

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Writing is an inseparable part of any language learning process. Producing a coherent and cohesive piece of writing in the first language, as Nunan (1999) stated, is usually difficult. So, writing in a second language can be even more complicated. Writing ability is the art of producing thought and ideas, the mastery of which brings many problems for learners in different writing tasks. With the appearance of communicative views of language teaching, writing has been considered to be a basic communication skill which involves sufficient control of the writing system and the grammar (Chastain, 1988). As students attempt to write within the proposed framework, teachers meet a more complex situation. Providing effective feedback to help learners in their writing development can be a daunting and confusing task for teachers. Teachers provide feedback in order to support students' writing development and nurture their confidence as writers. Adam (2003) therefore claims that written production and feedback are of special importance in any language acquisition process.

A crucial question is: What is this feedback and how should it be managed in the language learning process? Undoubtedly, the role of feedback has a place in most theories of second/foreign language learning and language pedagogy. From the perspective of both structural and communicative approaches to language teaching, feedback is seen as a means of fostering learner motivation and ensuring linguistic accuracy. There exist various definitions and views on feedback proposed by scholars in the field. Reid (1993), for example, believes that feedback is an ongoing process that can take place from when the writing process starts; and it is not to be confused with evaluation, which may include feedback but is used to explain or justify a judgment or value. Kepner (1991, p. 308) defines feedback as "any procedure used to inform a learner whether an instructional response is right or wrong". Keh (2003, p. 17) considers feedback as "any input from reader to writer that provides information for revision".

The focus of the feedback may be the content of the writing, stylistic elements, grammar, or a combination of any or all of the above. Content feedback focuses on ideas presented in the writing and the organization of those ideas. Feedback on stylistic elements includes providing suggestions for a more appropriate word or phrase, even though no grammatical error has been made. Grammar feedback is given on grammatical aspects of writing. Grammatical accuracy is reported as having significant consequences for students' writing, particularly as it pertains to assessment and grades (Santos, 1988).

In most EFL/ESL contexts, the issue is more to do with how to give error correction rather than whether to give feedback or not. In doing so, various mechanisms have been employed. For instance, there are two main strategies used by teachers to respond, comment and correct grammatical errors to improve students' accuracy in writing. Direct or explicit error feedback occurs when the teacher identifies an error and provides the correct form, while indirect strategies refer to situations when the teacher indicates that an error has been made (by underlining, circling, coding) but does not provide a correction. It is the task of a student to correct it, i.e. solve the problem (Ferris & Hedgocok, 2005; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Lalande, 1982; Terry, 1989; Zamel, 1985).

Although many studies have been conducted to examine the effectiveness of written feedback; a lot of confusion remains regarding the kind of corrective feedback which can improve the learners' writing process. So, many ESL/EFL teachers do not have clear guidelines at their disposal to help their students. On the other hand, Terry (1989) asserts that students know that the accuracy of their writing may affect how they are received or how their abilities are judged by other people. If written accuracy has become so important to students in many contexts, the question for teachers then is how to provide feedback to get the best possible results in the students' texts.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Those who are involved in the field of second language writing regard feedback as a crucial factor for "encouraging and consolidating learning" (Hyland & Hyland, 2006, p. 92). Some scholars in writing (for instance, Leki, 1991; Raimes, 1983) believe that giving feedback is one of the important methods in assisting student writers to improve their writing.

Providing feedback on students' writing errors has always been one of the teachers' difficult tasks. Bearing this fact in mind, a lot has been written on the issue surrounding offering error feedback on students' writings, most of which is controversial and even inconclusive. Although there have been controversies regarding the efficiency of providing error feedback on students' writings (Ferris, 1999; Truscott, 1999), more literature in this area confirms that error correction debate continues. Since providing feedback to students' writings is difficult and time-consuming, it is worth investigating the most effective way to react to errors.

The issue which is worth mentioning here is that there exist different types of written corrective feedback and, Ellis (2009; p. 98) presents a comprehensive typology of written corrective feedback types, which will be discussed in details, in the following chapter:

1. Direct corrective feedback: the teacher provides the student with the correct form.
2. Indirect corrective feedback: the teacher indicates that an error exists but does not provide the correction.
3. Metalinguistic corrective feedback: The teacher provides some kind of metalinguistic clue as to the nature of the error.
4. The focus of the feedback: This concerns whether the teacher attempts to correct all (or most) of the students' errors or selects one or two specific types of errors to correct. This distinction can be applied to each of the above options.
5. Electronic feedback: the teacher indicates an error and provides a hyperlink to a concordance file that provides examples of correct usage.
6. Reformulation: that consists of a native speaker's reworking of the students' entire text to make the language seem as native-like as possible while keeping the content of the original intact.

