

In the Name of God



Shahrekord University
Faculty of Letters & Humanities
English Department

**EFL Students' Response to Different Comment Types in
Writing Revision in the Persian Culture**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of M.A. in TEFL

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	i
List of Tables	iv
List of Figures	v
List of Abbreviations	vi
Abstract	vii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
1.1. Overview	1
1.2. Statement of the Problem	4
1.3. Purpose of the Study	5
1.4. Research Questions	6
1.5. Research Hypotheses	6
1.6. Significance of the Study	6
1.7. Definition of Key Terms	7
1.7.1. Writing	7
1.7.2. Feedback on Writing and the Different Types	7
1.7.3. Problem/Solution Pattern of Organization	8
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.1. Introduction	9
2.2. Definition of Feedback	10
2.3. Feedback on Grammar	11
2.4. Feedback Expectancy	12
2.5. The Effect of Feedback	15
2.6. How to Make Feedback More Effective	19
2.7. Different Types of Feedback	20

2.8.	Usefulness of Teacher Feedback	24
2.8.1.	Usefulness of Teacher Feedback on Writing	28
2.8.2.	Usefulness of Teacher Feedback on Grammar	30
2.9.	A Few Additional Studies	32
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY		
3.1.	Introduction	33
3.2.	Participants	34
3.3.	Materials	35
3.4.	Procedure	35
3.4.1.	Feedback Procedure	35
3.4.2.	General Procedure	36
3.5.	Data Analysis	38
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS		
4.1.	The Result of Comment Applications	40
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS		
5.1.	Discussion	50
5.2.	Conclusion	57
5.3.	Implications of the Study	58
5.4.	Limitations of the Study	59
5.5.	Suggestions for Further Research	60
REFERENCES		62
APPENDIXES		
Appendix A: Examples of Teacher Comments and Student Revisions		73

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1. Frequencies of Comment Types and Revision Types	41
Table 4.2. Frequencies of Comment Types and Revision Types	42
Table 4.3. Frequencies of Comment Types and Revision Types in SPSS	42
Table 4.4. Revision Comment Cross Tabulation	46
Table 4.5. Fisher's Exact Test	47
Table 4.6. The Effect Size	48

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1. Frequencies of Comment Types and Revision Types	43
Figure 4.2. Percentages of Comment Types and Revision Types	44
Figure 4.3. Frequencies of Comment Types and Revision Types	49

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESL	▶▶▶▶	English as a Second language
ILI	▶▶▶▶	Iran Language Institute
L1	▶▶▶▶	First Language
L2	▶▶▶▶	Second Language
N.S	▶▶▶▶	Not Satisfactory
P	▶▶▶▶	Poor
S	▶▶▶▶	Satisfactory
TTC	▶▶▶▶	Teacher Training Course
W	▶▶▶▶	Well-Done

ABSTRACT

Over the past years, L2 teachers have adopted many approaches to helping L2 learners to write, sometimes, but by no means always, with apparent success. One of the important issues is the effect of the comment or feedback that L2 teachers give on a composition. A great deal of L2 teacher feedback has been shown to be ineffective, confusing, and inconsistent (Zamel, 1985). Different comment types might have different effects on L2 learners' revisions. That is why the purpose of this study was to determine the effect of different types of comments on L2 learners' revisions in the Persian culture. Because L2 learners' culture could be a variable and may affect the results, this research was done on Persian learners with the Persian culture. There are different types of comments for L2 teachers to use. Using some special comments more than others might make better writers with less frustration. In this study, 3 types of comments were under investigation in the Persian culture, namely, questions, imperatives, and statements. The exact problem was the existence or nonexistence of comment types which could affect the L2 writers more than the other comment types and also the exact type that was better for L2 teachers to use more than the others. The research proceeded with 60 participants who were all Persian native speakers with the same English proficiency in 3 groups. Each group received one type of comment in order to assess the effect of each comment. There were 3 drafts available from the participants in this research on which the feedback procedure happened. The revisions of the L2 learners were analyzed and showed that the imperative form was more effective. Then it might be better for L2 learners to receive this specific type of comment more to have better revisions.

Key Words: Writing, Feedback, Feedback on writing, Problem/Solution pattern of organization.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview

Writing is “a set of visible signs which represents units of language in a systematic way” (Coulmas, 1999, p. 560). Goldberg (1986) knows writing as a growing and lively process. According to him writing is a process of growing ideas and using experiences. By using experience, he means, through writing, the experiences are used on and on, learn, and finally develop thought and ideas. In other words, it can be said writing is a representation of what has been learned already and it would be a product in this sense. Maybe it is a useless action when just the product of the writing is important for the teaching process. According to Healy (1980), feedback given only at the product is useless. When L2 students receive feedback only on the end product, they would not have enough challenge while writing.

