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Corrective Feedback in L2 Writing:  
Theory and Practice

# 二语写作纠正性反馈： 理论与实践

(英文版)

刘雪莲◎著



上海交通大学出版社  
SHANGHAI JIAO TONG UNIVERSITY PRESS

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## 内 容 提 要

本书以英语专业本科生和英语写作教师为研究对象,采用文献资料分析、问卷调查结合文本分析论证的方法,对二语写作教学中教师的纠正性反馈行为认知、实践特点以及学生对其认知和反应特点进行调查研究,以期发现二语写作教师纠正性反馈的认知和实践、教师实践和学生需求之间的错配现象。实践问卷设计有针对性,调查样本大、数据详实、可信度高。本书可供相关领域的学者、研究生等阅读参考。

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## Preface

Corrective feedback (CF) is the most widely used feedback form in present-day L2 writing classrooms. It plays a very important part in Chinese EFL students' revision of English writing, especially in tertiary education, because of the move towards process approach in writing teaching methodology. This research investigated Chinese EFL writing teachers' perceptions and practices regarding giving CF on students' writing. In addition, students' preferences and reactions to teacher feedback in the Chinese college and university context were the other focus of the study so that student responses to the feedback could be fed back to teachers as a heuristic to help them develop reflective and effective feedback practices.

Methodologically the study employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. It used a triangulation of participants and methods in which the practice of feedback was seen from the perspectives of EFL students and teachers collected from the quantitative data (questionnaires) and qualitative data (teachers' written CF). The questionnaire survey was administered to students in roughly three months, that is, from early October to the end of December of 2012 in 17 different colleges and universities in China. The teacher questionnaire was given to 100 writing instructors at 30 colleges and universities in China from early October of 2012 to early January of 2013. Teachers' underlying values, beliefs, and knowledge can be elicited by questionnaire surveys. Nevertheless, the deeper mental constructs cannot be fully represented by such attitudes for different reasons. Therefore, in investigating their beliefs, teachers' actual behavior in giving CF should be considered to find out the extent to

which their beliefs converge with or diverge from their practice (Li & Barnard, 2011). Therefore, 150 written samples of teachers' CF were collected randomly in the fall and winter of 2012 from writings of students in the English departments of 17 colleges and universities in China.

The participants of the study consisted of 1,077 students majoring in English at 17 different colleges and universities located in 12 provinces and municipalities and representative of universities of various types, levels, and geographical locations, and 81 native Chinese teachers who teach EFL writing at 30 different colleges or universities of various types, levels, and geographical locations.

This book provides a comprehensive picture of Chinese college and university writing teachers' feedback practice to students on their English writing, contributing to an understanding of the behavioral characteristics, challenges and difficulties for teachers in using feedback to foster their students' writing development and their positive views of themselves as writers. In addition, this study also tries to investigate students' reactions to and preferences for teacher feedback on their written assignments so as to compare teachers' self-assessment of their feedback practice with students' reactions and their needs, as well as with their actual feedback practice. It is hoped that such comparisons will help to provide a greater understanding of how and how well teacher feedback addresses the needs of L2 writing students. Combining the students' views and teachers' views allows for open discussion of expectations and exploration of where there is a mismatch between these views. In addition, there may be places where teachers can accommodate their practices so that the student will be receptive to their feedback.

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have contributed to the completion of this study and the publication of this book. I owe my highest gratitude to professor Jeong-Won Lee from Chungnam National University of South Korea, who gave me

## Preface

constructive suggestions from the beginning till the completion of this research. I would also like to thank Professor Chang Junyue from Dalian University of Foreign Languages for his constant encouragement and support which stimulated me to make unremitting efforts to achieve my goal. Last but not least, my thanks go to Ms. Chen Qin from Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press for her great help which made the publication of the book possible.

*Xuelian Liu*

2015.3

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

This introductory chapter presents the background to the present study. It also sets forth the purpose, gives a justification for the research and indicates the contribution the thesis makes to the field of English as a foreign language (EFL) writing corrective feedback study, and outlines the research questions that the research addresses.

## 1.1 Background of the Study

Feedback is defined as any procedure used to inform a learner whether an instructional response is right or wrong (Lalande, 1982). It is a long-standing educational practice that can arguably be linked to almost everything we learn. In language learning, “the term corrective feedback [refers] to any feedback provided to a learner, from any source, that contains evidence of learner’s error of language form” (Russell & Spada, 2006: 34). According to Russell and Spada (2006), when reviewing their students’ written texts, second language (L2) (writing) teachers give feedback on a wide range of issues, such as the content, how the ideas are presented and organized, the appropriateness of the word use, and so on. “Such responses to L2 learners’ non-target like production have been commonly referred to as instances of *corrective feedback* (CF) or *error correction*” (Van, 2010: 2). CF is probably the most widely used feedback form in present-day L2 writing classrooms. Teacher feedback is a large part of the package of being a writing teacher. Some would argue that it is the biggest and most significant part.

Feedback plays a very important part in Chinese EFL students’

revision of writing, especially in tertiary education, because of the attitudes of tutors and staff and the move towards process approach in writing teaching methodology (Yang, Badger, & Yu, 2006). However, owing to the large class sizes resulting from enlarged enrollment, the examination-oriented teaching culture, and the varied teaching proficiencies of the teachers in China, there is considerable variation in the ways feedback is given to the students.