Review of the literature suggests that corrective feedback is more beneficial but, along with research on the written feedback strategies of teachers, there are very few research studies investigating the effectiveness of different types of feedback strategies. In fact, one of the problems of implementing corrective feedback on students' writing seems to be the selection of the appropriate strategy which fits the teaching field.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Providing feedback is vital to a student's writing development. While making errors is natural in all aspects of language learning, EFL language writers face unique challenges in developing writing skills (Evans, Hartshorn, McCollum, & Wolfersberger, 2010). Written corrective feedback gives learners information that they need to notice their errors. Ferris (2002, p. 163) suggests that students "need distinct and additional intervention from their writing teachers to make up their deficits and develop strategies for finding, correcting, and avoiding errors". One of the concerns of teachers, especially in communicative classes, is that they wonder if language learners should correct the grammatical errors in their writing themselves or the teacher should do the task (Leky, 1991). Of course, most teachers are into correction of errors, but the key point is that not enough knowledge is provided to teachers regarding what to correct and especially how to correct.

In fact, there have been various studies concerning the effect of direct (Sheen, 2007) and indirect feedback (Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 2006). To name a few, Mackey, Gass, and McDonough (2000), as well as Lyster (1998) emphasize the usefulness of indirect corrective feedback in some special areas of language. Bwon and Hanlon (2001) concluded that direct or indirect corrective feedback does not affect the accuracy of learners' productions. Ellis (2004), as well as Evans (2002), confirmed the positive effect of direct corrective feedback in different combinations. On the other hand, Guenette (2007) believes that in spite of the existence of many experimental studies on teacher written feedback since the early 1980s, the results of the efficacy of written teacher feedback have been left in the midst of controversy. The debate about whether and how to give L2 students feedback on their written grammatical errors continues between those who believe in giving the feedback to students to improve their written accuracy and those who do not. In her study, Ferris (2004) states that her previous research is incomplete and insufficient for discussing the effectiveness of the corrective feedback or the differential effects of different corrective feedback types on learners' accuracy, voicing the need for further research. More recently, Ellis (2008) explicitly stated the need for well-designed research on this issue after suggesting a typology of written corrective feedback techniques.

The noteworthy point is that, considering the results of all these studies, one cannot observe any conclusive results regarding the effectiveness of direct and indirect corrective feedback.

So the need could be easily felt to investigate the effect of either type of written corrective feedback on EFL writing process. The present study may encourage EFL teachers to search and learn about the effective corrective feedback techniques. They can ponder about their students' needs and try to find the suitable feedback methods for their students. The study is also expected to bring a new perspective to writing feedback and put emphasis on how form-related feedback should be given to students. It directly sheds light on the question whether corrective feedback is useful or not; and if so, in what ways it should be given.

1.4 Research Questions and Hypotheses

As can be inferred from the previous section, type of corrective feedback is the independent variable of concern in this study, and the dependent variable to be studied is writing performance of the learners; gender is considered as a moderator variable.

To investigate the relationships between the above-mentioned variables in a systematic way, the following research questions were put forward:

Q1: Does direct feedback have any significant impact on Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners' writing?

Q2: Does indirect feedback have any significant impact on Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners' writing?

Q3: Is there any significant difference between direct and indirect corrective feedback on writing of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners?

Q4: Does learners' gender play any important role regarding the effect of direct and indirect corrective feedback on writing?

The above questions were tentatively answered in the form of the following null-hypotheses to be tested at the probability level of 0.05:

H01: Direct corrective feedback has no significant impact on Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners' writing.

H02: Indirect corrective feedback has no significant impact on Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners writing.

H03: There isn't any significant difference between direct and indirect corrective feedback on writing of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners.

H04: Learners' gender does not play a significant role regarding the effect of direct and indirect corrective feedback on writing.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

The terms defined in this section include (1) writing, (2) feedback and its typology, (3) written corrective feedback, (4) direct corrective feedback, (5) indirect corrective feedback and (6) EFL learners.

