World Applied Sciences Journal 17 (3): 375-383, 2012
ISSN 1818-4952

Teachers' Corrective Feedback in L2 Writing Revisited: Concerns Against and Suggestions for its Employment

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Abstract: The present study reviews contrasting viewpoints on the nature and efficacy of teachers' corrective feedback in L2 writing. A comparison of opposing views in this regard seems to favor the contention that teachers' corrective feedback strategy does not result in students' writing accuracy. The paper also reveals that teachers' written comments are often time-consuming, vague, contradictory, unspecific and idiosyncratic. Besides, teachers' comments most often deviate students' attention away from their own writing to teachers' purpose in writing. Most teachers' comments treat students' first drafts as final or finished drafts, the result being that surface-level features are given priority over higher-level concerns such as clarity, development and logic. While casting doubts on the claims of pro-corrective feedback group, the paper offers strategies for the better use of teachers' corrections and comments.

Key words: Corrective feedback · Error correction · Writing accuracy · Teachers' written comments · EFL learners

INTRODUCTION

As early as 20th century, a number of scoring styles whereby teachers evaluated students' writings were offered. Many teachers find it necessary to assign a letter grade to those papers, a grade untidily and carelessly scribbled in foreboding red ink [1]. The grades, indeed, impart nothing of teachers' evaluation of the content, the mechanics, the style, or even the organization of the paper. The student is left to figure out the reason behind the grade on his/her paper. But not very long ago, things changed. As Connors (1993, cited in Alamis, 2010) contends, teachers came to the understanding that grades per se do not assist students in ameliorating their writing skills [1]. Teachers found that grading scales were only useful as devices for management decision making rather than for student betterment.

Teachers little by little did away with just assigning grades and began bringing students' papers under meticulous and scrupulous observation and considered essays as real audiences and regarded "marginal and end comments as the most efficient ways of explaining to the students what needed attention in their writing" (Connors, 1993, in Alamis, 2010, p. 41) [1]. Investigating learners' errors is one of major issues dealt with in the field of second language acquisition research. Learners' errors are viewed as a natural and integral part of the learning process. They are also regarded unavoidable, since learners are involved in the exploration of target language. "We cannot learn a language, whether it be first or second language, without goofing" [2, p. 44; 3, 4]. The vexing question that arises here is then 'what is the part played by the teacher vis-à-vis learners' errors?' In other words, 'should teachers supply corrective feedback on learners' errors or should they not?' [5, 6].

The present study attempted to shed light on the vanity of written feedbacks offered by teachers, which, in most cases, not only serve no enabling factor in helping students to improve their writing but rather negatively affect students' perspectives towards teachers' comments.

Views of Teachers on Written Comments: Responding to student writers' errors is a controversial issue and this controversy still rages between the supporters of both options (pro-correction and non-correction views) since research has not been able to establish or substantiate "beyond reasonable doubt that providing feedback is a decisive factor in the attainment of language fluency and accuracy" [7, p. 41].

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For years and years, error correction in writing has been a matter of hot altercation and strife among language practitioners and researchers. Attitudes towards error correction ranges from the utter abolition of errors before 1960s to strong disapproval of error correction as being noxious and unjustified in the late 1970s and to a more serious view of the need and value of error correction in the 1970s and 1980s [8]. Truscott (1996, cited in Lee, 1977) opts for a strong viewpoint and argues for the abolition of grammar correction in the L2 writing classroom [8, 9, 10, 11, 12]. Truscott's reasoning is that grammar correction is both pernicious and ineffective, hence, it has to be forcibly uprooted from the writing classroom. He further argues that the existence of developmental sequences is one of decisive factors which render error correction debased and unfounded. "When students are corrected on a point for which they are not ready, the correction is not likely to have much value" [9, p. 18; 13, 14, 15, 16]. However, until thorough and complete evidence on the uselessness of error correction is found, Truscott's reasoning would likely have little effect on classroom teachers. Also, there is abundance of evidence to indicate that ESL students want correction and that it is useful. So, teachers are forced to deal with errors in the classroom [1, 11, 12, 15, 17, 18]. Students pursue teacher comments to apprehend their ability and debility. Students crave for feedback in the area of content in the form of admonition or recommendation [1]. "The absence of comments sends the messages to the students that they do not need to revise their text because their meaning has been communicated effectively to the audience" [1, p. 41; cf. 7, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20].

