ASSISTING MULTILINGUAL WRITERS: ERROR FEEDBACK & LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

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Overview

Part 1: Effective Error Correction in L2 Writing

BREAK

Part 2: Effective Writing-Oriented Grammar Teaching

Opening discussion

1. If you have provided error feedback to student writers before, can you describe your approach or strategy for doing so? Be as specific as you can.

2. If you have provided error feedback to student writers before, how do you feel about your efforts? Was it time well spent? Why or why not?

Understanding "Error"—Sources & Severity

1. Why do L2 writers make errors?

2. What kinds of errors do they make?

3. How serious are these errors, and how should we factor them into our assessment of their writing?

A Quick Definition

"Error":

Errors are morphological, syntactic, and lexical forms which **deviate from rules** *of the target language,* **violating the expectations** *of literate adult native speakers.*

(Ferris, 2011, *Treatment of Error in Second Language Student Writing,* p. 3)

Sources of L2 Error

1. L1 interference:
   - ❖ **The movie _that_ I saw _it_ was very sad.**
   - ❖ **_Is_ very cold in Minnesota in the winter.**

2. L2 interlanguage:
   - ❑ **I _leaved_ my phone at home this morning.**
   - ❑ **I didn't _walked_ to school today.**

3. Production constraints—"mistakes" vs. "errors"
   - ◆ "Mistakes": time, attention, poor strategies
   - ◆ "Errors": lack/incomplete knowledge of structure/rule

Types of Error (handout)

Two Notes:

1. Not much overlap between the lists
2. Some multilingual writers (especially Generation 1.5) will make errors from *both* lists

Severity of Errors: Three Factors

1. **Global vs. Local Errors**

- *Global errors* interfere with communication
- *Local errors* are noticeable (and maybe distracting) but rarely impede reader comprehension

Severity of Errors: Three Factors

2. **Stigmatizing Errors**

- ◆ Signal "ESL" status
- ◆ May distract/annoy "real world" readers

Severity of Errors: Three Factors

3. **Frequent Errors**

✧ May indicate lack of understanding/awareness of rule

✧ BUT consider also "obligatory context"—how many times did the writer use the structure correctly?*

*In other words, don't overgeneralize about the writer's knowledge from a few missteps.

Sample Text--Prompt

You have read an article by Jason Casillas entitled "Students, faculty battle over attendance." Now you will write an essay responding to the question below.

Background: Jason Casillas describes the disagreement between CSUS professors who have mandatory attendance policies in their classes and students who feel that it should be their own business and their choice as to whether or not they attend class regularly.

In a clear, well-organized essay, please respond to the following question:

Should college or university professors require their students to attend class regularly?

Small Group Discussion: Sample Text

1. What types of errors do you notice?

2. Considering the "severity" factors we looked at (global/ local, stigmatizing, frequent), how serious do you think the errors in this paper are?

3. If this were your student, how might you approach giving error feedback to him or her?

The goals of error feedback

1. Progress, not perfection
2. Increased student autonomy

Error feedback: best advice from research

1. Be *selective*, not comprehensive.
2. Focus on *patterns* of error for each student text.
3. Give *indirect* feedback.
4. Add *summary comments* about patterns of errors you marked.
5. Provide *explanations* and/or opportunities for students to ask *questions*.
6. Offer *error conferences* where feasible/needed.
7. Require students to *apply* error feedback.

Using technology for error feedback: some suggestions

1. **Don't** use Track Changes.

2. **Do** use Comments to provide brief explanations or suggestions.

3. Use highlighting and/or color-coding to mark patterns of error in the text.

Application activity

1. Use the same sample student text.
2. Identify 2-4 patterns of error you might mark if this were your student.
3. Mark (indirectly) 2-3 examples of each pattern you selected.
4. Compose a summary comment (or several comments) in which you briefly inform the student of which pattern(s) you marked.
5. Compare your choices with those of others in your group.

Group discussion

- *Which patterns of error did you choose to mark, and why?*

- *What, if anything, did you struggle with in doing this exercise?*

Opening discussion

1. What strategies have you used for grammar instruction and vocabulary development in your writing classes?

2. How well do you think these strategies have worked, and why?

What usually doesn't work

What (Usually) Doesn't Work

- Decontextualized grammar lessons by the teacher on random topics
- Decontextualized grammar presentations by the students on random topics
- Unfocused peer editing activities
- Unstructured "outsourcing" or "self-study"

Why it Doesn't Work

- Not enough connection to students' own writing
- Not well integrated with other class activities
- Not targeted to class/ individual needs
- Students don't know what to look for

What does work (1)

➢ Narrowly focused minilessons on topics most/all students need

Effective minilessons include:

❖ Discovery/analysis activities with authentic text samples

❖ Brief deductive explanations with clear examples

❖ Immediate application in peer/self-editing activities

What does work (2)

➢ Teaching self-editing and proofreading strategies*

Most important strategies to cover:

✦ Making time for editing/spreading the task out
✦ Reading aloud
✦ Monitoring for known patterns of error
✦ Using word-processing & online tools effectively
✦ Utilizing other human editors effectively

*Accountability is key!

What does work (3)

➢ Peer- and self-editing workshops

Tips for success:

✧ Ideal as a follow-up to minilessons

✧ Must be carefully and narrowly structured*

✧ Need enough time for the task and for discussion

✧ Especially effective right before a paper is due

*Ask students to look for specific problems or structures; tell peer editors to mark but not correct errors they find

What does work (4)

➤ 1:1 or small group error conferences

Suggestions:

✧ Focus 1:1 work on most needy students

✧ Focus on errors/issues not easily remediated through written feedback or minilessons

✧ Listen carefully to find out what students do and don't know and understand (washback to instruction and feedback)

✧ Consider small group conferences for students with similar issues

What does work (5)

➢Helping students notice vocabulary and style choices in texts they read and write

Ideas:

✧Discuss language use (vocabulary, sentence style, even punctuation) when talking about class readings (not just content)

✧Teach vocabulary analysis/learning strategies

✧Assign a self-directed vocabulary and/or style journal

✧Help students consider word choice and style in their own writing

Discussion

1. Look again at the "What Doesn't Work" list. Have you tried any of these? Do you agree that they don't work, or have you had success with them?

2. Look at the five "What Does Work" lists. How many of these have you tried? How did they work?

3. Are there strategies you haven't tried and would like to? What questions do you have about how to implement them?

Closing Discussion

- *In the discussion of teaching strategies, what were 1-2 issues or ideas that seemed most interesting, promising, or puzzling in your group?*

- *Most of these strategies would take up class time. If you were implementing new ones, how might you need to adjust your syllabus or lesson plans?*

Additional Resources

For Teachers:

Coxhead, A. (2006). *Essentials of teaching academic vocabulary.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Ferris, D. (2011). *Treatment of error in second language student writing* (2nd Ed.). University of Michigan Press.

For Students:

Ferris, D. (forthcoming). *Language power.* Boston: Bedford St. Martin's.

Lane, J., & Lange, E. (2011). *Writing clearly* (3rd Ed.). Boston: Heinle ELT.