

## Types and Frequencies of Written Corrective Feedbacks in Adult ESL Classroom

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### ABSTRACT

Feedbacks have been seen as an effective way to help language learners acquire second language competence. This study aims to find out how the written corrective feedback (CF) has been used in the adult ESL classroom. In this study, the data were generated through the learner's writing. Then the data were put into direct, coded and uncoded type of the written corrective feedback. In addition, those types of feedback were categorized into content and form category to find the scope of the written corrective feedback. As the result, the direct written corrective feedback was mostly used by the teachers. Interestingly, the teachers only used the uncoded written corrective feedback when it refers to the content of the writing. Besides, the dynamic corrective feedbacks that occur several times can be a proof that the teachers not only focus on the form the writing but also the content.

Keywords: *written corrective feedback, ESL*

### INTRODUCTION

Speaking and writing have been often valued as a way to assess ability in mastering a language. Still, writing has been considered as the most difficult skill to master (Hartshorn, et al., 2010). Many second language learners have their "hard" time in writing. They struggle to produce writing that is linguistically correct and accurate. It seems that having adequate knowledge of lexical and grammatical components of the second language (L2) are not enough. Tangmpermpoon (2008) reason that writing require the L2 learners to have a certain amount of L2 background knowledge about the rhetorical organizations, appropriate language use or specific lexicon with which they want to communicate to their readers. Therefore, a successful writing may require the writer to not only master the grammatical component

of L2 but also be able to demonstrate the proper use of the lexis in the right context.

Despite the fact that producing a good writing is not easy, there is a way to achieve successful writing. Hyland (2006) states that successful writing requires an awareness of the importance of cognitive and motivational factor. It implies that teachers have their own role in assisting learners in the process of producing a good piece of writing. The teachers should be able to provide an effective and constructive corrective written feedback to their learners' writing. Hopefully, the quality of the learners' writing can be improved through the written corrective feedbacks (CF) and also revising processes. However, Truscott (1966) reviewing on written CF studies ends up with a controversial conclusion that CF is ineffective and even harmful in promoting

L2 acquisition. As one of the counter arguments, Ellis (2008) argues that CF has been acknowledged as one of the central element in the classroom discourse. He even claims that the CF has a vital role to supports the interaction in the classroom.

Mi-mi (2009) defines written CF as any indication to the learners that their language use is incorrect. It is supported by Suzuki (2003) that claims written CF as the provision of negative evidence which encourages learners' repair involving accuracy and precision. Conversely, the negative evidence that show the L2 learners' weakness or errors should be seen in a "positive" view. It actually indicates that the acquisition of the second language acquisition is on process (Tavakoli, 2012). Besides, the negative evidence or a situation where the learners made mistake is required to trigger teachers' response in a form of CF (Suzuki, 2003). Hopefully, the CF from the teachers can help the learners to acquire the L2 by helping them to overcome their negative evidences.

Interestingly, written CF can also have a negative impact on subsequent motivation and performance of the L2 learners. Kernis, et al. (1989) claims that these particular situations happened if the learners have only been experiencing negative feedbacks. This statement is supported by Van-Dijk & Kluger (2000) that state a positive written CF should be also addressed to the learners for it demonstrates an increase of learners' motivation instead of the negative feedback. They continue that positive feedback should give an impression that the learners "want to" achieve the goal instead of "have to do" (Van-Dijk & Kluger, 2000). Therefore, the written CF given to the learners should not only focus on the learners' errors but it is also expected to enhance the learners' motivation. The

learner's motivation is important to push them naturally to engage in error correction strategies following error detection. It may also motivate them to continue pursuing the goal or reducing the gap between current knowledge and the goal.

Regarding to the benefits of giving the written CF, researches on written CF have been conducted and published several times. Bitchener (2012) claims that written corrective feedback (CF) on the learners' writing is necessary. He also adds that most second language teachers' goal is to foster their learners to be able to communicate with their L2 (second language). Nevertheless, the question about what is the best type of written CF that the teachers should give to the learners is not yet answered. Although there are several types of written CF, Hyland (1998) notes that "good feedback can only really be defined with reference to the individual writers, their problems, and their reasons for writing" (p. 2). Therefore, this study intends to find how to use different types of written CF effectively by examining the pattern of each type of feedback. In order to do that, this study aim to answer these research questions: (1) What are the different types of written corrective feedback and their distribution in adult ESL classrooms? (2) What type of learner errors leads to what types of corrective feedback?