How much of students' wrong conviction in error correction is because of support they get from their teachers? To some degree, "the argument from students' belief is circular: By using correction, teachers encourage students to believe in it, because students believe in it, teachers must continue using it" [15, p. 116]. Hendrickson (1978, cited in Makino 1993) averred that error correction can demonstrate to be helpful in making students achieve higher degrees of proficiency provided that they are errors that break down communication, torment the learner and show up more often [17]. Long (1997, in Makino, 1993) [17], however, argued that error treatment is not so momentous and others have had their own uncertainty on the usefulness of error correction [13, 21]. Their reasoning is that errors committed by the learners are viewed as the natural and indispensable part of language learning process and simply indicative of a "certain stage of their interlanguage which will develop naturally into more accurate and appropriate forms" [17, p. 337].

Feedback: There is a widely-held conviction in foreign language teaching and learning that an erroneous utterance should not be left in the air but corrected [4]. If they are left unnoticed or go uncorrected, it is more likely that they would be deeply rooted or fossilized in the learner's cognitive repertoire and it would be doubly difficult for learners to use language correctly [22, 23].

Teachers' end and marginal feedback or comments are necessary to a student revising and rewriting his/her composition. The teacher needs to figure out how his/her students regard the feedback. He needs to know whether the students disregard the comments or think sagaciously about their writing and make revisions. As Sommers (1982, cited in Alamis, 2010) explains, teachers' feedback should inspire students to re-examine their texts with inquisitiveness and involvement [1]. The challenge and strenuous task we, as teachers, confront is to organize and develop comments which will "provide an inherent reason for students to revise; it is a sense of revision as discovery, as a repeated process of beginning again … We need to show our students how to seek … the dissonances of discovery" [1, p. 20]. We, as teachers, ought to bear in mind that students must apprehend the feedback and be susceptible of doing something with it. Teachers, also, must be congruous with their feedback, accommodate it to their students' proficiency and competency to self-repair. The results of some studies are reminiscent of the fact students await feedback from their teacher and generally feel that it helps them [7].

Making comments should be an integral part of the teaching and learning process, not something for learning to struggle against. "Student writers should be taught that rewriting and revision are integral to writing and that editing is an ongoing, multi-level process, not merely a hasty check for correct grammar" [1, p. 51]. Feedback appears to be pivotal to the process of teaching and learning as revision to the process of writing. It is, thus, necessary for both teachers and students to accomplish their roles effectively, to have an increasing knowledge of the nature and function of the feedback. Dehram (1995), by likening feedback to a two-bullock cart, argues that in order for the cart to walk or move in the proper course, its two bullocks need to be wary of the objectives of their attempts but also each other [25]. This follows that teachers and learners should opt for a collaborative approach to the processing of feedback.

Having outlined the features of feedback, we now turn to the negative aspects of teachers' feedback or comments, which is the focus of the present study.

