

EVALUATION OF ERROR CORRECTION IN WRITING PROCESS

Cuong Phu Nguyen

Hanoi University of Natural Resources and Environment, Vietnam

Email: phucuongcn2@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

It is obvious that English has become a popular language in many countries in the world. As a means of communication, English guarantees better mutual understanding and has become indispensable for most of people around the world. Thus, it is necessary to find out an appropriate and effective methods of giving feedback to help university students improve their English writing skills. The result of this study indicates that using indirect coded feedback in error correction help students make noticeable progress. The students' positive attitude towards teacher's feedback (indirect coded feedback) means that they enjoyed using error codes to find and correct their errors. Moreover, their confidence was boosted because error codes motivated them.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is widely recognised that teachers' feedback plays important roles in improving students' skills in English language learning. Thus, it is necessary for teachers to find out the suitable methods of error correction to improve students' writing skill in the target language, especially, in English as a second or foreign language (ESL, EFL). If the students receive appropriate feedback, they can make some progress in the process of learning writing. Nevertheless, unlike reading and speaking skills, writing skill requires comprehensive knowledge. Learner-writers need full understanding of different grammar.

As a teacher, I recognize the importance of writing in language teaching and learning. I invest much time and effort in finding out the effective and suitable method to give feedback in order to support students to consolidate their writing skills more efficiently.

Developing and improving students' writing skill accompany handling various situations in writing classes as well. First, teachers should closely examine their teaching situations to provide the appropriate feedback. Secondly, to use feedback in their classrooms, teacher should carefully consider the seating arrangement as well as timely intervention.

In Vietnam, error correction is usually conducted in the traditional ways; for instance, circling or underlying errors, by which students prove to be passive. Moreover, they do not have any chances to demonstrate their creativity and potential to correct error. It is very difficult for learners to memorise the knowledge. They may even feel confused when having many errors underlined and lose their interests in learning. This problem has been discussed with my colleagues in order to propose some solutions to tackle this situation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ashwell, T. (2000) shows that teachers' feedback is indispensable in helping students improve as well as consolidate their writing skills.

Bitchener et al. (2005) also used quantitative methodology to clarify the problems. According to the research of Erel & Bulut (2007), indirect coded feedback is prove to be useful and effective for students in error correction.

Chiang Kwun-Man, K. (2004)'s study entitled "Students' preferences and responses towards teacher's feedback play important part in determining success in second or foreign language" show that effective feedback from teachers play important part in helping students correct their errors.

There are a number of related studies such as Lee, I. (2005) "Students' positive attitudes on error correction can facilitate for both teacher and learner in language learning and teaching" and Bitchener et al. (2005) "Teacher and students should both have mutual understanding about benefits of corrective feedback in language learning and teaching".

Hamouda, A. (2011) states that there should be a mutual interaction of both receiving feedback and giving feedback to provide students and teachers with better understanding, "Timely intervention of teacher is of decisive roles in improving students' writing skill". The time for giving feedback plays essential role in determining success in learning second or foreign language.

Natasha et al. (2011) focused on exploring students' preferences and perception on teacher's feedback. It is stated that students' preferences and perception towards teacher's feedback are necessary for both motivating and

- When water (boil), the liquid (change) to vapour that (be called) steam.
- The grass is still wet. It (rain) last night.
- Two miles (be) enough got her to jog every morning.
- Do you think politics (be) important for everyone?

(ii) Filling in the blanks:

(1) many years people believed that the cleverest animals (2) man were chimpanzees. Now, however, there is proof that dolphins may (3) even cleverer than these big apes. Although a dolphin lives in the (4) it is not a fish. It is a mammal. It is in many ways, therefore, like human being.

(iii) Writing composition: Write a short essay of 200 words about your country.

3.2.2. Questionnaires

A questionnaire was designed to investigate students' attitudes and preferences towards teacher's method of using indirect coded feedback in error correction such as which feedback techniques they preferred and what problems they encountered. Together with the results of the tests, the results of questionnaires, observations and interviews help the teacher-researcher examine the effectiveness of indirect coded feedback. Basically, the teacher have to pay more attention to give relevant suggestions to improve the currently-used feedback giving techniques.

The questionnaire which was given to 30 students of the experimental class consisted of 5 questions relating to students' opinions about indirect coded feedback.

- The first question: (1) *Do you agree with the way your teacher give feedback when correcting writing errors?*

This question aims to find out if the participants agree with the way their teacher gave feedback to their writing errors. This question used a 5-point scales (strong agree, agree, no idea, disagree, strong disagree). This question was designed to investigate the general opinions of students about indirect coded feedback they received.

