Learner Attitudes and Effectiveness of Coded Feedback in Second Language Writing

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Abstract

This study aims to address three issues: (a) the short- and long-term effectiveness of CF provided through editing symbols; (b) how L2 learners react to different types of errors marked via editing symbols; (c) association between learners' attitudes towards accuracy and form-focused feedback and their short- and long-term gains in written accuracy. Data were collected from forty Level 5 students in the Program of Intensive English over a fifteen-week semester. Students wrote three argumentative essays with two drafts for each. Unfocused language feedback was provided to students' draft 1s using editing symbols. They were then asked to correct the marked errors with the help of the Table of Error Correction Codes developed by the researcher. Besides, upon the completion of the three writing tasks, an attitude questionnaire was given to participants to gauge their attitudes towards accuracy in English academic writing and form-focused feedback. Data will be analyzed to test a series of hypotheses: a) there will be a significant decrease in error rates (total number of errors per 100 words) in the revised drafts; b) there will be a significant decrease in error rates in the long run from the first to the third essay; c) rule-governed errors (e.g., articles, propositions, word forms) are more amenable to CF than idiosyncratic errors (e.g., word choices, sentence structures), and d) learners' attitudes towards accuracy and formal feedback has a significant relationship with their revision success and long-term improvement in linguistic accuracy. Findings from this study will inform L2 writing teachers with respect to their decisions on providing effective and efficient CF to students.

Key words: error correction codes, target linguistic feature, learner attitudes

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Background

The role played by form-focused feedback (CF) in developing L2 learners' linguistic accuracy has been a hotly debated topic among practitioners and researchers during the past forty years. However, so far little consensus has been reached due to different perspectives taken by researchers (mainly SLA and L2 writing scholars) and complexity of the issue itself (involving multiple interwoven variables). A number of recent review papers call for more empirical studies to address a) the potential impacts of moderating factors, particularly learners' individual differences (e.g., Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Rahimi, 2014), b) unfocused CF that more truthfully mirrors classroom practice (e.g., Truscott & Hsu, 2008; Van Beunigen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2008, 2012); and c) long-term development in L2 written accuracy as opposed to revision only (Ferris, 2004; van Beuningen, 2010).

Research Questions

In light of the above-mentioned suggestions, the current research aims to answer the following four research questions:

1. Are editing symbols effective in helping L2 writers to reduce error rates in immediate revision?

2. Are editing symbols effective in facilitating L2 writers to develop linguistic accuracy in the long run?

3. Are certain types of errors more amenable to feedback provided via editing symbols than others?

4. Is there an association between L2 writers' attitudes towards accuracy and form-focused

feedback and their gains in the short- and long-term development of written accuracy?

Methods

Data were collected from Level 5 Writers' Workshop (5A, B, and C) in the Program of

Intensive English at NAU. In total, forty students participated in the study. They were asked to

write three argumentative essays. Feedback was provided to students on language errors in their

first drafts via editing codes after they were trained on how to decipher the codes and make

corrections. Students were then required to revise the errors pointed out by the teacher/researcher

with the help of the Table of Error Correction Codes. Upon the completion of the three essay

writing tasks, students filled out an attitude questionnaire which contains forty items. The

purpose of the questionnaire was to measure students' attitudes towards English learning,

accuracy in English writing, feedback and error correction, and the specific type of feedback they

received in the course (unforced, coded).

Results

Up till now, the researcher has finished data competition and data entry. The next step is

to conduct data screening and complete analysis. Results are expected by the end of August,

2015.

Relevance to PIE and Second Language Learning

This study has a number of pedagogical implications for L2 writing instruction in general

and PIE students and teachers in particular. For the broad domain of L2 writing teaching and

learning, the study will shed light on the ongoing debate over the short- and especially long-term

effectiveness of unfocused, coded feedback in facilitating L2 learners' development of linguistic

accuracy. For PIE students and teachers, the study is useful in a number of ways: First, data

collected in the study provides a frequency list of common errors in students' writings, which should be good resource for future writing teachers; second, the packet to train students how to decipher each error code and perform corrections can be useful to teachers who use editing symbols to provide feedback to students' language errors; third, the Table of Error Correction Codes created by the researcher was piloted and revised many times and the final version proved to be a useful tool for students who were asked to use it during revision. Thereby, it could be a good resource for future students and teachers as well; forth, results of the study may also raise teachers' awareness that different kinds of errors merit individualized treatments because some are easy to correct and others need more cognitive and linguistic efforts; finally, if motivation turns out to be a significant predictor of students' success in revision and long-term improvement in accuracy, then teachers should try their best to motivate students to write, revise, and edit.

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