Comments Are Time-consuming and of Little or No Avail: Student writing judgment can be one of the most daring, tedious, challenging, baffling, daunting and time-consuming tasks [8, 15, 25]. It takes time, energy and above all mental energy [22, 23, 26, 27]. That writing teachers invest a great deal of time responding to their students' paper is a fact. According to one survey, teachers take at least 20 to 40 minutes to respond to or provide comments on a single paper [7, 8, 15, 19, 22, 23, 27]. Zamel (1985, p. 79) gives a detailed account of an English teacher likened to a tired dog which clearly depicts the dreadful and challenging nature of writing comments [27]:

> *It is a November midnight. Johnny Carson has just ended and throughout the block the last lights flick-off -- all but one that is. A single orange light blooms in the darkness. It is the English teacher, weary-eyed, cramped of leg, hand and brain, sifting listlessly, but doggedly through piles of themes, circling, marking, grading, commenting and guilt-ridden because the students were promised that papers would be returned last week. The fifth cup of coffee grows cold and bitter. Just one more paper. And then one more and then ....* [see also 28].

Not only is the drudgery act of correcting students' written tasks time-consuming, but the feedback the teacher receives is more often than not negative. The return of papers filled with unavoidable red marks gives rise to looks of frustration and despair in the students' countenance. "The teacher wonders if the students will even bother to read the corrections, to say nothing of learning from them" [22, p. 195]. We all, as students, have experienced receiving of an essay spoiled or ruined with an instructor's mysterious, indecipherable comments [29]. Nothing damages the student's reputation save degrading comments, recurrent and wearisome correction [Corder, 1997, cited in 23].

Most teachers have watched and experienced the indignant and uninterested student "who defiantly or casually throws a newly-returned piece of writing into the classroom waste basket after looking at the grade but without even glancing at the written comments" [28, p. 36; 7, 23, 29]. Yet, most teachers still keep on giving grades and more arduously devote time and energy on writing comments. The findings of many experimental studies on written corrective feedback conducted over the last 20 years have been so conflicting that second language teachers looking to uphold the instructional choice to correct, or not to correct, the grammar of their students' written activities are "left in the midst of controversy" [7, p. 40; 9]. Semke (1984) argues that correcting students' free writing is an exhausting task for the teacher [22]. He argues by reasoning that the amount of free-writing assignments is more determined by the teacher's correcting time than by the amount believed to be helpful to a student's writing. The reason why studies utilizing the impact of written corrective feedback bore dissonant outcomes is that the discrepancies in research design and methodology, in fact, are at the bottom of dissimilar results procured [7, 25]. As Russel and Spada (2006, cited in [7, p. 51]) remind us, "researchers must investigate similar variables in a consistent manner so that they do not end up comparing apples and oranges (and pears and grapes and nectarines)". In response to Ferris, Truscott (1999, in Ferris 2004, p. 52) contends that "generalization is most reasonable when similar results are obtained under a variety conditions" [25].

That teachers' arduous and assiduous labor of writing comments to student writers' papers is an activity of little or no avail is strongly corroborated by Krashen (1984, cited in Robb *et al*., 1986), who argues that feedback should be postponed to the final stages of revising and prescribes intensive reading practice as a long-term panacea for the immediate problems of surface-level errors [30]. Overseeing student production while that production is in the process of developing may not only be unproductive but may prevent additional development. "We should hold in abeyance our reflex-like reactions to surface-level concerns and give priority to meaning" (Krashen, 1982, cited in Zamel, 1985, p. 96), for by being anxious about mistakes prior to helping them with the most critical and serious problems of sufficiently representing meaning, we may be teaching students to do the same [27]. It is an all-agreed upon fact among language teaching professionals that while a teacher plays an indispensable part in language teaching process, it is the learner who is the main character at the center of learning process.

Based on Personal Agenda Hypothesis proposed by Schumann and Schumann (1977, cited in Martinez, 2006), every student has his own personal taste or attitude on what he wants to learn and the way he wants to do it [4]. That is why the fact that some learners do grasp something but not others could be attributed to the learners' ability to choose from a lesson only those items that they want and in the way they want. This implies that learners' built-in syllabus is the main determinant in the language learning process rather than the teacher's

imposed syllabus [2, 16]. Had teachers known this, they would certainly have raised less hue and cry about their students' heedlessness to their comments [3, 13]. Likewise, Krashen's (1982) Natural Order Hypothesis implies that we acquire the rules of language in a predictable way and this is independent of the order in which rules are taught in language classes [13]. "SLA insights point to the fact that different linguistic categories should not be treated as if they are equivalent because they represent separate domains of knowledge that are acquired through different stages and processes" (Bitchener *et al*., 2005, p. 194) [20]. This is a very important point which is often disregarded by teachers who regularly keep correcting the students' papers with no productive outcomes (Krashen, 1984, cited in [4]; 3, 14, 20, 22, 30).