Writing is a set of visible or tactile signs used to represent units of language in a systematic way, with the purpose of recording messages which can be retrieved by everyone who knows the language in question and the rules by virtue of which its units are encoded in the writing system (Coulmas, 2006). Fischer (1996, p. 64) argues that “no one definition of writing can cover all the writing systems that exist and have ever existed”. Writing can be seen as an “art of forming graphic symbols”, that is, letters or the combination of letters (Byrne, 1988, p. 56). Tribble (1996, p. 91) also stresses that writing “normally requires some form of instruction” and that “it is not a skill that is readily picked up by exposure”.

Feedback, according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is: "the partial reversion of the effects of a process to its source or to a preceding stage" or "the transmission of evaluative or corrective information about an action, event, or process to the original or controlling source". Keh (1990, p. 294) defines feedback as “the comments, questions, and suggestions a reader gives a writer to produce reader-based prose as opposed to writer-based prose”. Kepner (1991, p. 308) defines feedback as “any procedures used to inform a learner whether an instructional response is right or wrong” and introduces a typology of feedback options for teachers and students as follows:

1. A *recast* is an instructor's rephrasing student's utterance, so that the utterance is correcting its grammatical form and/or its meaning.

2. *Error correction* refers to the assistance provided by expert, peer, or self, with reference to any shortcomings on the part of a second language student in the target language. It can be oral, written, or non-verbal.

3. *Self-correction* is the correction or compensation of the mistakes/errors made by one.

4. *Positive feedback* encourages a student to repeat and/or expand upon a given contribution in the target language. It is very similar to what psychologists would refer to as a positive reinforcement.

5. *Negative feedback* is that tends to dampen a process by applying the output against the initial conditions.

6. *Informational feedback* corrects errors that the learner commits.

Written corrective feedback is a pedagogy that is often used when helping learners improve their written accuracy (Ferris, 2003). Brannon (2006, p. 84) states that written corrective feedback is the most widely used form of feedback that students receive on their written work and “it can be a powerful tool for helping students to move forward in their learning. However, if teachers bombard the students with too much feedback, the students will shut down”. Lightbown and Spada (1999, p. 63) give written corrective feedback a definition such as: “Any indication to the learners in their writing that the use of the target language is incorrect. The learners receive various responses”. In this study, the term is used to focus on the correction of all types of grammatical errors. Written corrective feedback is primarily discussed in terms of the dichotomy of direct versus indirect feedback.

Direct Corrective Feedback or explicitness has an important role in a student’s uptake, or response to feedback. Direct feedback involves providing the students with the correct target form. It may include the crossing out of an unnecessary word, the insertion of a missing word, or the provision of the correct linguistic form above or near the linguistic error. Direct feedback is also referred to as explicit or specific feedback (Ferris, 2003). Direct instruction is generally a fast-paced instruction in which students respond to and receive immediate feedback (Bennett, 1982). According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), in direct correction the teachers supply the correct form and clearly indicate that what the students say is incorrect. In this study, the term is used to refer to locating the erroneous part of the structure and giving the correct form.

Indirect Corrective Feedback refers to situations when the teacher indicates that an error has been made but does not provide a correction, thereby leaving the students to correct it themselves. Indirect feedback is also referred to as implicit or non-specific feedback (James, 1998). In indirect corrective feedback, teachers indicate the errors but do not correct them (Ancker, 2000). Bitchener (2005) believes that indirect or implicit feedback refers to the situation when teachers point out an error without correct form provision. In this study, indirect corrective feedback is used to refer to underlining the erroneous structure and having the students provide the correct form.

English as a foreign language (EFL) learner is defined in *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied linguistics* as “A learner who learns English in countries where it is taught as a subject in schools but not used as a medium of instruction in education nor as a language of communication (e.g. in government, business, or industry) within the country” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 123).

1.6 Organization of the Study

The present thesis consists of five chapters. In chapter one, a basic introduction and an overview of the study are provided. The dependent and independent variables as well as research questions and hypotheses and the key terms are defined. The second chapter reviews the related literature concerning written corrective feedback and its different types. In chapter three, the design of the study, participants, instruments used for data collection, and procedure, as well as data analysis are described in detail. The fourth chapter presents the statistical results of the study through tables and discusses the findings. The last chapter contains the implications, limitations of the present study, and gives suggestions for further research, and draws relevant conclusions. The thesis ends with a list of references consulted and the appendices.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITRATURE

2.1 Introduction

In chapter one, it was made clear that the study intended to investigate the comparative effect of type of corrective feedback (direct vs. indirect) on pre-intermediate EFL learners' writing. It also aimed at exploring the possible effects of gender on the process of implementing different types of written corrective feedback.

