



The Use of *Indirect Corrective Feedback* to Eliminate the Grammatical Errors in Students' Writing

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Abstract

This study aims to determine how the benefits of Indirect Corrective Feedback to improve students' ability in reducing the grammatical errors in their writings. To answer the formulation of this problem, the researcher used a descriptive qualitative design. The study included nine students of English Education Department, batch 2012 as participants. The research data was obtained from the student writings of a descriptive paragraph. The student writings were then analyzed to prove how Indirect Corrective Feedback is used during the study. The results of this study indicate that the number of grammatical errors of all participants decreased after they received the Indirect Corrective Feedback from the lecturer.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing paragraph, at college or university level, is one of the primary courses that students should take. It is a beginning stage leading them to compose an academic writing, after learning a basic writing skill in previous semester. In the university where the researcher teaches, Unsika (Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang), this course is divided into two stages under the name Writing in Professional Context I and Writing in Professional Context II. As it is stated in the writing syllabus of Unsika, in Writing Professional Context I, put in second semester, the students will learn what the things should be included in paragraph, such as topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence; how to reach and maintain coherence and unity; and how to completely and clearly express their ideas. Moreover, in Writing Professional Context II, which is put in third semester, they will learn further about paragraph and gain knowledge of several

paragraph genres such as narration, description, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, classification etc. In short, throughout the two semesters the students will learn how to make a well-developed paragraph in those various types.

Teaching paragraph writing to students of English as a Foreign language whether in first or second stage, based on the writer's experience, was not an effortless thing to do. She was confronted with various problems. Most students, taking this course, psychologically tended to be anxious in learning paragraph writing. They did not enjoy the class because they thought that writing is very difficult, especially when in starting to write. They worried too much on the topic to be developed, what sentence look like is in the beginning of a paragraph, and what is the next sentence to continue writing. As a result, they got many troubles even it is just to write a single piece of paper.

Moreover, the students taking writing paragraph course technically also lack of knowledge dealing with basic writing skills, e.g. grammar. The writer discovered a variety of language errors that she has found in grading students' works. For example, the students often do not choose the correct English verb tense for expressing an idea or do not use it in its correct form. They also fail to use the articles and prepositions correctly, use adjectives instead of adverbs, shift from one person to another, or place words in the wrong order in a sentence. This writer's experience is then supported by the result of an unpublished research conducted by Wigati (2003), at Unsika, addressing the students' problems in writing. The findings show that the respondents were faced mainly with the lack of vocabulary and the lack of capability in operating the English grammar. The following are types of errors in grammar met by the respondents: incorrect verb tense, verb incorrect formed, incorrect sentence structure, incorrect or awkward word order, incorrect formation or use of passive, unclear message, incorrect subject-verb agreement, incorrect or missing article, problem with singular or plural of a noun, wrong word choice, including prepositions.

In EFL context, it is a common thing for students to commit grammatical errors with assumption that using good grammar may be much more difficult for them than those who have been speaking English since childhood because their native sentence structure and grammatical rules are different from the English language. However, if it is disregarded and left unsolved, the students may not be able to communicate their message properly, and they may not be competent to

produce a good writing. What is more, these students had also previously enrolled in grammar course that boost up their knowledge about the English language rules. The researcher assumes that in their level, the students should not encounter the writing block shown above. It further indicates that it will be very much hard to faculty to have students with the proficiency to write comprehensible and error-free English language text as it is expected in the objectives of the courses.

Therefore, to overcome the problems found in writing paragraph class or at least to diminish the toughness of teaching writing described above, the lecturers are required to make a significant contribution to successful learning that is through setting up him/herself as a feedback provider. Feedback, as Merrill (2002: 99) points out, has been long acknowledged as the most essential form of learner guidance. It provides them with information about what is good and what needs to be improved in their revisions and in the final product of their writing.

When a teacher performs as a feedback provider, indirect corrective feedback could be one that he or she can choose to offer useful feedback. Ellis points out that "indirect corrective feedback is when the teacher indicates and locates the problem using underlining or other markers, but does not give the correct form. Indirect corrective feedback could also be used with indication only then only indicating in the margin that one or more errors have occurred". There is research evidence suggesting that students who receive indirect feedback outperform students in a direct correction group. That is because it engages them in guided learning and problem solving leading them to reflection about linguistic form (cited in Chandler, 2003).