Nayernia (2011), corroborating the viewpoints of Krashen (1984) with regard to language teachers' groan about their students' inability to use the target language structures as they are taught, asserts that this situation arises because of teachers' wrong conception that learner-produced structures should be in complete concordance with the input they are subjected to [3]. This attitude overlooks the role of intake -- the part of input that the learner assimilates -- which is "independent of the teachers' syllabus and relates to the learner's internal syllabus" [3, p. 200; 13]. Truscott (1996, cited in Bitchener *et al*., 2005) contends that grammar correction has no room in writing course and should be dislodged from it [20]. He concludes that "there is no convincing research evidence that error correction ever helps student writers improve the accuracy of their writing" (p. 192; [8, 9, 22]). He argues by reasoning that in the first place it does away with SLA theories about the gradual and complex process of learning second language linguistic structures and forms [4]. Secondly, it is pernicious, for it robs the teachers of their invaluable time and energy to be devoted to the productive aspects of a writing program. Besides, Truscott (1999, p. 177) contends that correction tends to make students curtail and simplify their writing to eschew from being corrected, thereby "reducing their opportunities to practice writing and to experiment with new forms" [15]. In contrast, Ferris (1999, cited in Bitchener *et al*., 2005), challenges Truscott's viewpoint [20], claiming that his (Truscott's) arguments were hasty and overly zealous given the rapid growth of a massive bulk of research evidence highlighting the ways in which effective correction can be of help at least for some student writers on the condition that "it is selective, prioritized and clear" (p. 192; see also 8, 11, 23, 28). This is while Semke (1984) contends that corrections are hardly conducive to writing accuracy, writing fluency or general language proficiency; they may deal a lethal blow to students' confidence or attitudes especially when they make corrections on their own [22].

Santos strongly discards as unfounded Ferris and Roberts' (2001) claim that student writers favor correction whether it is direct, indirect or coded by reasoning that "at times the classifying of errors becomes a matter of individual interpretation and judgment" [31, p. 74]. Labeling errors by type or category may well be more time-consuming for teachers than just indicating that an error has been made. More momentously, there is much greater likeliness that the teacher may mislabel an error if she/he is identifying it by type rather than simply locating it for the student. Tedick and Gortari (1998) also criticize Ferris' strong corroboration of direct correction by stating that one's students may well be more gifted than one perceives [32]. As teachers, we often feel a rush in with the correct response long before they are granted sufficient amount of time to process information. Should we allow time and supply pertinent clues for the learner to self-repair, more often than not, the students will come through. The least effective technique, they argue, for correcting a student language is to simply give the answer.

Teachers' Corrections and Comments Are Vague and Abstract: "Teachers' correction is often criticized as being unspecific, incomprehensible, contradictory, inconsistent, inaccurate, meaningless to the student, vague, over-general, abstract, formulaic and idiosyncratic" [29, p. 25]. Zamel (1985) found that marks and comments are often perplexing, arbitrary and inaccurate. He, further, argues that teachers' marks and comments are usually in the form of impractical and imprecise commands, instructions or directives that are unintelligible to the students [27]. These vague directives, while teachers may imagine that they have widely-known definitions, are in the form of marks and comments that typify complicated meanings "which remain locked in the teachers' head" (Butler, 1980, cited in [27, p. 83]). Sommers (1982) commenting on the vanity of feedback says that we all, as teachers, have witnessed our baffled student complaining about unintelligibility of our comments: "I don't know how you want me to change this", or, "Tell me what you want me to do" ([19, p. 150]; see also [7, 11]). This does not imply that we can easily disregard inherent positive research evidence on the effects of grammar correction. "At minimum, it can be said that if the existing longitudinal studies do not demonstrate the efficacy of

error feedback, they essentially do not prove its uselessness either" ([25, p. 55]; see also [11, 12, 14, 19, 22]).