Studies on feedback in writing have highlighted the different types of feedback provided and depending on the type used they have led to different outcomes. This chapter provides some key issues related to corrective feedback which will be presented as follows. First, a brief discussion of corrective feedback will be presented. Next, roles of feedback in language classrooms accompanied by learners' written feedback preferences in such classroom will be explained. Then, written corrective feedback and its subcategories will be put forward .When and How to correct section will be followed by the controversy around written corrective feedback. Finally, the debate regarding EFL grammar feedback in writing and a chapter summary will be presented.

2.2 Corrective Feedback

In general, feedback is used to express an opinion or a reaction to another person's performance (Mackey, Gass & McDonough, 2000). This reaction, in turn, aims to facilitate or promote more appropriate actions in the future, in relation to a goal and a vision. The feedback used at school is mostly defined in similar ways; it is a strategy, according to Askew (2000), where the teacher is imparting directly a judgment of a learner's strategies, skills, or attainment, and giving information about the judgment. Furthermore, Marzano (2003) states that in educational environments, feedback could be used to praise achievement or to point out an error or a mistake. Feedback should not be directed at the person's personality; instead, feedback should focus on the person's actions in a certain situation.

Humans can consciously change a behavior if they “become aware that a particular behavior produced an undesirable consequence” (Rubin & Campbell, 1997, p. 53). In addition, feedback can be classified according to the medium used to practice it (oral and written) and the message conveyed (i.e., accuracy vs. fluency).

Different researchers (e.g., Hedge, 1988; Raimes, 1983; Sommers, 1982; Ziv, 2002) argue that feedback is a crucial aspect in the writing process and that it plays a central role in learning this skill. Through feedback, learners come to distinguish whether they themselves are performing well or not. When they are not performing well, however, further feedback helps them take corrective action about their own writing in order to improve it and reach an acceptable level of performance (Freedman, 1987). Providing learners’ writing with feedback, however, is not only intended to help them monitor their progress, but also encourages them to take another’s view (Asiri, 1996).

Another valuable feature of feedback is that it serves as a good indication of how English as a Second Language (ESL) students are progressing in learning the written language and, therefore, assists the teachers in diagnosing and assessing their students’ problematic areas (Hedge, 1988). Additionally, feedback is helpful in encouraging students not to consider what they write in a final product and helping them write multiple drafts and revising their writing several times in order to produce a much improved piece of writing (Asiri, 1996). This can be adopted and benefited from in a teaching situation where rewriting is encouraged; that is, in a situation where the process approaches to writing are employed. Sommers (1982) asserts that it is not only student writers who need feedback to make revisions, but also professional writers seek feedback from professional editors, and from their writer colleagues to help them know whether they have communicated their ideas properly or not.

In the absence of feedback, students can become discouraged (Hedge, 1988), and lose sense of how they are doing and which aspects of their writing they should pay more attention to. Asiri (1996) argues that students’ efforts may be misdirected and they may gain an inaccurate impression of their performance in the writing skill. Moreover, a lack of feedback may also create the assumption among students that they have communicated their meaning and, therefore, they do not perceive a need to revise the substance of their texts (Sommers, 1982).

Error correction has always been a very controversial topic, and perhaps a thorny issue as there is very little agreement on how to correct errors and whether this correction will be

effective or not. Error correction can easily be described on a continuum ranging from the view that it can be harmful and ineffective to the view that is very essential and beneficial for some grammatical structures. Recent studies, as shown below, have proved that error correction is effective, necessary and essential but the obstacle which prevents error correction from being totally effective lies in teachers' inconsistent and unsystematic ways of dealing with errors.

The notion of corrective feedback (CF) contributing to the learners' language development has been a point of contention since Truscott (1996, p. 328) first argued that "grammar correction has no place in writing courses and should be abandoned" in writing classes as he believed it to be ineffective and even harmful. This argument has been of significant influence within the field of L2 writing, "[crossing] disciplinary, or at least sub-disciplinary, boundaries" (Ferris, 2010, p. 185) between the two areas of research and prompting both areas to address these criticisms.

The role of corrective feedback and whether it helps accuracy and overall writing has been debated for many years. Error feedback has been viewed as, either, contributing to the learner's language improvement (Sheen, 2007) or as being ineffective or even harmful according to the most extreme views, such as Krashen (1994) and Truscott (1996).