The present study then attempts to investigate the potential effectiveness of indirect corrective feedback in reducing grammatical errors on students' essay writing.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Widdowson in Harris (1993) states writing is "the act of making up correct sentences and transmitting them through the visual medium as mark on paper". It is supported by Hamp-Lyons and Kroll (in Ishak and Mulyanah, 2017) state that writing is an act that takes places within a context, that accomplishes a particular purpose, and that is appropriately shaped for its intended audience. Moreover, Pennington (1995) views writing as "a thinking process in the sense that one writes

to externalize one's thought, both as a way to express those thoughts to others." Put these definitions in familiar words, writing is the skill to express ideas, thought, feelings to other people in written symbols to make other people or readers understand the ideas conveyed.

In language learning context, writing serves two important roles. As asserted by Rao (2002), first, it motivates students' thinking, organizing ideas, developing their ability to summarize, analyze, and criticize. Second, it strengthens students' learning, thinking, and reflecting on the English language.

Besides having the important roles, writing on the other hand is also seen as a demanding task. Richards and Renandya (2002) confirm that the skills in writing are highly complex and therefore L2 writers need to be proficient in a variety of skills in order to write effectively. In particular, they have to pay attention to the "higher level skills of planning and organizing as well as the lower skills of spelling, punctuation, word choice, and so on". Also Richards and Renandya (2002) surmised if their language proficiency were weak, L2 writers would encounter great difficulty in writing.

It is the teachers' duty to help their students cope with obstacles in the learning process. Hawthorne and Jesson suggested that providing feedback is one of the efforts the researcher made to solve the problem of learning writing. According to Kepner (1991) feedback is "Any procedures used to inform a learner whether an instructional response is right or wrong". Similarly, Ur (1996) describes feedback as "information that is given to the learner about his/her performance of the learning task, usually with the objective of improving their performance." Thus, it can be concluded that feedback is provided to ask for further information, give directions, suggestions or requests for revision, to provide students with information that will help them revise and also to provide positive feedback about what has been done by students.

There are many types of feedback that can be implemented in writing class. As Ellis (2009) stated in "A Typology of Written Corrective Feedback Types", feedback may take the forms of direct corrective feedback, indirect corrective feedback, metalinguistic corrective feedback, the focus of the feedback, electronic feedback, and reformulation written corrective feedback, as we can see in the following table.

Type of CF	Description	Studies
A Strategies for providing CF		
1 Direct CF	The teacher provides the student with the correct form.	e.g. Lalande (1982) and Robb <i>et al.</i> (1986).
2 Indirect CF	The teacher indicates that an error exists but does not provide the correction.	Various studies have employed indirect correction of this kind (e.g. Ferris and Roberts 2001; Chandler 2003). Fewer studies have employed this method (e.g. Robb <i>et al.</i> 1986).
a Indicating + locating the error	This takes the form of underlining and use of cursors to show omissions in the student's text.	
b Indication only	This takes the form of an indication in the margin that an error or errors have taken place in a line of text.	
3 Metalinguistic CF	The teacher provides some kind of metalinguistic clue as to the nature of the error.	Various studies have examined the effects of using error codes (e.g. Lalande 1982; Ferris and Roberts 2001; Chandler 2003). Sheen (2007) compared the effects of direct CF and direct CF + metalinguistic CF.
a Use of error code	Teacher writes codes in the margin (e.g. ww = wrong word; art = article).	
b Brief grammatical descriptions	Teacher numbers errors in text and writes a grammatical description for each numbered error at the bottom of the text.	
4 The focus of the feedback	This concerns whether the teacher attempts to correct all (or most) of the students' errors or selects one or two specific types of errors to correct. This distinction can be applied to each of the above options.	Most studies have investigated unfocused CF (e.g. Chandler 2003; Ferris 2006). Sheen (2007), drawing on traditions in SLA studies of CF, investigated focused CF.
a Unfocused CF	Unfocused CF is extensive.	
b Focused CF	Focused CF is intensive.	
5 Electronic feedback	The teacher indicates an error and provides a hyperlink to a concordance file that provides examples of correct usage.	Milton (2006).
6 Reformulation	This consists of a native speaker's reworking of the students' entire text to make the language seem as native-like as possible while keeping the content of the original intact.	Sachs and Polio (2007) compared the effects of direct correction and reformulation on students' revisions of their text.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is a descriptive study. The researcher involved nine students of third semester taking writing subjects. Determination of the subjects in this study is based on a purposive sampling technique in which the study was not conducted on the entire population, but focused on the target. The data for this study were collected from the Students' Writing Assignments which went through several steps. To start with, each of the students participating in this study was asked to perform a two-day sequence of composition writing and revision to investigate the students' ability to revise their writing accurately. On the first day of the two-day sequence, students were required to write a composition based on given prompts. After the students submit their writings, the teacher-researcher put indications for error correction on the students' work. On the second day, the researcher gave the

