Research on the Application of Written Corrective Feedback in College English Writing Teaching

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Abstract

As we all know, the importance of English writing, a form of language output, is self-evident. Nowadays, in college English teaching, teachers should not only pay attention to learners' learning process, but also to learners' learning results. In order to improve learners' writing ability, on the one hand, English teachers should constantly improve the effectiveness of classroom teaching and teach students how to write; on the other hand, learners' internal factors and the intrinsic characteristics of writing tasks also require teachers to give appropriate corrective feedback on writing output to attract learners' attention to errors in text and gradually improve the accuracy, fluency and complexity of writing output. Based on the Skill Acquisition Theory, the Interaction Hypothesis and Noticing Hypothesis, this paper mainly explores the application of written corrective feedback in college English writing teaching, and further improves the English writing ability of college English learners through effective ways.

Keywords

college English; writing; written corrective feedback.

1. Introduction

English writing ability is an important aspect to test English learners' comprehensive language use capability. However, English writing ability of college English learners in China hasn't improved significantly for a long time. As we all know, for college English teachers, guiding students to improve their skills in all aspects is the primary task in English teaching. But many previous studies have shown that teachers and students devoted a lot of energy to improving their reading ability, so the improvement of writing ability is ignored to some extent. However, as for college English learners, strong English writing ability can not only help students achieve excellent results in relative tests, but also lay a good foundation for their further study and work in the future. As one of the available methods of feedback given by college English teachers, written corrective feedback plays an irreplaceable role in college English writing teaching.

2. Written Corrective Feedback

(1) Connotation

Written corrective feedback refers to the feedback provided to learners' articles containing grammatical errors (Ellis, 2007). In 1978, Hendrickson raised five questions about written corrective feedback: (1) Should the language errors in learners' articles be corrected? (2) When should these errors be corrected if they need to? (3) What errors should be corrected? (4) How should errors be corrected? (5) Who should correct the errors, teachers, peers or learners themselves? These five questions lay the foundation for us to carry out research on

written corrective feedback, and also point out the direction for English teachers' writing teaching.

(2) Research review

A large number of studies on corrective feedback have shown that direct written corrective feedback on grammatical structure improves the accuracy of grammatical structure in direct post-test and delayed post-test. Ellis et al. showed that both focused and unfocused direct written corrective feedback could help learners improve the accuracy of their output (2008). Sheen et al. (2009) pointed out in an article on analytical accuracy that in direct post-test, the focused direct written feedback group performed better than the unfocused direct written feedback group and the control group, but in delayed post-test, the focused direct written feedback group performed more accurately than the control groups. In addition, in a study of five grammatical structures, it was found that in direct post-test, the focused direct written feedback group performed better than the control group. Van Beuningen et al. (2012) pointed out that different writing tasks embodied different context and language requirements, both of which alleviated the effects of written corrective feedback because different errors were caused by different variables. When we measured the accuracy of a new writing text, learners paid attention to the rules of the meta-language with a systematic learning structure, and generalized the written corrective feedback they obtained from one context to the context that appeared in other writing chapters. In the context of a new writing chapter, the structure of systematic learning would be more easily processed by written corrective feedback than the structure of project learning. Yuanshun Cai (2014) jointly explored the influence of focused written corrective feedback on the acquisition of English past tense. Their research showed that focused direct written corrective feedback could promote the acquisition of rules of English past tense and irregular verb forms by learners at primary English level.

3. Theoretical Framework

(1) Skill Acquisition Theory

The Skill Acquisition Theory holds that learning language is the same as learning skills. Anderson's theory of adaptive control of thought holds that knowledge originates from declarative knowledge and gradually becomes automatic procedural knowledge through practice of declarative knowledge. Declarative knowledge here refers to the explicit knowledge about language (meta-linguistic rules), and procedural knowledge refers to the implicit knowledge contained in unconscious language generation.

(2) The Interaction Hypothesis

Long's Interaction Hypothesis holds that second language acquisition is the result of the interaction between learners and other speakers, especially those with higher levels than themselves. The key factor in the interaction is meaning negotiation, which is an important mechanism to promote the development of second language interlanguage. Meaning negotiation is helpful for learners to grasp the relationship between language form and speech function of target language.

Long put forward two types of inputs in his updated Interaction Hypothesis: positive evidence and negative evidence. Positive evidence is information about the correct content related to grammar, representing comprehensible input. Long believes that in addition to positive evidence, learners also need negative evidence to deal with several errors. Positive evidence can provide comprehensible input that promotes acquisition and interactive update, while negative evidence provides corrective feedback that is incorrect interactive update or not grammatical, and promotes acquisition by supporting the cognitive process of acquisition.