Regarding the corrective feedback, it is necessary to state that errors are a natural part of the learning process (Tornberg, 2005). Errors are common characteristics of language acquisition and learning. That is to say, everyone will make errors in the process of learning, no matter learning the first language or the second language. However, in a second language classroom, the teacher usually wants students to speak as much as possible and encourages them to speak with the purpose of improving communication competence. When students speak second language, they will also make various errors, and if these errors are not corrected, students will mistake them for correct form and internalize them to their inter language system. Thus, the oral English will be easy to fossilize if teachers do not provide corrective feedback.

2.3 Roles of Feedback in Language Classrooms

Hattie and Timberley (2007, p. 3) asserted that “feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement.” Friermuth (1998, p. 7) supported that teachers’ feedback helps “improve learners’ accuracy and language acquisition”. To the researcher, the indispensable role of teachers’ feedback can be shown in the fact that teachers’ feedback reflects to students what and how they perform, showing them their strong points to strengthen as well as the weak points to improve. Noticeably, when teachers leave mistakes untreated, the defective language might serve as an input model and be acquired by other students in the class. In short, students, when writing without teachers’ feedback, run a high risk of losing their ways. Added to this, Moss (2002) proposed that teachers’ feedback can speed up the process of language learning by providing information about rules and the limits of language use, which would otherwise take students a long time to deduce on their own. In brief, teachers’ feedback is considered “a prime requirement for progress in learning”, as proposed by Tunstall and Gipps (1996, p. 393); therefore, “giving feedback is one of the key roles that teacher plays in classroom” (Tornberg, 2005, p. 67). Moreover, not every teacher is successful in doing this job; therefore, the issue of what types and contents of feedback to deliver is undoubtedly a matter of concern.

The question is then how teachers can incorporate useful corrective feedback strategies into their own practice? Research on WCF continues to help us understand the best ways to support learners in their writing progress. As teachers we need to assess the needs of our students and engage them in CF practices. The success and implementation of CF may depend on a variety of factors that each teacher faces in the classroom. According to Moss (2002), using a combined approach, such as providing mini lessons and using few targeted problematic linguistic features could be one efficient way to provide feedback to learners. He asserts that mini lessons that focus on different types of errors of grammar seem to be more beneficial to students’ improvement and their ability to self-edit. While teachers may not be able to focus exclusively on a single linguistic error when correcting students’ writing they can make decisions that may better suit the needs of their students, perhaps by alternating foci on different assignments. Involving learners in the process of CF can provide information to teachers as to which linguistic features they may find more problematic. When working with students, teachers can inform students on the purpose of providing feedback and on which particular error type they will focus on. Bitchener and Knoch (2008, p. 210) assert that

“motivation is more likely to be gained if teachers negotiate with students about how frequently the feedback will be given, about the type of feedback that will be given, and about what the students will be expected to do in response to feedback”.

For teachers, the findings show that in order to support L2 writers in improving linguistic errors in writing, it may prove more productive to target one or two language errors rather than an unfocused approach. This facilitates students’ ability to focus on a few errors to which they can attend and learn to implement in future writing. For example, teachers can correct articles at one time and past-tense errors at another.

A study by Bitchener and Knoch (2008) using a single feedback session showed that it can be effective in developing accuracy in the use of two rule based features. Bitchener and Knoch (2008, p. 209) suggest using this targeted approach “until clear signs of accuracy improvement” are seen. The decision on which grammatical feature to focus on may be based on what teachers observe in the students’ writing. Teachers can also decide with the students on an additional feedback focus. However, other aspects of writing would also require attention in order to improve overall writing abilities. Teachers can choose to correct different aspects of writing such as content and organization at different times. Finally, teachers need to assess their own classroom and, students’ needs, and consider the many variables that will influence the implementation and options of feedback that are available to them. Teachers can explore a variety of CF strategies that might be better suited in their own contexts. According to Guenette (2007, p. 52) “The success or failure of corrective feedback will depend on the classroom context, the type of errors students make, their proficiency level, the type of writing they are asked to do, and a collection of other variables that are as of yet unknown”.

Teachers still need to assess and take into account their classrooms’ needs and learners, as one cannot ignore the fact that not all students will benefit from CF in the same way for reasons such as motivation and learning style. Guenette (2007, p. 52) highlights that “any type of feedback that does not take the crucial variable of motivation into consideration is perhaps doomed to fail, if the students are not committed to improve their writing skills, they will not improve, no matter what type of corrective feedback is provided”.