corrected essay back to the students and asked them to find out the differences between their writing and the corrected version, and they were instructed to revise their original version. Both the original versions and the revisions were then collected. The frequency of the types of errors on the first draft and the final draft were compared to investigate how successful error correction is.

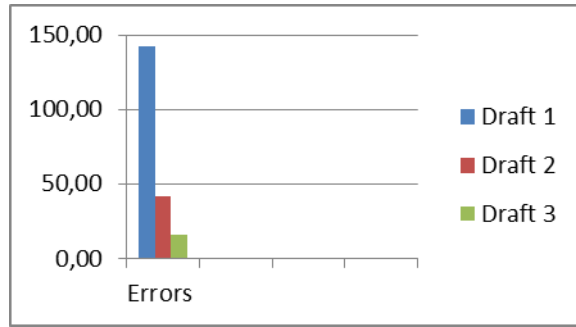
As it is stated previously, after students perform writing prompt, the teacher-researcher analyzed the students work by comparing the original versions and the revisions to see the grammatical error frequencies that the student commit before and after receiving the indirect corrective feedback which is believed to provide the necessary information about their writing ability and how successful error correction was. The calculation of grammatical frequency error follows error-frequency ratios based on a rubric set earlier. Since, this study focused only on grammatical competency of the students, analytic scoring which makes separate judgment about the students' writing performance of various components (for example, organization, spelling, grammar, etc.) was used for this purpose.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This study attempts to investigate how useful is indirect corrective feedback to enhance students' ability in eliminating the grammatical errors in their writing. To make it clearer, it is to find out whether or not there is any difference in the number of errors between the original paragraph and the corrected paragraph using indirect corrective feedback.

The followings are the steps that a researcher underwent to get the data. First, the researcher counted the number of verb, noun, and article errors of the first and second paragraph. Next, the researcher enter this data into Microsoft excel to ease the calculation. Afterward, the results of each sequence were analyzed to prove whether or not there is any difference in the number of errors between the original paragraph and the corrected paragraph using indirect corrective feedback. From the calculation, it was obtained that in first draft, the students made 142 errors. After receiving the feedback, it was found that the students made 42 errors. On second revision, it was gained that the students committed only 16 inaccuracies. To give a clearer description of the results, consider the chart below.

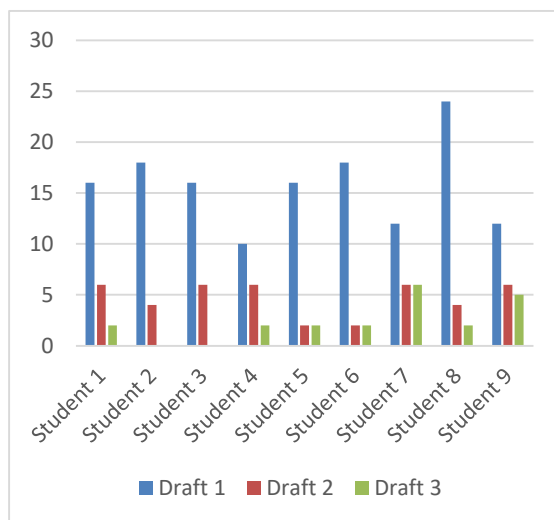
Chart 1: Number of all students' errors



The chart above shows the number of errors made by students in their writing in every draft. In the first draft, we can see that the number of errors made by students is quite high, if presented, the average error for each student reaches 15,7%. These errors include errors in the use of verbs, nouns, tenses, and articles. In the second draft, the number of errors decreased significantly. If presented, the average error for each student reaches 4,6%. This means that there is a reduction of error of 11,1%. Grammatical mistakes that are still found in this second draft were more on the use of tenses. Furthermore, in the third draft the number of errors made by students was reduced. The average error for each student reaches 2,3%. As in the previous draft, tenses still dominate the error.

