A long debate over error correction – why not ask the students for a change?

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Good, guiding feedback has a strong impact on learning. However, foreign and second language research has mostly narrowed feedback to corrective feedback. Furthermore, there has been a lively debate over the efficacy of corrective feedback (CF) as well as its methods in L2/FL research over the past couple of decades (see e.g. Bitchener & Ferris 2012).

Especially SLA scholars advocate direct corrective feedback. When the teacher not only indicates the error but provides its correct form, and a possible metalinguistic explanation, the student learns it correctly, they believe. Yet, several L2 writing studies have promoted indirect corrective feedback: the teacher indicates the errors but asks the students to correct them themselves. The advocates of indirect CF believe that the self-correction process increases student engagement and reflection and is therefore more effective than direct correction.

Despite dozens of studies, no consensus has been found. Interestingly, few recent studies have asked students what kind of feedback they would prefer. Even fewer studies have considered the fact that different students may have different learning needs and styles and therefore may react differently to feedback.

My aim has been to find out what feedback and error correction methods would serve my upper secondary EFL students best in their own opinion. Altogether 46 students, aged 1719, chose how each of them wanted feedback on their EFL essays: orally or in writing, with errors corrected directly or marked indirectly.

The presentation will focus on the student choices, their experienced effects and the reasons the students gave for their choices. The implications of these two teaching experiments will also be discussed.


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