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An Exploratory Study of Corrective Feedback in a Thai EFL Writing Class

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Abstract

Although a large number of studies have focused on oral corrective feedback in communicative classes, comparatively, few have focused on the corrective feedback devices used in writing classes. Whenever emphasis has been placed on the corrective feedback employed in writing classes, the focus has primarily been on the written corrective feedback. Where oral corrective feedback employed in writing classes serves as the research focus, the context has mostly been teacher-student conferences. This study attempts to shed more light on the usage of the different kinds of corrective feedback devices during teacher-fronted class sessions. It investigates the corrective feedback usage of a teacher in a Thai EFL writing class and aims to answer the following three research questions: 1) What kinds of corrective feedback are employed?; 2) To what extent does the participant use corrective feedback devices?; and 3) How does the participant utilize corrective devices?

Introduction

Panova and Lyster (2002) assert that corrective feedback has gained prominence in studies in the second language acquisition field in part due to the theoretical claim that comprehensible input

alone may not be enough and second language learners may need to be exposed to a certain degree of negative feedback. Ever since Swain (1985) proposed the comprehensible output hypothesis, stressing the crucial role output may play in second language acquisition, the notion of "pushed" language has become one of the central themes of research in the field of second language acquisition. Nevertheless, debate on the effectiveness of teaching techniques should not be viewed entirely in isolation from the classroom context. The large size of most EFL writing classes, together with the cultural differences underlying certain appropriate classroom behavior, may alter the nature of certain teaching techniques resulting in a variety of ways these teaching techniques are employed. Thus, there is a need to bring to light the full range of possible approaches used among EFL/ESL teachers before any conclusions can be drawn. If research in the field of second language acquisition is to be of any use to teachers, studies that investigate different classroom contexts should be encouraged. This study will examine corrective feedback as used in an EFL academic writing class at the graduate level in Thailand.

Classroom settings

Ellis (1997) defines "Second Language Acquisition" (SLA) as the study of "...the way in which people learn a language other than their mother tongue, inside or outside of a classroom" (p. 3). Another term commonly used to refer to the same process is "Second Language Learning" (SLL). Lightbown and Spada (1999) further discuss many, more often than not, contrasting characteristics of the two learning settings, one being that in natural acquisition settings, erroneous utterances produced by "Learners of Second Languages" (L2Ls) are not usually corrected as long as these errors do not interrupt the communication flow, whereas in traditional instructional settings errors are corrected frequently even though they may be well-understood in terms of meaning as the focus is on accuracy. More recently, another instructional setting has emerged as a result of the rise of an interactionist take on SLA. Also known as content-based or task-based language teaching, the aim of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach is to create a new learning setting, which

combines different characteristics of traditional instructional and natural acquisition settings. The result is a learning setting that minimizes the amount of explicit correction; utilizes simplified within context but not structurally graded input; provides a variety of discourse types as commonly found in natural settings; pulls L2Ls' attention away from the accuracy of their production and emphasizes comprehension; and pays attention to using modified input that suits L2Ls' levels. Nevertheless, CLT has been heavily criticized when it has been observed that L2Ls in various immersion programs using content-based approaches, although fluent in the target languages, fail to achieve desirable accuracy levels (Lyster, 1994; Swain 1985). This raises the possibility that meaningful interaction alone may not be sufficient and there may be a need to draw L2Ls' attention to form as well.

Given the increasing attention paid to the need to rely on form as well as meaning in language learning, Long (1991 as cited in Ellis et al., 2002) distinguishes between two kinds of form-focused instruction: focus-on-forms (FoFs) and focus-on-form (FoF). The former refers to traditional grammar teaching where pre-selected linguistic items are presented and emphasized during the course of each lesson without stressing meaning. The latter refers to instruction that focuses on meaning rather than form. However, this is not to say that there is no attention drawn to form at all. Rather, attention to form may emerge from communicative tasks which most of the time lend themselves to communication breakdown, which, in turn, provides ample opportunities to attend to form. Moreover, FoF can be further classified into 'reactive FoF' which refers to FoF that functions as the treatment of learner errors, and 'pre-emptive FoF' which refers to FoF that occurs before any erroneous utterances are produced. For L2Ls, pre-emptive FoF functions as a confirmation check or a query before producing the target structures, and for teachers, it serves the need to check L2Ls' knowledge before allowing them to produce certain target structures.