Regarding the contradictory and vague messages given by teachers, Sommers (ibid) states that students are frequently given contradictory messages such as 'revise a sentence in order to render it correct' or 'condense a sentence so as to achieve a greater succinctness of style', or that 'a particular sentence needs to be expanded or elaborated' [19]. The interlinear and marginal comments embody two distinct functions for the students. The former stimulate the student to view the text as a fixed and definite piece, frozen in time that just requires some editing. In contrast, the latter imply that the meaning of the text is not complete or fixed but rather the student still requires unfolding the meaning by doing additional research. These contradictory signals and equally opposite terms given to the students such as 'expand and concise' are indicative of teachers' failure to direct substantive revision of the text as a whole.

At times, students have a hard time understanding the purpose behind teachers' comments and take these comments very superfluous. At other times, students make sense of the comments, but the teacher misreads the text, the result being that the comments are not applicable [22]. The teacher by misreading or misunderstanding the text, not only gives rise to appropriating the text, but also his incorporation of his intended changes renders the text less unified or less coherent than the student's original was.

> *"There are moments when you think everything is going wrong and nobody cares about you. On moments you are really down some action really. One but Then the People You Work With: Surprises you" (example taken from Zamel, 1985, p. 86).*

The student wants to say 'on those moments' which exactly relates to the preceding sentence. The teacher, not knowing that "does" is the graphic representation of "those", misreads the student's text and by incorporating his changes makes the text less coherent than it was. What is most regrettable about teachers' comments is that most teachers' comments are not text-bound and could be interchanged or rubber-stamped, from text to text. "The comments are not anchored in the particulars of the students' texts, but rather are a series of vague directives that are not text specific" ([19, p. 152]; [1, 27, 28, 30]). Squiggly lines, exclamation points without context and unfinished sentences mean nothing to them. Among reasons cited by the students preferring their paper to be left uncorrected or kept intact was that they often misunderstood their teachers' comments or suggestions [7, 23]. Ferris (2004) while holding an irreconcilable viewpoint with those of Truscott, Lee and Sommers, to name a few, remarks that studies of student opinions about error feedback are very like-minded that L2 student writers yearn for feedback from their teachers and regard it excessively significant to their success [25; 11, 15, 17, 18]).

A striking difference between the teachers' comments and those of computer showed how arbitrary and idiosyncratic most of teachers' comments are. In addition, the quiet and sound language of the computer provided quite a contrast to antipathy and lifelessness of most of the teachers' comments [19]. Moreover, the comments are usually written in such a way that it is difficult for students to tell the most important problems from the least important ones. Comments about spelling, erroneous sentence, comma, semi-colon, etc. are given an equal weight as the comments about the text organization or logic. Hendrickson (1978, cited in [8]) proposes that some errors should favor higher superiority or preference to others, for instance, those that impede communication or those that students commit repeatedly. There is

> *an overwhelming similarity in the generalities and abstract commands given to the students. There seems to be among teachers an accepted, albeit, unwritten cannon for commenting on students texts. This uniform code of commands, requests and pleadings demonstrates that the teacher holds a license for vagueness while the student is commanded to be specific [19, p. 153].*

Approximately, the majority of students interviewed on written comments unanimously acknowledged that they had difficulty in understanding the teachers' comments. They expressed that when a teacher commands in the margins or as an end comment "*take care of precise language"* or "*think more about your audience"*, revising or re-examining becomes a guessing game [19].

