Written corrective feedback: To what extent does it account for contextual, linguistic and learner variables?

Ahlem Ammar
University of Montreal, Canada

Providing corrective feedback on learners’ errors in writing (WCF) is one of the main hallmarks of second language teaching. Research indicates that WCF promotes second language learning (Ortega, 2012). Little descriptive research has been undertaken to uncover how feedback is provided (Guénette & Lyster, 2013; Lee, 2008) and how students use it. The moderating effects of intervening variables have been rarely accounted for despite calls to do so (Kormos, 2012). The present descriptive study sets out to investigate French teachers’ WCF practices across contexts (L2 Vs. L1) and educational levels (elementary Vs. Secondary); the extent to which those practices vary across error type (linguistic variable) and learner proficiency level (learner variable); and if students are able to use the provided WCF.

Twenty one French teachers (twelve L2 and nine L1) from two different educational levels (10 elementary, 11 secondary) and their respective classes participated in the study. Twelve students (4 low proficiency, 4 high proficiency, and 4 with learning difficulties) were selected from each class (n=252). They were asked to produce a first draft that was followed by the teacher’s WCF and by revision. Teacher feedback and student revision were analysed in relation to error type and student proficiency level. Two independent judges coded 10% of the data to ensure the reliability of the coding categories.

Results indicate that teachers’ WCF practices vary across educational context, learner proficiency and error type. First, while coding is the teachers’ technique of choice in first language contexts, it is less prevalent in L2 classes. Low proficiency learners receive indirect WCF more often than their high proficiency peers. When addressing syntactic errors, instructors opt for direct feedback; however, they rely more on indirect techniques with errors of grammatical morphology. Finally, students’ ability to repair following WCF varies across WCF techniques and learner proficiency level.

Keywords: “individual learner variables”, “learner revision”, “written corrective feedback”. 