Taxonomizing the classroom settings from another perspective, Stern (1992) introduces the notions of experiential and analytic foreign language teaching. The experiential strategy allows L2Ls to "use the language for a purpose" (ibid; 301). This approach is similar to CLT mentioned above in the sense that the focus of

these classes is on the content, not on the language with the assumption that the language will take care of itself. The result is speech that is high in fluency but low in accuracy. Analytic foreign language teaching, on the other hand, is quite the opposite in the sense that language and more often than not culture are the objects to be studied. L2Ls in these classes pay more attention to the code itself. Moreover, Stern (1992) has put forward the learning dimensions of experiential and analytic in the form of a cline, suggesting that it may be difficult to exactly classify one class into one type or the other.

Corrective Feedback

Definitions

'Corrective feedback,' 'negative feedback,' or 'negative evidence' are terms which refer to responses to erroneous utterances provided by teachers or peers in an attempt to either point out that there is an error or to correct an error. Many different definitions have been offered by different researchers. Chaudron (1988 as cited in El Tatawy, 2002) offers three different functions of corrective feedback. First, it may only "inform the learner of the fact of error." Second, it may "elicit a revised student response." Lastly, it may serve the function which Chaudron terms "the true correction" which aims at modifying the interlanguage rule (if that is possible) in order to minimize the likelihood of the same error reoccuring (p. 1). Schachter (1991 as cited in El Tatawy, 2002), Long (1996 as cited in El Tatawy, 2002), and Ellis et al. (2002) categorize corrective feedback as either implicit or explicit feedback.

Corrective Feedback in Non-Composition Classes

Since the introduction of form-focused instruction, many types of corrective feedback have been proposed. Long (1999 cited in Lyster, 2002) proposes that to bring students' attention to form while keeping the flow of the conversation in meaning-based classes, the teacher must employ what he refers to as *negotiation of meaning*. According to Long, negotiation of meaning occurs when there is a communication breakdown between two interlocutors.

The process of negotiating for meaning consists of three types of interactional moves: input modifications such as stressing key words; semantically contingent responses such as expansions and repetition; and conversational modifications such as requests for clarification or confirmation 'check. However, some scholars argue that Long's negotiation of meaning may not represent what is really going on in the classroom context. It has become apparent that a lot of form-focused behavior does not occur only when there is a communication breakdown. Sometimes the teacher may understand the meaning the student is trying to convey but decides to 'push' the student to produce a more accurate utterance. Thus, it seems that while Long's negotiation of meaning primarily focuses on reaching mutual understanding between interlocutors, the classroom practice usually focuses on accuracy even when there is mutual understanding. Consequently, Lyster and Ranta (1997) introduced the notion of *negotiation of form.* They state that the process of negotiating form allows students to self-correct, pushing them to produce more accurate utterances which according to Swain (1985) can be very beneficial (Lyster, 2002).

Investigating the relationships between error types, corrective feedback types, and uptake in French immersion classes at the elementary level, Lyster (2001) found that the types of errors that occurred did correlate with the types of feedback given to L2Ls. To be more specific, they found that lexical errors tended to lead to negotiation of form, while grammatical and phonological errors to recasts. They also found that negotiation of form was more effective than recasts and explicit correction when it came to lexical and grammatical errors, while with phonological errors, recasts tended to be more effective in leading to successful uptake. However, Lochtman (2002) investigated the role of feedback in analytic German as a Foreign Language classes in Belgium where three GFL teachers were observed and the main activities classes were text-comprehension and grammar exercises looked at three different types of corrective feedback: explicit correction, recasts, and teacher-initiations to self-correction which included clarification requests, metalinguistic clues, elicitation, and repetition. He concluded that the recasts in analytic classes did not function in the same way as those in more experiential classes. He also noted

that this was because students in analytic classes tended to expect correction from the teacher, thus more often than not perceived recasts as correction. Lochtman thus referred to the recasts found in his study as "pseudo-recasts."

Corrective Feedback in Composition Classes

Although many papers have discussed corrective feedback in composition classes, to the author's knowledge, only one has made an effort to define the written corrective feedback in general and not just types of corrective feedback. Syananondh and Padgate (2005) cite Keh's (1990) definition of corrective feedback as "the comments, questions, and suggestions a reader gives to a writer" (p. 69). In addition, the main distinction among written feedback is between direct feedback which refers to the teacher's provision of the correct form, whereas indirect feedback refers to the teacher's indication that an error has occurred without the correct form being given (Ferris & Roberts, 2001).

Exploring the employment of written corrective feedback by teachers in Hong Kong, Lee (2004) surveyed both teachers and students, and also asked the teachers in the study to complete an error correction task. The results showed that a limited range of corrective feedback techniques were used. In general, only two techniques were used: direct corrective feedback and indirect coded feedback. More importantly, only half of the corrections were considered accurate by the researcher. Lee, therefore, has called for ways to improve teachers' training in the area of corrective feedback.