It is better for L2 writers to receive feedback while they are writing. It is more effective that drafts of L2 student writers be read by an audience during the process of writing. The reason is that they can become aware of what their readers’ need and would be able to communicate more with them. In the other approach of writing which is interactive and process approach, writing is seen as a thinking

process as well as a communicative act, which means writers write to convey meaning to an audience. The mentioned audience might affect the writer and give some responses to what the writer does. One of the important readers could be the teacher who receives different roles like the role of a facilitator and can work on the writers' thinking and rethinking process. This facilitative role is very important for L2 writers which little by little should change into a more real role. In this approach, it is necessary for the writers to establish a reciprocal relationship with the readers (Nystrand, 1986).

In comparison with giving feedback on product, other studies (Freedman, 1987; Ziv, 1984) have also shown that comments on L2 students' drafts have resulted in improvement on their final composition. Giving feedback on the L2 students' earlier drafts makes them encouraged and more active in the process of writing, which finally results into more and more revision. It creates more communication between the reader, here the L2 teacher, and the L2 writer. The happening communication between the two parties could be a good goal itself.

Also within the field of L2 testing, the mentioned reciprocal relationship and communication is considered important. This importance is shown in the tasks used in performance based tests for speaking and writing which are designed with the objective of creating a communicative context that resembles a communicative situation which is normal and not like a test (Bachman et al., 1995; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Norris et al., 2002).

On the issue of the effect of the comment or feedback that L2 teachers give on a composition Sommers (1982) wrote:

As writers we need and want thoughtful commentary to show us when we have communicated our ideas and when not, raising questions from a reader's point that may not have occurred to us as writers. We want to know if our writing has communicated our intended meaning, if not, what questions or discrepancies our reader sees that we, as writers, are blind to. (p.148)

About the teacher feedback, it has been stated that some of them are ineffective, confusing, and inconsistent (Applebee, 1984; Zamel, 1985). It might have different reasons like the type of the comment, the way the learners received the comment, or the strategies the students need. Chaudron (1983) tried to find another way and identified more positive effects in the group using the peer feedback.

In working on what was effective and what was not effective on writers' revisions, the issue of correction and its amount was another important issue. In studying the effects of feedback on errors of L2 writers, Robb et al. (1986) concluded that the amount of time teachers spent on correcting errors, "might be more profitably spent in responding to more important aspects of student writing" (p. 91). About the amount of correction, Leki (1992) had the idea of not giving comments on all parts of the writing and reduce the number of comments. Semke (1984) also found that even if L2 teachers mark all errors in L2 students' drafts, it would not necessarily improve their writing skills and also it "may have a negative effect on student attitudes" (p. 195). Selective error feedback is a type of feedback which has nothing to do with all errors of L2 writers. Its focus is only on the L2 learner's very problems which are considered more serious (Ferris, 1995; Hendrickson, 1978). According to Semke's researches (1989), the group which received comments in

question type rather than ready corrections showed more progress and had more positive attitudes toward writing.

Another important matter is the question of focusing on form or on content. Sheppard (1992) found that working on content is more useful than on form as students who received comments on content showed improvement in the quality of their writing, although they could be weaker in the quantity of writing they were able to produce. Other studies have also shown that comments on content were more helpful and effective, especially those that were focused and not wordy (Beach, 1979; Hillocks, 1986). Hammond (1995) mentioned, after the audiolingual method, there has been less attention to accuracy in the production of language. Maybe it would be not bad to focus on form more than before.

In order to find more effective ways of giving feedback to writers, working on different comment types which might have different effects on L2 students' revisions seems reasonable. That is why the purpose of this study is to determine the effect of different types of comments on L2 students' revision in the Persian culture. L2 students' culture could also be a variable and affect the results. It means a special comment type may have different effects in different cultures. This research will be done on Persian students with the Persian culture.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Feedback is “something that pushes the writer through the various drafts and on to the eventual end-product” (Keh, 1990, p. 294). These various drafts, are something which make the end product a better writing composition and finally might make better writers. But how is it possible to make L2 writers have more drafts and revise more? Maybe using some comment types make L2 writers revise

more than the other types. For example, Zhang (1995) compared different sources of feedback and found that teacher feedback had an affective advantage over peer feedback, self-feedback, and other types of feedback.