This study does not intend to present a model of correcting learners' writing nor give impression that a single type of written CF is perfect compare to the other types. Yet, it intends to help the teacher, especially writing teacher, to be able to give of a 'good' written CF to their learners. By showing the distribution or how a teacher treats each type of error differently, the reader can actually learn from the other teachers' experience. Besides, they can also

learn how to read the situation for a “good” written CF should be able to help the learners’ to solve the problem. The distribution of the different type of written CF will give an illustration how each type of written CF is used in the classroom. Expectedly, it will also give an insight to the reader to conduct a further research related to this issue.

### **FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE TEACHER IN DETERMINING WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACKS**

Though the written corrective feedback has been a main topic of several discussions in this millennium era, (Suzuki, 2003; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Tangmpermpoon, 2008; Ellis, 2008; Bitchener, 2012) there are still argumentations on assessing the effectiveness of written corrective feedback (Brown 2012). As a L2 teacher, I often find myself in confusion when I need to give the most appropriate corrective feedback to my students. However, Brown (2012) has described two factors that might influence second language teachers in determining the written CF.

#### **1. Explicitness of Feedback**

Explicitness refers to how feedback draws the learners to notice the location or nature of error (Brown, 2012). Ellis (2008) also adds that learners like to be corrected if the feedback is explicit. From the learners’ point of view, the explicit feedback will help them to know directly what they have to do, therefore it is also called as a direct feedback. In addition, the learners’ miscorrection can be avoided through the explicit feedback. Sheen (2007) proves that direct correction is more superior to other types of indirect correction in producing more accurate writing.

On the other side, the indirect CF also brings benefit to the learners. The indirect CF is believed as a medium to push the learner to engage in the hypothesis testing (Bitchener, 2012). It is possible since the teacher only marks the location of the error. The correction part is intended to the learners. So, it requires their analytical skill to recognize the error and give the correct answer. By doing the correction by themselves, learner will experience and actually know what they have to do. In addition, Ferris (2010) believed that the indirect CF will also help the learners to monitor their writing autonomously.

#### **2. Scope of Feedback**

Scope refers to the number and type of errors that are addressed (Brown, 2012). An effective feedback can be focused on a particular error or a comprehensive approach. Sheen (2007) finds out that written CF that improves grammatical accuracy in future writings is typically focused on a single grammatical feature. In this case, the teachers can set the priority areas that they want to focus. This approach suits well with the coded system in the writing (Brown, 2012). The particular code will only be used to refer to particular error. As long as it’s manageable, it will not lead the learners to confusion.

However, the focused approach may have limited in the L2 classroom where the learners need to deal with various language features. In this respect, Hartshorn, et al. (2010) introduced what is called as dynamic CF. They argued that written CF should not only focus on the form or grammatical aspects since it will not help the learners to produce writing that is linguistically correct and accurate. They also claim that dynamic CF is comprehensive but manageable, timely and

constant. Hence, this approach will enable the teacher to return learners' work quickly.

Kim & Kim (2005) conducted a similar study about the scope of feedback in writing classes in Korean. They found that the teachers examined three factors from the learners; writing, which were: form, content and writing style. The finding of their study indicated that the teachers did not only focus on the linguistic aspect which refers to the form but also on the content and the writing style (Kim & Kim, 2005) The other finding also indicated that the learners expected feedback from their teacher since it generally helps them to improve their writing.

## **TYPES OF WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK**

In one of the earliest study, Rob et al. (1986) examined the writing of EFL learners in Japan. The study was conducted over one academic year to see if four different types of written CF produce more positive effect than others. There were four methods of written CF that they examined, which were:

### **1. Direct correction**

The direct correction is the most explicit feedback design. It will not only indicate the location of error but also provide the correct answer. In addition, Ellis (2008) stated that this type of feedback raises the interaction of the learners in the class. The other researchers also found it beneficial for the learners since it improves the control of the language since it will not lead the learner to a miscorrection.

### **2. Coded feedback**

The coded feedback is less explicit compared to the pervious type of feedback. The code will function to mark the location

of the error and elicit the error to the learners, yet the correct answer of the error will not be provided. The other way to do it is by giving the clue to the learners in order to help them correcting their error. Therefore, the learners will have to correct it by their self. Brown (2012) defined it as the combination of the direct and indirect feedback. However, he also added that the codes/clue should be manageable to not lead the learners to confusion.