In China, by the end of 2007, there had been 899 colleges and universities which could grant the bachelor degree in English studies (He, Huang, Qin, & Chen, 2008). The total number of undergraduate English majors amounted to about 400,000 in 2008 (Hu, 2008). English writing is a required course for English majors. Therefore, English writing teachers' feedback practice really has great influence over a very big population.

Under the requirements of the new era of the 21st century, *The National Curriculum for English Majors in Chinese Tertiary Institutions* was issued by the Ministry of Education in April, 2000, which gives a detailed description about the cultivation objectives and the course design requirements for English majors. The English writing skills required of the English majors are divided into eight levels in the syllabus.

Following the guidance of the nationally unified syllabus, different writing courses are offered at different stages of the undergraduate program. In the second year, Basic English Writing is offered, and in the third year, Advanced English Writing is offered. In some universities, Academic English Writing is offered for senior English majors (Board, 2000).

There are two national English proficiency tests for undergraduate English majors in China, that is, Test for English Majors—Band 4 (TEM 4 hereafter), which is held in the fourth semester, and Test for English Majors—Band 8 (TEM 8 hereafter), which is held in the eighth

semester. In both tests, the writing proficiency of the English majors is tested in the writing sections. The 2004 editions of *Syllabus for TEM 4* and *Syllabus for TEM 8* comply with the teaching requirements set by the 2000 edition of *The National Curriculum for English Majors in Chinese Tertiary Institutions*. In TEM 4 writing section, students are asked to write an essay, which can be an exposition, a narrative, or an argumentative writing, about their opinions on some current issues in approximately 200 words in 35 minutes, and a note about 50-60 words in 10 minutes fulfilling different purposes, such as declining an invitation, passing information, making a complaint, etc. (Syllabus For TEM 4 Revision Committee, 2004). In TEM 8 writing section, students are asked to write an essay of about 400 words in different genres in 45 minutes (Syllabus For TEM 8 Revision Committee, 2004).

In this setting, all the sophomores majoring in English are enrolled in the Basic English Writing course, and juniors in the Advanced English Writing course taught by either Chinese EFL teachers or native speakers of English, with the former being the majority. The classes usually meet once a week for 2h. On the whole, for the English majors, great importance is attached to the development of their English writing skills at the tertiary level in China.

Approaches to writing instruction developed in North America have gradually made their presence felt in China recent years. Chinese EFL teachers tried to integrate those approaches into the local contexts (You, 2004a). The new North American approaches to teaching writing, such as the process approaches, genre-based approach, and writing for academic purposes approach were introduced into the country, experimented by researchers and teachers, and became prevalent during the last two decades (You, 2004a). Such approaches to writing instruction as process, task-based, and portfolio approaches, are being tested in Chinese English classrooms. ESL writing concepts, such as peer review, portfolio assessment, paradigm shift, and post-process,

are also widely used in EFL writing research in China (You, 2004b).

Whatever approaches the teachers adopt in their English writing instruction, there is no denying that feedback is an integral part of their job, and that writing teachers invest a great amount of time to giving CF to their students' written work is a truism.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

This research attempts to investigate Chinese EFL writing teachers' beliefs, practices and problems regarding giving CF on students' writing. In addition, students' perceptions of and reactions to teacher feedback in the Chinese college and university context will be the other focus of the study as it is crucial that student responses to the feedback are fed back to teachers as a heuristic to help them develop reflective and effective feedback practices.

There have been many studies done concerning EFL writing corrective feedback in Chinese college and university settings, but there are some limitations to the existent research. Much of the research lacks statistical reports and the samples used are not representative due to the relatively small sample and small areas covered. There has been some thorough research done in Hong Kong China to elementary school teachers and students, but there is a paucity of thorough research done in mainland China at the college/university level. In addition, while experimental studies on L2 written feedback have predominantly focused on the issue of error correction, some descriptive studies have investigated teacher written feedback from the view points of both teachers and students. These descriptive studies, though few in number, may play an important role in filling the gap by providing "a mine of information as to the various dimensions of feedback as a pedagogical tool" (Guénette, 2007:50).

The present study aims to ascertain how CF is perceived and carried



out by EFL writing teachers in Chinese college and university classrooms, to find out why teachers respond to student writing in the ways they do, see if discrepancies exist between teachers' beliefs and their actual practice, as well as between their beliefs and recommended principles of giving feedback, and to explore the reasons that may account for the mismatch. By doing this, it will provide a more comprehensive picture of Chinese college and university writing teachers' feedback practice to students on their English writing, contributing to an understanding of the behavioral characteristics, challenges and difficulties for teachers in using feedback to foster their students' writing development and their positive views of themselves as writers.

In addition, this study also tries to investigate students' reactions to and preferences for teacher feedback on their written assignments so as to compare teachers' self assessment of their feedback practice with students' reactions and their needs, as well as with their actual feedback practice. It is hoped that such comparisons will help to provide a greater understanding of how and how well teacher feedback addresses the needs of L2 writing students. Combining the students' views and teachers' views allows for open discussion of expectations and exploration of where there is a mismatch between these views. In addition, there may be places where teachers can accommodate their practices so that the student will be receptive to their feedback.

It is in this sense that attempts should be made to chart a broader understanding of how teachers' perceptions relate to both student perceptions and teachers' actual written feedback practices. Also, in many ways, further insights should be offered into and critical questions should be drawn out about how teachers' perspectives relate to the writing process. Accordingly, the present study is designed to answer the following major research questions: