How does French teachers’ written corrective feedback vary across their teaching experiences and across learners’ error types?

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Truscott (1996)’s call for the abandonment of grammar correction in L2 writing classes has ironically renewed interest in the place and role of written corrective feedback (WCF) in L2 writing and language development. As a response to Truscott’s claims, many studies examined the efficacy of different WCF techniques, resulting in increased evidence for its language learning potential (Ortega, 2012). Compared to the highly contested effectiveness of WCF techniques, L2 teacher WCF practices, however, are relatively unexplored (Furneaux et al., 2007). With the exception of Ammar et al. (2015), research on WCF practices was conducted mostly in English as a second or foreign language contexts and focused either on pre-service instructors (Guénette & Lyster, 2013) or on in-service teachers (Lee, 2008). These concerns prompted the present descriptive study, which examines WCF techniques by both in-training and post-training instructors of L1 and L2 French in Québec.

70 French instructors of whom 38 were pre-service (20 L2 and 18 L1) and 32 were in-service (17 L2 and 15 L1) provided corrective feedback on a student text. Teachers’ responses were coded for the targeted error type (e.g. syntax, spelling, vocabulary, etc.), the type of feedback provided (e.g. direct or indirect), its explicitness (with or without metalinguistic explanation) and the precision of the metalinguistic information.

Preliminary results indicate that regardless of the context (i.e. L1 or L2; pre-service or in-service), instructors flag spelling and morphological errors more than syntax. Unlike their ESL counterparts (Guénette & Lyster, 2013), they show a preference for indirect coded WCF, which was prevalent independently of the error type. However, teachers’ WCF practices illustrate a disturbing tendency to mark most verb errors, regardless of their nature, with the same broad code (e.g. grammar), which raises concerns about the clarity and efficacy of WCF. Implications for pedagogy and future research are discussed.

Keywords: French as a second language, pre-service and in-service teachers, error types, written corrective feedback.