A study was undertaken by Zamel (1985) to investigate teachers' responses to students writing. The results revealed that composition teachers write, to a large extent, common or identical comments and deal with language-bound errors and problems [27]. Not only are the comments and marks perplexing, arbitrary, idiosyncratic and unintelligible, they hardly seem to expect the students to re-examine the text beyond the

surface-level. The comments abet students to feel that their first drafts are perfect drafts not discovery drafts and that all they require to do is to patch and refine their writing. That is, teachers' comments do not seem to indoctrinate the students with sound reason for amending the structure and meaning of their texts, for the comments propose to the students that the meaning of their texts is already there, finished, produced and all that is required is merely refining the text. The processes of revising, editing and proofreading are subsided and diminished to a single trifling activity and the students' misconception of revision process is strongly fortified by their teachers' comments [19, 27]. That texts are regarded as fixed and end products is also approved by the overwhelming evidence that teachers give careful thought and consideration to the surface-level features or characteristics. Teachers apparently find it hard to respond to student writing "unless they respond to it as a final draft and, therefore, focus on problems of mechanics, usage and style" [27, p. 81]. Teachers' attending to local errors as opposed to global errors brings about in students a quite restricted concept of composing and consolidates the misconception that these concerns must be the ones to be treated first. It, however, does not follow that teachers do not believe that certain characteristics outweigh others, but their responses typically convey the impression that local errors are as significant as content-related concerns if not to say that they are more important. As Flower and Hayes (1981, in [27, p. 81]) put it, "these writers are locked in by the myopia of their low level goals".

What is especially amazing about teachers' responses is that teachers primarily assume themselves as language teachers rather than writing teachers and their students as language learners rather than developing writers. They are primarily concerned with surface-level features of writing and seem to read and respond to a text as series of disintegrated and isolated sentences rather than as a unified whole of discourse [8, 27]. Williams (1981, in [27, p. 86]) in outlining the difference between reading for typological letters and reading for content says that "when we read for typos, letters constitute the field of attention; content becomes virtually inaccessible. When we read for content, semantic structures constitute the field of attention. Letters, for the most part, recede from our consciousness".

This, however, does not imply that issues of content and organization skip the teachers' attention and go unnoticed. Since mostly first drafts are treated as end products, students do not seem to display responsibility for attending to these significant features in writing. Besides, since teachers' comments for the problems of text organization, logic and rhetoric are couched in the same sort of vague, abstract and incongruous terms used for localized errors, it is unlikely that students could make substantial revision even if they are forced to do so. This may, also, arise from teachers' simultaneous attending to surface-level features, or to use Sommers' term, "accidents of discourse", which are minor infelicities and larger issues of content, organization and rhetoric in the same version of a text [19].

Teachers have been so disproportionately preoccupied with precision and correctness of low-level issues of writing that error identification has been viewed as the most frequently exercised technique in responding to students writing. Error identification sounds to be deeply fixed in the inveterate practices of second language teachers, who by reason of assuming their role merely as instructor of formal aspects of language, circumscribe their activities to maneuvers exclusively within the realm of formal training rather than that of cognitive maturity (Cumming, 1983 in [27]). This is while Fathman and Whally (1990, in [24, p. 161]) found that "learners grammatical competence only improved when they received specific feedback on their grammar".

Teachers' comments rob the initiative or leadership from the students and train their attention to their (teachers') own purpose in commenting. Freedman by accounting Jody's case, a college freshman, luminously depicts the point in question. Jody, a college freshman, asseverates her experience to her latest English teacher as to her teachers' comments to her writing as follows:

> *... And I like English, but I've had so many different English teachers, all saying different things about my writing, that I can't know what to believe. All teachers want different things and it is hard to please all of them without changing my way of writing. You know, in your first paper or something you write and they'll say, Oh, you should do this, or you should do this and you go, Uhha, I know what they want and then you just write the way they want and they go, Great! Excellent writing. But then you end up in college and you don't know how to write, for yourself. You just write for other people. Hopefully you won't try and change the way I write, but just try and help me on the things I do badly* [28, p. 35].

Jody's case denotes that teachers, while sustaining their role as an educational leader, should entrust the responsibility of communicating ideas and text mastership to their student writers and refrain from doing anything that gives rise to students just playing the school game and relinquishing text ownership.

Sommers' (1982) study of teachers' comments unveiled that they swerve students' mind from their own purpose in writing a particular text and direct their attention to the teachers' end in commenting [19, 27]. According to Murray (1984), we long our students to accomplish to the standards of other students, to study what we plan for them to study and to learn from it what we or our teachers learned [27]. The result being that students edit or re-examine according to the changes that teachers place on the text. Teachers should inscribe their comments in such a way to eschew from dictating their own perception or aim on the written composition. Instead, the stress should be on "guiding the students' ideas and allowing them to make modifications with confidence and competence" [1, p. 52]. Though the strength and efficacy of teachers' error correction in writing class has been called into question, several decades of research activity in this area, has divulged that "we are virtually at square one, as the existing research base is incomplete and, inconsistent and it would certainly be premature to formulate any conclusion about this topic" ([25, p. 49, 8, 9]).

Studies undertaken by researchers manifested that "teachers appropriate their students' writing by establishing themselves as authorities. Teachers have been found to apply uniform, inflexible standards to their students' texts and response according to the extent to which these texts conform to or deviate from these standards" (Moran, 1981, in [27, p. 81]). These teachers have been found to exert control over important decision-making processes and let their own ideal texts to determine choices that rightly belong to student writers [27]. The consequence of teachers' imposing their own ideas on student writers is that they (students) come to conclude that what their teachers want them to say outweighs what they themselves long to say.

Peagogical Implications and Strategies for Better Use of Comments: If students conceive that they are communicating and someone is making sense of the message, there remains no doubt that they will be quick at welcoming the suggestions and even seek admonition on how to better the mechanics of their writing. Research by Rinderer (1978, cited in [22]) upholds the theory that, at minimum in the teaching of English, a teacher's written, supportive comments tend to have a positive impact on students' motive toward writing amelioration, whereas corrections tend to still motivation. Thus, "giving supportive comments in lieu of corrections appears to have a positive effect on students' attitudes towards writing and toward target language in general" [22, p. 201].

There is a broad consensus of opinion among language teachers and practitioners that teachers should correct errors which bring the interaction to a halt, because in daily-life situations, we strive to communicate "successfully than to communicate perfectly" [4, p. 6]. So being, the teacher should inspire students to run the risk of committing errors, if necessary, so as to unfold their learning capabilities, which in turn is the foremost end of language teaching and learning.

We read with preconception and obsession expecting to find errors and ambushing to catch the students red-handed. The result being that we find errors and misread our students' texts. We get what we crave for; in lieu of reading and responding to the meaning of a text, we correct our students' writing. This approach needs to be reversed. In lieu of finding errors and indicating students how to mend parts of their text, we need to demolish our students' faith that the drafts they have scribbled are finished and coherent. "Our comments need to offer students revision tasks of a different order of complexity and sophistication from the ones that they themselves identify, by forcing students back into chaos, … the point where they are shaping and restructuring their meaning" [19, p. 154].

Students should be made cognizant of the fact that texts unfold, that revision is to be viewed as a process of re-visiting one's text and that their revisiting is an integral and recursive part of writing. Thus, rather than responding to texts as finished and end products, we should guide students through the cycles of revision. By rendering help before an essay is considered final, we expedite more writing and strengthening the idea that additional refinement and inspection may be called for prior to one's meaning pronouncement.