2.3.1 Learners' Written Feedback Preferences in Language Classroom

A student's attitude toward feedback can affect the way he responds and implements it in his writing process. Moreover, students' preferences for written feedback can differ according to their beliefs about the purpose of written feedback. Therefore, attitudes and expectations of students provide some insights on when and how students respond to feedback. Hedgecock and Lefkowitz (1996) investigated college level writers' (both foreign language (FL) and English as a second language (ESL) students) perceptions of their instructors' feedback on their writing assignments. Interview data showed that instructional practices largely shaped learners' expectations concerning the educational goals of written feedback. L2 students studying a foreign language (FL) viewed writing as a way to practice language, which meant that they were looking for different types of feedback. According to Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1996, p. 308), the interviews showed that for FL students a prevalent attitude is that "composing and revision in L2 are for grammar practice, not trying out new ideas or demonstrating creativity". In contrast, for ESL students, writing in English is important for expressing ideas and being evaluated in academic settings. The interviews showed that ESL students also valued feedback that focused on form and expressed a preference for sentence level correction. Both groups expressed that "interpreting teacher feedback sometimes involves playing a lexico-grammatical guessing game".

Other researchers have tried to find out what L2 students themselves want from the written teacher feedback. Leki (1991) used a questionnaire to investigate ESL students' preferences for error correction in college-level writing classes. The findings showed that students considered grammar, spelling and choice of vocabulary to be important. She discovered that having error-free work was also important for students and they preferred the teacher to show the location of the error and to provide a clue on how to correct it. Overall, the study revealed that students were eager to receive feedback on their writing and believed they benefited from it, but they did not want the teacher simply to tell the students about the errors and leave them to find the errors for themselves. This is in contrast with the findings of some researchers that indirect feedback, which tells students about the error and lets them correct it themselves, is the best way to improve accuracy. What learners believe to be helpful to them is in contradiction with what studies report to be helpful in improving writing.

Furthermore, it is important to consider that students' preference is related to their motivation, initiative and whether they view the type of error correction as an opportunity to improve. For instance, Lee (2005) investigated L2 secondary students' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes about error correction in the writing classroom. Findings showed that the majority of the students wished that their teachers would mark and correct the errors for them because they felt that the teachers were more competent, knew more than the students about grammar, or the students did not feel confident about their abilities to do it independently. In addition, this view could be related to the claim that students feel they must write without errors and in order to achieve error free writing, direct feedback is preferred. Among other reasons why students preferred direct feedback is that they did not always remember the grammar rules and would probably make the same errors again. Having a focused targeted approach to error correction, as Bitchener (2008) discovered, would be useful and help the students to improve accuracy of such errors in future writing. Focusing on a selected error can guide students and provide them with an opportunity to feel success rather than being overwhelmed or frustrated by a variety of grammar rules. Although Lee's (2005) study provides insight into students' preferences for error feedback, it is difficult to apply these findings to other L2 settings. Thus, the context of Hong Kong high school students in Lee's (2005) study cannot be generalized to other settings, since "in Hong Kong error correction is a relatively unexplored area" (Lee 2005, p. 5) and this suggests that students may not know what to do with it. The survey findings in Lee's study indicate a preference for direct correction. However, in another study conducted by Liang (2008), it was found that university students preferred a type of error correction which used underlining and description of the errors in their writing because they wanted to know what kind of errors they had made.

The students' preferences in both of these studies (Lee, 2005; Liang, 2008) have much to do with motivation and students' perception of the purpose of error correction. College students may see error correction as an opportunity to improve their writing and therefore take more responsibility; they have to rely on themselves to correct their errors in their future writings. Liang (2008) believes that direct correction is preferred because the correct forms are provided and, therefore, it is an easier way for the students to correct errors. The problem is that students still do not know why they made those errors.

The findings in Lee's study, which suggest that students prefer direct teacher feedback, contrast with the findings that indirect feedback is preferable to improve students' accuracy in long-term writing development (Ferris, 1999). This disagreement about what students prefer and what some researchers claim is beneficial over time suggests that, as teachers, we should not only consider the long-term value of error correction, but also vary the type of feedback according to each situation and level of language. As researchers have pointed out (e.g., Ferris & Roberts, 2001), direct feedback could be more appropriate for students at a lower proficiency level, whereas, indirect feedback may be more beneficial in the long term and more applicable to higher level proficiency students that can work out the errors independently. If the goal is for students to become independent in self-editing, we should consider that a student in a lower proficiency class will need more guidance and, therefore, giving them a chance to edit their work without direct feedback might prove ineffective in helping students improve accuracy. What is clear is that students want error feedback and believe that it is beneficial in helping them become better writers (Lee, 2005).