- The second question: (2) *Which techniques of giving feedback is more effective in helping you improving your writing skill?*

The question used to gather the information of the students' attitudes and preferences of feedback-giving techniques.

- The third question: (3) *What are your opinions on advantages of your teacher's technique of giving feedback used in error correction?*

- The forth question: (4) *What are your opinions on disadvantages of your teacher's technique of giving feedback used in error correction?*

The third question and forth question used to ask participants to give their opinions on disadvantages and advantages of their teacher's giving feedback techniques.

- The fifth question: (5) *What do you comment on the symbols of feedback?*

The question used to collect students' perception of the symbol system of indirect coded feedback.

3.2.3. Interview

Some possible questions to interview students include:

- (1) *How do you often correct your mistakes in the writing process?*
- (2) *What do you think about the teacher's innovation in error correction?*
- (3) *How satisfactory are you about the teacher's indirect coded feedback?*
- (4) *Which do you prefer: the traditional way or the new one?*
- (5) *How effective do you think teacher's method is?*

3.2.4. Observation

Colleagues' observation of the experimental classes.

Three teachers in the same university were invited to observe students' responses as well as activities. They were also asked to list all activities on observation sheets given by the researcher and take notes of students' responses during learning process. These observation sheets were collected and the data was used to find the answer for second research question (What are students' attitudes towards teacher's feedback?).

3.3. Research results

3.3.1. Pre-test and post-test

Results of the pre-test and post-test when applying traditional way of giving direct feedback

There are 4 weak students which accounts for about 14.3% in pre-test. The number of average students is 16, accounting for nearly 57.1% and only 8 students (28.6%) belonging to the category of good students, none of the students got excellent grades from 9-10.

The results of the post-test show that there is some improvement in the traditional class. There are only 2 weak students (7.1%). The percentage of average students reduces from 57.1% in the pre-test to 42.9% in the post-test. The number of good students increases from 28.6% in the pre-test to 39.3% in the post-test. Especially, there are 3 students who get excellent writing grades from 9-10. These results indicate that the students in the traditional class have made some progress. In summary, the results of the pre-test and the post-test as well as the comparison of the number of students in each grade category of each test evidently indicate that the traditional way of error correction could help students make some progress in writing process.

Results of the pre-test and the post-test when applying innovative way of giving indirect feedback

The students in the experimental class are divided into four categories based on their grades of the two tests: Category 1 of weak student (writing grade <5), category 2 of average student (writing grade 5-6), category 3 of good student (writing grade 7-8), category 4 of excellent student (writing grade 9-10). This classification aimed to find out whether there are any changes in the number of students in each category. The numbers of students in each category of the experimental class show remarkable differences from the pre-test to the post-test. Regarding the pre-test, the number of average students is the highest. There are 4 out of 28 students getting bad mark. The percentage of good students in the pre-test is 17.8% (5 of 28 students). No students got excellent marks in the writing pre-test. Nevertheless, the situation with the post-test has changed. The number of students who gained average marks decreases from 19 students (67.9%) in the pre-test to 10 students (35.6%) in the post-test. The number of good students also changes remarkably from 5 students (17.8%) in the pre-test up to 14 students (50%) in the post-test. The number of weak students decrease dramatically from 4 of them in the pre-test to zero in the post-test. There are positive changes in the number of excellent students, in the pre-test the number is zero but in the post-test there are 4 students.

The results of different students' categories in the experimental class reveal positive changes in their writing process from the pre-test to the post-test, which proves that the employment of indirect coded feedback has positive effects on the student's writing skills. Thus, the results have provided a clear answer to the first research question.

3.3.2. Questionnaires

The students' responses to Question 1:

The purpose of question 1 is to obtain the general opinion of the participants (students) on the teacher's indirect coded feedback. The findings showed that most of the students were satisfied with this technique of giving feedback (strongly agree 53.6%; 35.7% agree and only 3.6% no idea and 7.1% disagree of indirect coded feedback). None of them expressed that they strongly disagreed with the teacher's way of giving feedback.

More importantly, most participants (about 85.7%) agreed with the way teacher gave feedback in error correction. Only one had no idea about receiving this correction technique and 3 students disagreed with teacher's indirect coded feedback. Once again, the findings acknowledge the participants' positive attitudes toward the indirect coded feedback-giving method.

The students' responses to Question 2:

With regards to the students' preferences for teacher's different techniques of giving feedback, the findings of question 2 indicate that indirect coded feedback which the teacher-researcher used in their experimental class reached 53.6% (15 participants). The results correlate with the positive responses. None of the participants wanted to skip or highlight the errors only, which means that they want to get feedback from teacher on their errors. 17.9% (5 participants) wanted their teacher to correct their errors directly by underlying or circling their errors and suggest correction in their papers. 25% (7 participants) wanted to have their errors underlined and circled by their teacher. Only one out of 28 participants (3.6%) in the experimental class who received this kind of feedback for writing found it somehow time-consuming and difficult to understand the codes.

Beside some feedback-giving techniques given in the questionnaires, only one student suggested another way of giving feedback. This means that it is necessary for teacher and students to have a meeting to exchange their views on the matter.

The students' responses to Question 3:

With regard to the advantages of the indirect coded feedback in improving students' writing skill, over half of the participants point out that this kind of feedback is useful and practical. Together with the results of the Pre-test and the Post-test mentioned above, 57.1% (16) of the participants stated that this technique help them not only learn actively but also make some progress and memorize the error for long time.

7.1% (2) of 28 participants in the experimental class stated that teacher's feedback helps them memorize the errors and correction in longer time. Only 3 (10.7%) out of 28 participants in the experimental class showed that the technique of giving feedback makes them more active in error correction and confident. 21.4% (6 participants) indicated that they had some chances for finding errors and self-correcting and help them make some progress in error correction. Only one of them had no ideas about teacher's experiment.

The students' responses to the Question 4:

Indirect coded feedback brings about various advantages in helping students improving their writing skill. However, it has some shortcomings. Although 50% (14 participants) have no difficulty with this kind of feedback, 25% (7 participants) in the experimental class complained that it is really confused for them to self-correct the difficult errors when receiving only the indirect coded feedback. Only 3.6% (1 participant) stated that the symbols are difficult to learn by heart. 14.2% (4 participants) in the experimental class stated that the technique of indirect feedback was time-consuming for them to understand the system of symbols in error correction. None of them claimed to have no idea about the teacher's feedback technique in error correction. 7.1% (2 participants) stated that the technique of feedback used in error correction was complicated.

The students' responses to the Question 5:

The final question aims to collect the information of students' opinion on the symbols of indirect coded feedback which the teacher applied during the experiment. Most of participants (67.9% or 19 participants) showed that the symbols are easy to understand. Only 21.4% (6 participants) felt that it is a little confusing for them to understand. Only 2 (7.1%) participants out of 28 participants complained that the system of symbols for error correction is complicated and not easy to understand and remember in the longtime. One of them had no idea about the symbols of indirect feedback.

In summary, more than 50% participants enjoyed receiving this technique and showed their interest in this technique.

3.3.3. Interview

The students' responses and attitudes toward teacher's feedback in group 1:

The results of the interview showed that indirect coded feedback that the teacher applied during the experiment received 5 participants' responses in the group of 7 participants (71.4%). This results illustrate the positive attitudes and correlates with the results of the questionnaire as mentioned above. Only 2 out of 7 participants receiving this kind of feedback showed that they had a little confusion. This means that most of the participants show interests in the innovation by showing positive attitudes during receiving indirect coded feedback.

The students' responses and attitudes toward teacher's feedback in group 2:

With regard to the advantages of the indirect coded feedback to students' writing skill, 6 out of 7 participants (85.7%) expressed that this kind of feedback motivated them to find out their errors by using the system of symbols which given on the first day of class.

The students' responses and attitudes toward teacher's feedback in group 3:

In addition to advantages, the indirect coded feedback still has some shortcomings. 2 out of 7 participants complained that it is really confusing for them to self-correct their errors. Only one out of 7 participants stated that the system of symbols is time-consuming and difficult to remember in longer time.

In summary, the interview results together with the aforementioned advantages of the indirect coded feedback one again demonstrate that indirect coded feedback is evidently effective and appropriate for students to improve their writing skill.

3.3.4. Observation

More than 50% of the students in the experimental class expressed that they enjoyed the new method of giving feedback from teacher for error correction. However, indirect coded feedback has some shortcomings as mentioned above such as the system of symbols was difficult to fully understand and remember; they felt confused to self-correct their errors.

The observation result, together with questionnaire results and interview results, once again demonstrated that using indirect coded feedback was effective and suitable for students to improve their writing skill in the target language.

3.4. Discussion

In the first week for applying the innovative method of giving feedback, there was some obstacle in introducing the symbol system to students. Some students felt surprised at the symbol system which was presented by teacher.

Traditionally, error correction in Vietnam is usually conducted with teachers often correct students' errors directly. By this way, students only correct the errors underlined or circled by teachers, which tend to be discouraging to students. My concern is finding out the appropriate and effective method for students to improve the accuracy in their subsequent writing papers.