(3) Noticing Hypothesis

In Noticing Hypothesis, Schmidt (1990) put forward that noticing plays an important role in the process of second language acquisition from language input to brain processing of language information. Although noticing cannot guarantee the realization of acquisition, one of the prerequisites for acquiring a certain language form is that learners must consciously pay attention to the form and be able to understand the meaning represented by the form. Only the noticed language form can be absorbed. And the continuous strengthening of the specific language form is beneficial to the learners to improve the sensitivity to the language form and promote the reorganization of the interlanguage system, so as to effectively narrow down the gap between the learner's interlanguage and the target language.

4. Approaches to Written Corrective Feedback in College English Writing Teaching

Exploring how to effectively adopt written corrective feedback in college English writing teaching has always been the focus of college English teachers. The following part illustrates several ways of corrective feedback that are commonly used, hoping to help college English teachers improve learners' writing output and enhance learners' writing capability through effective written corrective feedback.

(1) Direct and indirect written corrective feedback

When it comes to direct written corrective feedback (Ferris, 2002) , it means that the teacher provides correct language forms directly for learners' language errors, including delimiting the redundant words or phrases in the text, inserting the missing words or phrases, giving the correct language structures and forms corresponding to the wrong language structures or forms, etc. In short, direct written corrective feedback means that the teacher presents the correct forms or content directly to the students. The advantage of direct written corrective feedback is that learners can clearly see what errors are made in their own articles, correct errors according to teachers' clues, and master the correct form efficiently. Furthermore, this method can help to reduce the confusion and anxiety caused by learners' failure to understand errors, and promote accurate correction and subsequent writing.

Indirect written corrective feedback refers to the feedback that does not directly provide the correct language form, mainly by delimiting or circling the language error, or marking the number of language errors on the edge of the text, or indicating the addition or subtraction of the text with adding or deleting symbols. Indirect written corrective feedback does not directly provide learners with the correct modification, but requires learners to correct their errors on their own; therefore it requires learners to devote more attention and energy. However, indirect written corrective feedback can attract learners' attention to errors in writing output, guide learners to correct errors autonomously, and further verify whether the usage of knowledge or skills they have mastered is reasonable. Furthermore, autonomous corrective can also help learners internalize the types of errors, so indirect written corrective feedback is more effective than direct written corrective feedback for long-term language learning (Ferris & Roberts, 2001).

(2) Focused and unfocused written corrective feedback

Focused written corrective feedback (also known as selective written corrective feedback) refers to the provision of written corrective feedback on one or a few pre-selected language structures. Unfocused written corrective feedback (also known as comprehensive written corrective feedback) is the correction of all errors in learners' writing output. Sheen (2007) believes that focused written corrective feedback can reduce learners' attention pressure and therefore can help learners to notice a certain target structure, while focused written

corrective feedback will reduce the possibility of learners' attention to the target structure because of learners' increased attention load.

Since written corrective feedback is a time-consuming and laborious work, many researchers prefer to support unfocused written corrective feedback. Sheen (2007) pointed out in his research that L2 learners' information processing ability was limited, and if they were required to deal with multiple errors at the same time, it would increase learners' burden. In daily English teaching, comprehensive written corrective feedback methods are not necessarily more effective than selective written corrective feedback due to individual differences among learners. If learners are required to deal with all errors in writing output, it will seriously affect learners' learning enthusiasm and self-confidence. Therefore, in the process of writing teaching, teachers need to choose appropriate methods of written corrective feedback according to the learners' existing learning level, learning ability and the complexity and difficulty of writing tasks.

In terms of focused and unfocused written corrective feedback, the author thinks that semi-focused corrective feedback is more desirable. First, although focused corrective feedback is more rigorous at the methodological level, it has lower economic value and can only improve the accuracy of single language structure, not help learners improve the overall accuracy. Secondly, in the course of daily teaching and literature reviewing, the author found that a lot of corrective feedback given by teachers is one-time, considering the convenience of examining the validity of the feedback, teachers should take more dynamic, multi-stage, high-frequency, timely and long-term feedback in the later teaching , so as to effectively help learners improve their writing capability. Moreover, we should realize that it isn't enough if the feedback is not responded to by students after being corrected by teachers. Finally, teachers should pay attention to the length of writing before they give feedback on students' writing, because the length of writing reflects the learners' writing proficiency, and there are fewer errors in short writing chapters than long chapters, so it cannot fully reflect the problems that learners have in writing.

5. Conclusion

Written corrective feedback is of great significance to the teaching of college English writing. Based on the elaboration of the connotation of written corrective feedback and the related research done by predecessors, this paper puts forward approaches suitable for college English writing teaching. Since different feedback methods have their own advantages and disadvantages, teachers also need to make decisions on proper methods in the process of writing teaching according to learners' individual differences, the characteristics of different writing tasks and writing subjects, in order to achieve the purpose of helping learners to effectively improve their writing output capability.

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