2.4 Types of Feedback

Feedback types have been categorized in different ways. The following is a brief account of the most important categories available in the literature reviewed.

2.4.1 Positive vs. Negative Corrective Feedback

As for McNamara (1999) and Anyon (2001), positive feedback shows students that teachers are interested in what they say and at the same time encourages them. On the contrary, negative feedback expresses teachers' displeasure, frustration or involves some kinds of punishment. Corrective feedback, as its name implies, is used to correct students' mistakes. Negative feedback is divided into two other types: preemptive and reactive. The former tries to prevent learners from making mistakes by giving clear instructions and explanations together with explicit grammar rules. The latter takes place after the mistake has been made by the learner. This reaction to error making can be implicit or explicit on the part of the language instructor, i.e., the way the language teacher corrects the mistake can be very explicit by telling the student that the sentence s/he has produced is wrong because of this and that reason (Anyon, 2001).

2.4.2 Written vs. Oral Feedback

Teachers' written feedback is delivered to students in the form of notes, whereas oral feedback is done in spoken words. It should be noted that oral feedback is synonymous with verbal feedback and it cannot be delivered in silence, the way non-verbal feedback is. Simply put, feedback which can be called oral must be in utterances (Anyon, 2001).

2.4.3 Explicit Correction

According to Lyster and Ranta (1997, p. 42), explicit correction falling at the explicit extreme on the continuum of corrective feedback, refers to “the explicit provision of the correct form”. As the teacher provides the correct form, he or she clearly indicates that what the student had said was incorrect. Explicit error correction, therefore, is characterized by an “overt and clear indication of the existence of an error” and the provision of the target-like reformulation (Ellis, 2006, p. 34).

2.5 Written Corrective Feedback

Written corrective feedback (WCF) is a pedagogy that is often used when helping learners to improve their written accuracy. Those who are involved in the field of second language writing assume feedback as a crucial factor for “encouraging and consolidating learning” (Hyland and Hyland, 2006, p. 92). Some scholars in writing (Leki, 1991; Raimes, 1983) believe that giving feedback is one of the important methods in assisting the student writers to improve their writing.

2.5.1 Types of Written Corrective Feedback

There are a wide variety of potential corrective feedback choices when dealing with written errors. And while the choice may be somewhat varied, it demonstrates the creativity of teachers and researchers who strive to find the most effective means to give feedback in an attempt to enact the greatest change.

As an instance, when studying corrective feedback and learner uptake in four French immersion classrooms at the primary level, Lyster and Ranta (1997) put forward six types of corrective feedback: 1) explicit correction: teachers supply the correct form and clearly

indicate that what the students say is incorrect; 2) recast: the teacher implicitly reformulates all or part of the student's utterance; 3) elicitation: the teacher directly elicits the correct form by asking questions or by pausing to allow students to complete teacher's utterance, or asking students to reformulate their utterance; 4) metalinguistic feedback: without providing the correct form, the teacher poses questions or provides comments or information related to the formation of the student's utterance; 5) clarification request: the teacher requests further information from a student about a previous utterance; 6) repetition: the teacher repeats the student's ill-formed utterance, adjusting intonation to highlight the error.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ellis (2009) distinguishes six different types of feedback with subgroups: (1) direct corrective feedback, when the teacher supplies the correct form, directly in the text or in the margin/at the end, no further division is made. (2) Indirect corrective feedback is when the teacher indicates and locates the problem using underlining or other markers, but does not give the correct form. Indirect corrective feedback could also be used with indication only, indicating in the margin that one or more errors have occurred. (3) Metalinguistic corrective feedback, when the teacher provides some kind of metalinguistic clue “as to the nature of the error” (Ellis, 2009; p. 98). He makes a division between (3a) use of error code, placed in the margin, and (3b) brief grammatical descriptions of errors. (4) Unfocused corrective feedback occurs when the feedback is extensive, focusing on all features in each hand-in and, focused corrective feedback considers only one or two features at the same time. Ellis (2009) suggests that, in L2 acquisition, unfocused corrective feedback may be the most efficient in the long run, despite focused corrective feedback supplying more examples of corrections to the same type of error. The fifth form is (5) electronic feedback explained by Ellis as when the teacher provides a hyperlink to correct usage in an electronically submitted document. Yet another form of corrective feedback is the use of (6) reformulation, a form of feedback as consisting of a native’s reformulation of the student’s text so as to make the text as native-like as possible while keeping the content intact.