Rather than confining our responses to written comments and reactions which are in essence, to use Sommers' term, "disembodied remarks" and making preconceptions as to the text, exerting control over it and passing judgmental comments that upset the balance of teacher-student equilibrium in a real learning situation, it is essential to set up a cooperative relationship with our students, drawing attention to problems, offering alternatives and suggesting possibilities.

We should impart how we can respond as authentic and interested readers rather than as arbiters and evaluators. We should strive to reply "not to secretaries but to authors", a distinction Smith (1983 cited in [27, p. 97]) draws between "the act of proofreading transcriptions of our own texts and that of reading original texts created by others". What all this implies is that we should reply not so much to student writing but to student writers.

Students are often reminded that something has gone astray in their text and that their texts should undergo some alterations before it qualifies as a fixed or final product. "To tell students that they have done something wrong is not to tell them what to do about it. In order to offer a helpful revision strategy to a student, the teacher must anchor that strategy in the specifics of the student's text" [19, p. 153]. For example, to call on our student, using comments such as 'be precise and specific' or 'expand more', does not signal what difficulty the reader has about the sense of the text, or what failure in the logic exists that could be overcome, nor is he (student) indicated how to obtain that desired specificity.

There are teachers who use comments to excess. Composing illimitable comments can cause the students to become disaffected with the teaching process and disconcerted with their work. Likewise, there are teachers who overmark, which runs counter to prioritizing learners errors and which is based on the mistaken premise that "the greater the number of the corrections they (teachers) do themselves, the quicker their students will learn to write better English" [8, p. 467]. Lee also asserts that the aforementioned stance does not stand to reason. He contends by arguing that the leading axiom is to tailor the degree of salience or prominence of feedback to the learners' proficiency -- for instance "less salient information for more advanced learners and more salient information for less advanced learners" [8, p. 471].

It is in the teacher's favor and in his/her students' as well, to pick his or her battle of fight when supplying feedback. Painful as it is to bridle the drive to fix the errors, too many comments on too many aspects of writing can bewilder and overpower students as well as squandering teacher's time and energy. Once you read an essay, decide what areas merit to be paid much heed. Try focusing on higher order concerns first, such as focus, development, text coherence and logic. To this end, try reading through the entire paper first without marking it at all to help you get a good idea of what the primary issues are.

Writers endeavor to observe their own work objectively and it is advantageous for them to get feedback that lets them know how others feel and reply to their work. It is vital to reply as a reader to the writing, not to the person. For example, a useful comment might read, "As a reader, I'm having trouble understanding how this paragraph relates to the others" rather than "what does this have to do with anything?"

Concluding Remarks: At a cursory glance, it becomes evident that the arguments for and against the teachers' corrective feedback are all square. In plain terms, at times, the balance is upset by the findings favoring corrective feedback and at other times, by the findings devaluing it. Only after thorough inspection, does it become evident that there are convincing arguments and examples abound in this research overview that forcibly turn the scales in favor of non-corrective feedback group and render teachers' corrective feedback strategy as an activity of no avail. We, as teachers, have witnessed that notwithstanding our repeated explanation of a particular grammatical point, the students commit the same errors over and over again in their subsequent writings. This implies that learners' built-in syllabus is the main determinant in language learning process rather than the teacher's imposed syllabus.

Krashen's (1982) Natural Order Hypothesis accounts that we acquire the rules of language in a predictable way and this is independent of the order in which rules are taught in language classes [13]. Besides, at times, teachers misunderstand students' texts, the result being that by incorporating their own changes, they (teachers) render the students' texts less coherent and less unified than it originally was. Last but not least, teachers' comments are time-consuming, vague, abstract, contradictory, over-general and idiosyncratic, an observation which adds a further reason to the uselessness of error correction and corrective feedback strategy. In short, the body of this research project is rich in terms of arguments and examples against corrective feedback strategy which will suffice for a language teacher to wash his or her hands of corrective feedback strategy or use it taking the above suggestions into consideration.

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