In Vietnamese context, students rarely have good compositions at the first time of practice when learning English writing skill. Often, teachers cannot correct all students' errors because of the great workload of error correction for many students under time limitation. Each teacher has their own different methods for error correction in their writing classes. Until now, traditional way is being used for error correction. Similar to my situation, students do not take initiative to correct their own errors actively. They go to class with the belief that their errors will be discovered and corrected by teachers.

As a teacher, it is always one of my concerns to find out the better techniques for error correction for students to improve their writing skill. So I pay more attention to this technique (indirect coded feedback) instead of using traditional way in error correcting.

The purpose of my study was to investigate how effective indirect coded feedback is and difficulties I encountered during the implementation of the new method. The findings indicated that indirect coded feedback is useful for more than 50% students in the process of error correction. According to the results of observation and pre-test and post-tests, questionnaire, interview as mentioned above, indirect coded feedback created more chances for students to correct errors themselves.

When applying indirect coded feedback in error correction, the students spent 15 minutes understanding the meaning of error codes written on the board for the first two days. For examples: GR - Grammar; WO - Word order; SP - Spelling.

After that, the students copied error codes down many times, so as to get used to using the symbol system of error codes and were encouraged to find errors through symbol system and received my compliment. This made the students happy when applying indirect coded feedback in error correction.

It is obviously that more than 50% of the students in the experimental class paid more attention to the error correction activities. The results of my study also showed that students were interested in my feedback (indirect coded feedback). The results from the interviews also indicated that the students liked to use errors codes which created chances for them to find and self-correct the errors. They took the initiative to find their errors through symbols given from teacher's feedback.

Using indirect coded feedback is my choice. Indirect coded feedback should be improved and applied in my university in particular, other universities in Vietnam in general.

One thing that made students curious and interested in my feedback (indirect coded feedback) is that class activities in the process of error correction were designed by using error codes which copied down many times by students to help the students remember symbol system better. From the data analyzed in my research, it is obvious that indirect coded feedback may actually be an effective way to encourage and motivate students to improve their writing skill.

Thanks to clear, well-explained rules mentioned above, students worked attentively and were excited to take part in error correction activities in class.

The study employs indirect coded feedback in error correction, which kept more than 50% students from being bored during error correction, because they took the initiative to find errors instead of correcting error circled and underlined from teacher and expressed by their attention and attitudes.

In contrast, some students did not agree with teacher's method of giving feedback (indirect coded feedback). They felt confused when using error codes in the process of error correction. Another problem was that students are used to traditional way which made them lazy in finding errors and passive in error correction. One more reason is that they found the symbol system complicated and did not pay enough attention in their writing lessons. Sometimes, they kept silent and fell asleep. From the results of questionnaire and interview, I realized that they did not want to use indirect coded feedback in error correction because they were affected by using traditional way to correct errors. They only correct errors circled and underlined by teacher. In addition, they did not spend time finding errors, considered error codes to be time-consuming, difficult to learn by heart. This is a challenge during the implementation of the innovation. Once again, 5 weeks was quite short for students to realize their improvement in using indirect coded feedback by error correction.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Writing is a fundamental skill for foreign language students (EFL, ESL), actually one of most challenging skills for both teacher and students. So finding effective and appropriate ways to improve students' writing skill is of essential roles. It was indicated from the results of data analysis that more than 50% the students had positive attitudes towards indirect coded feedback. They were excited by using error codes in finding and correcting errors. More than half of students paid more attention during the experiment. When they got to know the meanings of error codes, their interests were expressed through their happy and attentive faces.

In addition, they were attentive when studying the symbol system explained by teacher in order to understand the meaning of error codes. They found it interesting because they could find their errors through the error codes by themselves. So the students could take the initiative to find and correct their own errors. This help the students be confident and excited in the process of using indirect coded feedback for error correction. The error codes assisted them. More than 50% the students showed their positive attitudes in taking part in the class activities such as they tried to copy error codes down many times to remember better.

However, some students were not interested in using indirect coded feedback for error correction. This was indicated through their expressionless faces and their hesitation to take part in error correction activities when being asked by teacher. Students did not pay as much attention as they should.

During the implementation of my study, there are some difficulties such as some students have been expressionless, limited time for full understanding of the error codes, both teacher and student must bear in mind is that they must know, understand what the codes mean, and get accustomed to them. Otherwise chaos may occur due to the misinterpretation of the symbol system. The time of experiment was quite short for students to recognise their improvement.

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