2.6 When and How to Correct

As to when to use the strategies of focus on form, first it should be reminded that malformed utterances by learners fall in two classical categories of errors and mistakes. It is believed that errors should be treated by explicit correction, while mistakes should be subject to implicit

strategies. In this regard, Hendrickson (1980) introduces a distinction between local and global errors. He explains that local errors need not be corrected since the message is clear and the correction by teacher may interrupt the flow of communication. On the other hand, global errors should be treated in some way since the understanding of the message is under question; that is, the message is incomprehensible. Hendrickson (1980) further mentions that sometimes it would be difficult for teachers to find out whether the error is local or global. As for error correction, now the question is that how global errors should be corrected. It is believed that the most effective method of error correction has not been concluded yet in research.

Some scholars like Krashen and Terrell (1983, cited in Brown, 2001) assert that there should be no direct treatment of errors, and the justification for that is what happens in real life situation. In contrast, learners have always wanted direct correction on the side of the teacher. Brown (2001) suggests that regarding these two extreme views, a balanced view should be taken in terms of error correction.

Also, affective state and linguistic stage of the learner are worthy of consideration (Harmer, 2000). Regarding the affective state of the learners, Gregerson (2003) warns that some learners find correction distracting, demotivating and stress-generating, as well as the fact that learners are also inhibited by some error corrections.

As far as correction and feedback are concerned, here the question that might rise is whether correction should be done by teachers only or there is also another source of correction. In this regard, peer correction is introduced by many scholars, such as Brown (2001), Harmer (2000), Hadley (2003), and Murphy (1986). Among these scholars, Murphy (1986) strongly recommends peer feedback and urges teachers to transfer the responsibility of correction and feedback to learners. But, in order to do so, according to his personal experience, he suggests that first the function of feedback should be explained to learners. Moreover, some discourse and communication-related matters, such as turn taking, and the appropriate gambits to correct should also be taught to learners (Murphy, 1986). In this regard, Hadley (2003) suggests that teachers can give a kind of checklist including grammatical features, discourse features, vocabulary, and pronunciation matters so that the learners get to know what to look for in the speech of their peers.

As for the empirical studies regarding peer correction, one study was conducted by Morris (2002), in which the effect of explicit correction, recasts, and negotiation moves including clarification requests, confirmation checks, and repetition by peers on the learner repair, as well as the relation of these strategies with special errors were checked. By tape recording the conversation between these learners, the researcher found that 70% of the errors by peers received corrective feedback but the rate at which lexical errors were corrected was higher than that of syntactic errors; therefore, the tolerance of these learners was low for lexical errors. Moreover, in this study, syntactic errors mostly invited recasts, whereas lexical errors received negotiation moves. In the idea of the researcher, these learners negotiated lexical errors because recasting might have confused their peers into believing that an alternative, yet equally correct form was provided. In addition, they recast syntactic errors because grammar is too complex to ask peers to produce the correct form on their own. With regard to immediate learner repair, the overall repair was low (20% of the time) but it was evident that lexical errors were more often repaired than syntactic errors.

Despite mixed results provided by studies exploring the effectiveness of WCF, a number of recommendations for teachers have emerged, that are currently widely accepted (e.g., Ellis, 2009; Ferris, 2003; Goldstein, 2006; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Lee (2005) summarizes the main areas of these recommendations: 1) focus (global and local, i.e. content and organization as well as grammar and mechanics); 2) error correction (strategic use of direct and indirect feedback with a preference for the latter; selected errors rather than comprehensive correction); and 3) written commentary (text-specific teacher recommendations).

2.7 Controversy around Written Corrective Feedback

Although a number of experimental studies on teacher written feedback have been carried out since the early 1980s, the results of the efficacy of written teacher feedback have been left in the midst of controversy (Guenett, 2007). The debate about whether and how to give L2 students feedback on their written grammatical errors continues between those who believe in giving the feedback to students to improve their written accuracy and those who do not. Truscott (1996) in his well-known article, “The Case Against Grammar Correction” stated that feedback is both ineffective and harmful on several grounds and should be therefore