feedback, and second teacher feedback is 21.47% : 22% : 56.5%—see Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6. Thus, there is only an insignificant difference between the contribution of peer feedback and first teacher feedback (0.53%). It can be concluded that direct peer feedback has the same effect on the learners' accuracy as the first teacher feedback.

This might happen because of the different types of feedback: peer feedback was given in the form of direct, explicit correction and the correction was salient, typed in capital letters. On the other hand, T1 feedback was written in the form of metalanguage comments or indirect correction. As a result, learners would see the peer correction right away because of their saliency, but they might face some difficulties in dealing with metalanguage comments since they possibly forgot the terminology and therefore they could not correct the errors. Thus, indirect correction in teacher feedback is not always beneficial for the learners. Direct correction in peer feedback appears to be more successful in helping learners correct their errors despite the superior position a teacher has.

Furthermore, when all consistently corrected errors are compared (Table 7), one can see that peer feedback has been as influential as the second teacher feedback in helping the learners correct their errors. Both of them are similar in the explicitness of the feedback given; peer feedback was given in the form of direct correction (locating errors and giving the correct forms), while the second teacher feedback was given in the form of indirect correction (writing metalanguage comments plus locating errors by underlining them).

Thus, it can be concluded that the learners could correct their errors consistently best when they attended to the peer and the second teacher feedback. From Table 7 it can also be seen that the second self-

editing resulted in more corrected errors than the first self-editing, 55 errors and 39 errors respectively. This means that the learners have improved their self-correction ability on the same written work after one year treatment

CONCLUSION

There were three kinds of feedback given to the learners in the present study: peer feedback, first teacher feedback and second teacher feedback. As it was shown in Table 3 there was a correlation between the feedback and the result of error correction activities. Therefore it can be concluded that the grammar knowledge of the learners has not been internalized yet since the learners seemed very much influenced by the feedback. They were not very sure of their own correction as one of them said that it was more difficult to correct their own writing than correcting the others'.

This is in line with what Shaughnessy (cited in James 1998: 259) stated that "all writers have difficulty seeing / noticing what they have written with objective eyes". Moreover, the study also deals with two kinds of feedback contribution: the first contribution resulted as the corrected errors in every error correction task and the second one resulted only from the consistently corrected errors in every task. What is meant by contribution here is the difference between the errors which could be corrected in one correction activity but not corrected in the previous error correction task, for instance when the learners did the second revision (P task) they could correct some errors which, in fact, were not fixed in the previous task (S1 task). The difference in the number of the corrected errors is considered the contribution of peer feedback, the feedback received when the learners did the second revision (P task). In sum, the contribution of peer and teacher feedback is as follows, the contribution of peer : first teacher : second teacher feedback is 21.47% : 22% : 56.54%, meaning that the learners still need explicit learning. They could correct their

errors when the location of the errors was underlined and the errors were explained by metalanguage comments (T2 task). However, the contribution of peer feedback surprisingly is as big as the first teacher feedback. This means that direct feedback from the peer is beneficial for the learners. Although the provider of the metalanguage comments was the teacher, who was supposed to be more trusted by the learners, the feedback did not outperform peer feedback. This probably happened because of the explicit level of the feedback: peer feedback was direct feedback versus first teacher feedback which was indirect feedback. Again, this proves that the learners still need explicit learning to improve their grammatical accuracy.

It is still difficult for the learners to identify the location of the errors. Once the location is identified as in T2 task, the learners only need to concentrate on correcting them. Thus, teacher feedback seemed to have an effect on students' self-correction. This finding corresponds to studies that support teacher error feedback on students' self-correction (Chandler, 2003; Fathman et al., 1990; Ferris et al., 2001; Makino, 1993). Fathman et al. (1990) found that ESL students seem to have trouble correcting grammatical errors by themselves without teachers' intervention. These findings contradict Truscott's (1996) argument that error correction was useless for L2 students. This finding is also in line with Leki's (1991) study that college level second language writers prefer explicit error correction from their instructors.

When only consistently corrected errors are examined, the contribution of peer : first teacher : second teacher feedback was 38.22% : 34.03% : 37.17%. Thus, the result gained in peer feedback outperformed second teacher feedback in regards to the consistently corrected errors (see table 7). Therefore, peer feedback contribution apparently is the biggest contribution of all feedback given to the learners, so in spite of the equal position with the learners, peers

Error correction activities	Total consistently corrected errors			Total
	Threetime correction	Four-time correction	Five-time correction	
1 st self-editing (S1 task)	13	11	15	39 (20.42%)
After given peer feedback (P task)	41	17	15	73 (38.22%)
After given 1 st teacher feedback (T1 task)	30	20	15	65 (34.03%)
After given 2 nd teacher feedback (T2 task)	35	21	15	71 (37.17%)
2 nd self-editing (S2 task)	25	15	15	55 (28.80%)

Table 7:
Description of all consistently corrected errors

proved to be able to give good correction, and the effect of peer feedback on the learners' self correction was even better than teacher feedback. This means that teacher should be cautious in giving feedback, especially indirect feedback in the form of metalanguage comments since the feedback may confuse the learners. In fact, the study does not deal with the problem the learners might have in doing the error correction activities – whether they forgot the terms used by the teacher in her feedback or they were unable to translate the terms into their correction. Moreover, the small number of participants in the present study may become one limitation of generalizing the result. Therefore there is a need to do the same research which covers a big number of students.

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