There are different types of comments for L2 teachers to use. Lynch (1996, p. 155) suggests “teachers should offer learners a range of feedback types ... [which] may stand a greater chance of success than reliance on a single technique.” It shows he believed there was a range of feedback types possible for L2 teachers. It means various types of feedback are available for L2 teachers like peer feedback, conferencing, and written teacher-feedback (Hyland, 1990). However, there might be some more useful comments to be given to L2 students’ writings.

Using some special comments more than others might make better writers with less frustration. Here in this study, three types of comments are under investigation in the Persian culture, namely questions, imperatives, and statements. Finally, if it is concluded that one type of the above comments is better than the others for Persian learners, then why not using that special type more than the other types? The exact problem was the existence or nonexistence of any comment types which could affect the L2 writers more than the other comment types and also the exact type that was better for L2 teachers to use more than the others. It means which comment type makes L2 students revise their writing more.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of L2 teachers’ comment types on L2 students’ revisions in the Persian culture. These comments are provided for the L2 students’ writings. L2 students’ drafts and their revisions of these drafts based on the L2 teacher feedback will be analyzed. The questions consider

whether or not the teacher's comment types have any influences on students' revisions and which type of comment is more effective. The comments are in the forms of questions, imperatives, and statements. In the end, if one type of comment is found to be more effective, L2 teachers might be better off using that special comment more than the others. The reason is the way student writers revise their writings under the effect of the comments. Some comments might make students do better revisions. This research is specifically done in the Persian culture and might have different results in different cultures.

1.4. Research Questions

In line with the above discussion, the following questions are to be pursued in this study:

1. Do comment types have any influences on L2 students' revisions?
2. Which comment types encourage L2 students to make substantive, effective revisions in the Persian culture?

1.5. Research Hypotheses

Accordingly, the following null hypotheses are formulated:

- H_{01} : Comment types would have no influence on L2 students' revisions.
- H_{02} : None of the comment types encourages L2 learners to make substantive and effective revisions more than the other two in the Persian culture.

1.6. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that if a special comment type affects L2 students' revisions in writing more than the other comment types, L2 teachers could use that comment more to affect people's writing in L2 more than before and

probably have a better teaching in writing. There are different types of comments like imperatives, questions, and statements. At this point, it is important to determine how students feel about L2 teachers' commentary and which type of comment is more effective with more changes that are positive in students' final drafts in writing. So the exact significance of this study and the reason why it is important is the result which shows us scientifically and statistically if there is any comment type which can affect L2 students' writing revisions more than the other comment types and if there is any, which one is more effective than the others? Finally, L2 teachers could use that specific comment type more than the other types and probably affect L2 students' writings more than before. It might finally lead to less frustration and confusion in L2 learners.

1.7. Definition of Key Words

1.7.1. Writing

As mentioned above, writing is a set of visible signs which represents units of language in a systematic way (Coulmas, 1999).

1.7.2. Feedback on Writing and the Different Types

Keh (1990, p. 294) defines feedback on writing as "input from a reader to a writer with the effect of providing information to the writer for revision." In the present study, three types of teacher commentaries will be used: statements, imperatives, and questions. The following examples clearly show the point:

- Question: What is the problem, and why?
- Statement: The reason is not clear.
- Imperative: Give a reason for it.

1.7.3. Problem/Solution Pattern of Organization

The participants in this study will be instructed to use a problem/solution pattern of organization. It means there is a problem in the writer's writing which has a solution in the L2 teacher's comment. In terms of the problem/solution pattern, the teacher-researcher will try to give different functions to the feedback. These functions are according to Sugita (2006) and are as the following with more details and examples below: 1) providing details to explain the problem or solution (Providing), 2) describing why the problem is serious (Describing), and 3) adding new ideas or more specific support (Adding). The expressions used in this study for functioning as teacher commentary are given below which are according to Sugita (2006).

1. Providing

- Question: What does this mean? Or, what do you mean?
- Statement: It is very confusing. Or, it is not clear.
- Imperative: Explain it more clearly. Or, explain that a bit.

2. Describing

- Question: What is the problem, and why?
- Statement: The reason is not clear.
- Imperative: Give a reason for it.

3. Adding

- Question: Is it supported with specific details?
- Statement: This part is too general. Or, it's difficult to understand.
- Imperative: Give a specific example. Or, make it easier to understand.