As presented earlier that there are three drafts in this study. The first draft is the original writings of students before they receive indirect corrective feedback. The second draft is the draft revised after the students received the first indirect corrective feedback. Furthermore, the third draft is the final draft of the students after they receive the second indirect corrective feedback from the lecturer. Below are the results of the analysis of errors made by students in each of the draft.

Chart 2: Number of each student's errors



The analysis of the students' paragraph revealed that all participants had a decrease in the number of errors in immediate revised texts after receiving indirect corrective feedback from the lecturer. The participants reduce their errors by 70,42% in their second draft, and 57,14% in their third draft, following from the indirect corrective feedback. Moreover, the results of data calculation above also indicated that the number of errors on grammatical items focused in this study from the first draft through third draft is consistence. In this study, the percentage of error reduction can be interpreted as the percentage of improvement in accuracy on the observed grammatical items.

From the percentage above, it can be stated that there is a major differences in errors number between the students' original written product and the corrected paragraph using indirect corrective feedback. From these results, it can be inferred that the provision of indirect corrective feedback in this study was effective in reducing grammatical errors in subsequent revised drafts.

These findings are in line with the findings of several previous studies. Lalande (1982) separated the students learning German as a foreign language into four groups receiving different treatments. The first two groups were treated with direct correction to correct their errors, and another two groups were given error codes or indirect metalinguistic WCF. During the semester, the students were asked to write essays three times and then asked them to revise the errors using the given feedback. Based on an essay written at the end of the semester, the researcher concluded that the groups that have been corrected using indirect written corrective feedback write more accurately compared to the group with direct correction. In other words, the study shows that students who receive indirect feedback outperform students in a direct correction group. Moreover, Erel and Bulut (2007) from a Turkish University conducted a research to investigate the possible effects of two types of feedback relating to accuracy in writing. There were 37 students enrolling in this study. 16 students received direct feedback, i.e., the correct form is written on student's paper, the other group, consisting of 21 students, received indirect coded feedback, i.e., a symbol representing a specific kind of error is used for the indication of the error. The results of the study revealed that the indirect coded feedback group committed fewer errors than the direct feedback group for the whole semester.

That is because indirect corrective feedback, as Chandler stated in Gandhi

and Maghsoudi (2014) "engages them in guided learning and problem solving leading them to reflection about linguistic form." It means that the students were able to identify the various types of errors and respond to the teacher's feedback by incorporating teacher's feedback in the next writing and by implementing language rules they learned from the teacher's feedback. It therefore increases students' engagement and attention to forms and allow them to problem-solve which many researchers agree to be beneficial for long term learning improvement (Ferris, 2003a; Lalande, 1982).

Furthermore, Ferris in Gandhi and Maghsoudi (2014) adds that "students benefit more from indirect corrective feedback because they have to engage in a more profound form of language processing as they are self-editing their output." It is indicating that the indirect corrective feedback leads the students to become autonomous learners. This suggests that without the involvement of students in the process of correction, satisfactory results will not be achieved. The results of this study puts emphasis on the role of indirect corrective feedback along with the contributions of students as quoted in Sivaji (2012) that indirect corrective feedback "induces the learner to become autonomous and responsible for their learning process.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on research data obtained through the administration of the test to the subject of research, which is then analyzed to look for the number of errors in each draft, the results of this study indicate that the number of grammatical errors all participants decreased. Thus, it can be concluded that this feedback - providing feedback by indicating an error without providing the correct - was effective in reducing grammatical errors in subsequent revised drafts.

To provide more accurate data, it is advisable in future research to expand the scope of research and extend the time of the study, which will provide an overview of the implementation of indirect corrective feedback in the long term.

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