### **3. Uncoded feedback**

In this type of feedback, the teachers will only mark the location of the error without any elicitation. The marking is usually done by highlighting the error (Sheen, 2007). Then, the learners are expected to be able to analyse the error that they made since no clue will be provided.

### **4. Marginal**

The teachers will write the total number of errors that the learners made on their paper. There will not be any clue to help the learners to correct their error nor any mark to locate the error. The learners are required to read and analyse their overall writing and revised it. Though it might be more challenging compared to the other types of feedback, it is believed that this kind of feedback will improve the control of the language since the learners are expected to autonomously do correction. Besides, the teacher can quickly return the papers to the learners.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The data were generated through the learners' writing to answer the research questions. Learners who are taking the writing class have to produce English writing. Since they are still learning English as their foreign language, they might need to revise their writing. This situation gave

the opportunity to gather the written CF gave by their teachers. However, the quality of the writing will not be examined. This paper will only examine the feedback that the lecturers gave on their writing.

### Participants

Ten writings were randomly taken from the adult ESL classes. All of the writings were written by learners who sit on the respective English language classes. English was their foreign language and all of them are Indonesians. Those writings were purposively selected from English language classes for their writing always got feedback from lecturers who are competent in teaching English language. All names mentioned in this study are pseudonyms.

### Data Analysis Procedure

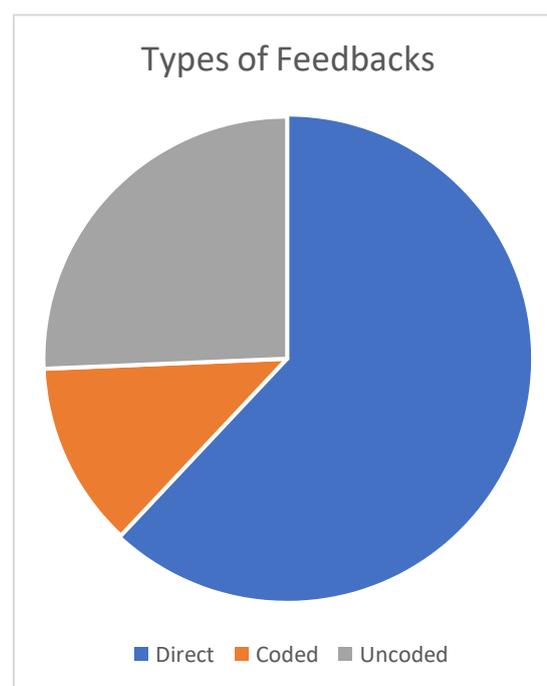
This research aims to investigate the types and frequencies of written corrective feedbacks in adult ESL classroom. As the initial steps, all of the feedbacks that have been gathered will be categorized into types of feedback that are frequently used by the teachers. These procedures were adapted from Panova & Lyster (2002). Different from what they have done, this study is specifically focus on the written corrective feedback. All of the written CF were counted and categorized based on the type of feedback that has been proposed by Rob et al. (1986). Those categories were: 1) direct feedback, 2) coded feedback, 3) uncoded feedback and 4) marginal.

In order to answer the second research question, the types of the written corrective feedback were analysed deeper. Each type of the feedback was categorized into specific error that they have been made. In order to do that, each of the type of written CF was examined and categorized into two different scopes. The scopes of the error are

“form” and “content”. As the final result, the data representation will be described in the descriptive form.

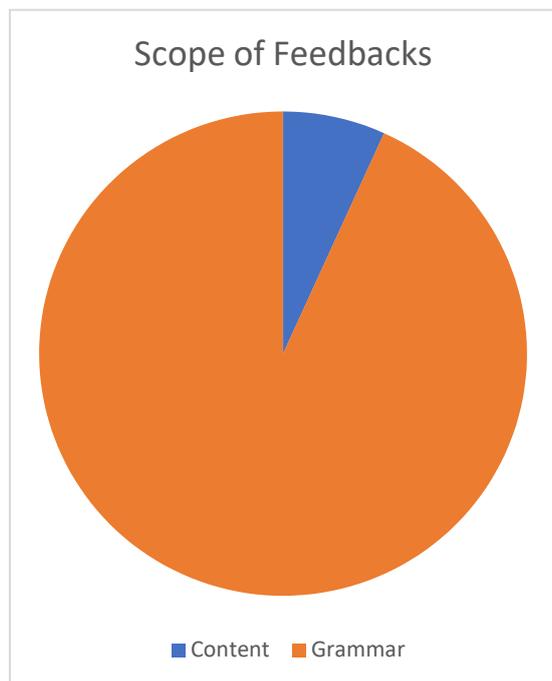
### FINDINGS

The distribution of Written Corrective Feedback.



The chart has shown that the direct feedback was the most dominant written CF in the classroom. With the number of 70 out of 103 written CF, the total number of direct feedback was beyond the other types. The number of the uncoded feedback was 29, while the coded/clue feedback's number was 14. Interestingly, the marginal feedback was not found in the data.

### The Scope of Feedback



The result has shown that the feedbacks were not only focused on the form but also on the content of the paper. With the number of 7 feedbacks, the content has got attention from the teacher. However, the feedback on the form or grammatical aspect were dominated the scope of feedback greatly. Its number was 96 feedbacks. There were possible factors why the feedback of content was lesser than the form. First, there were a lot of grammatical aspects that could be checked and corrected. Second, the content of the writing might be seen as learners' 'personal area', therefore the teacher might only need to help them with the content a little bit and focus more on their grammatical errors.

### ANALYSIS

This study aimed to find the types and frequencies of written corrective feedbacks in adult ESL classroom. There were two research questions in this study: 1). what are the different types of written corrective feedback and their distribution in adult ESL classrooms? 2). what type of learner errors

lead to what types of corrective feedback? In order answer those questions, the type of written corrective feedbacks that occurred in the learners' writing were observed and analysed. Then, the frequencies of each type of corrective feedback was also observed. After that, each feedback was investigated to state its scope to determine whether the written corrective feedback was directed to correct the form or content of the writing.

In answering the first research question, the findings show that there were three types of written corrective feedback that were found from the data, which were: direct, coded/clue and uncoded feedbacks. The finding showed that all of these types of feedback could be used to correct the form errors. Yet, the direct written corrective feedback is the most favourable type of written corrective feedback.

In answering the second research question, the findings indicated that the teachers consider either the content or the form of the writing as the scope that need to be improved. Interestingly, the teachers were only used one type of feedback, which was the uncoded feedback, in correcting/commenting the content. Though the amount of direct written CF was beyond the coded or uncoded written CF, none was used in commenting the content. However, all of the three types of written CF were used for correcting the form of writing.

In addition, the positive feedback always occurred together with the uncoded feedback. Fascinatingly, it only occurred when a feedback that focuses on the content was given. In addition, the dynamic written CF also occurred. On those writings, the teachers gave feedback in both of the content and form in writing. Furthermore,

they mostly chose uncoded written CF in giving the dynamic written CF.

## CONCLUSION

This study was adapted from Lyster and Ranta's (1997) yet, the goal and data of this study were different. This study focused on the distribution written corrective feedback, not the relationship of type of the corrective feedback and the learners' uptake. Hopefully, the result of the study can help the teachers, especially the new writing teachers, to select and consider the type of written corrective feedback for their classes. Besides, the result of this study indicates that further research can be conducted to improve the research about written corrective feedback.

With regard to the limitation of this study, firstly, the small number of uncoded feedbacks found in this study should be noted. As the indirect feedback is believed as an effective tool to help the learners to learn the language better than the direct feedback, it is not right to say that the uncoded feedback is probably not effective. A further research to find the relationship between type of feedback and the uptake in this context needs to be conducted. Secondly, the teachers' instruction might have effected on the choice of the type of written corrective feedback. Hence, a further study needs to consider it as one of the aspect.

However, the result of this study was unique in several aspects. First, the direct written corrective feedback numbers is way beyond the others feedback. Although it might take more time to do the correction, teachers prefer to use it compare the other type of feedback. Second, in term of giving correction on the content of the writing, the indirect feedback was the only type that has always been used, not the direct feedback.

Third, the dynamic feedbacks also occurred in the learners' paper. It may indicate that the teachers spent more time to help their learners to produce a piece of writing that linguistically correct and accurate.

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