Syananondh and Padgate (2005) investigated teacher intervention or preemption in large composition classes during the writing process. The undergraduate students in the study were divided into two groups: control class and experimental class. The control group was given both direct and indirect written corrective feedback without oral preemption, whereas the experimental group received preemption and oral corrective feedback while developing their drafts. It must be noted here that the corrective feedback was aimed at writing skills such as text organization, argument development, and paragraph writing. The results revealed that

preemption should be implemented as it seemed to be equally beneficial as written corrective feedback given after the drafts were finished but it seemed to help save the teachers' time.

The current study focused on a composition class at the graduate level. However, the class under study was unique and quite different from those reviewed above in the sense that the teacher provided oral corrective feedback on grammar points to the students after the drafts of reflection papers were handed in. Moreover, many studies reviewed above which favored corrective feedback in classrooms tended to be experimental in nature. However, the current study was aimed at shedding more light on the practical side of the matter; thus, it was observational and data-driven in nature. The research questions guiding the investigation were as follows:

1. What kinds of oral corrective feedback are employed?
2. To what extent does the participant use oral corrective feedback devices?
3. How does the participant utilize oral corrective feedback?

Methodology

Data collection

Three sessions of the class were videotape-recorded involving interaction between the students and the teacher who has been teaching EFL for 17 years and teaching writing for four to five years. Each session lasted three hours with roughly a 15-minute break in each session. The tape amounted to a total of 467 minutes or approximately seven hours and 45 minutes which was later selectively transcribed by the researcher. The content of the class sessions recorded included grammar instruction, grammar practice, and instruction on academic writing. As this study was intended to be exploratory and descriptive, the participant—the teacher—used his own approaches or techniques in teaching. Apart from the data on the videotape, note-taking was conducted in case there were any incidences of inaudible recorded data.

Frameworks and Data analysis

The data analysis was divided into two major parts, the macro and the micro analyses. In the macro analysis, a framework on classroom discourse adapted from that of Weissberg (1994) was used to observe the overall discourse of the class. Each of the three sessions recorded were analyzed and coded using "Episodes," the definitions of which were adapted from those developed by Weissberg (1994). In his 1994 study on the functions of talk in an ESL composition class, Weissberg identified three episodes: instruct, analyze, and explore/generate. Weissberg proposes that there are different moves which in turn form the structure of each episode. The first type identified in his study is instruct episodes, during which the teacher provides rules and tips on the subject matter. The structure of the instruct episode is [INSTRUCT] + IRE + IRE (etc.) + [INSTRUCT];..., in which IRE refers to the teacher's Initiation, a student's Response, and the teacher's reactive Evaluation, respectively. The second episode is referred to as analyze episodes, during which the teacher extensively uses textbook examples and exercises. Moreover, in these episodes, the teacher and the students critique pieces of student writing. The structure of this episode identified by Weissberg (1994) is [READ] + [ANALYZE] + IRE + IRE. The third episode type is referred to as explore/generate episodes. In these episodes, the defining feature is teacher-led collaborative composition sessions allowing for an open-ended class activities such as sentence generating. Weissberg does note that the Text-Explore/Generate episodes are rather difficult to define as they tend to be structurally open.

As mentioned above, the macro analysis would shed more light on the discourse of the class, allowing the researcher to systematically investigate the participant's teaching behavior. It must be noted here, however, that the pieces of writing critiqued by the participant in the current study were single and independent sentences rather than essays. However, to answer the research questions on corrective feedback devices, another level of analysis was needed. The micro analysis should explore a variety of corrective feedback devices employed during the class sessions. Micro analysis was decided upon because it seemed the most appropriate way to identify not only the distribution of corrective

feedback devices but also the relationships between them and the errors which triggered them. In order to accomplish these goals, only the analyze episodes were further transcribed and used as a database for micro analysis as they were found to be rich in corrective feedback devices. Each analyze episode was further categorized into two major task types, namely spontaneous and non-spontaneous tasks. During the spontaneous tasks, the participant asked the students in the class to use the skeletal sentence patterns in the textbook to form new sentences of their own. Subsequently, the participant showed the newly formed sentences on the projector and critiqued them. On the other hand, during the non-spontaneous tasks, the participant brought with him samples of sentences produced by students in other course sessions and critiqued them.

In order to investigate the relationship between the error types and the corrective feedback used in response to them, episode identification was needed. Thus, in the micro analysis, the analyze episode structure of [READ] + [ANALYZE] was replaced by [Prompt] + [CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK] + [CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK] where [Prompt] referred to an erroneous utterance.

A codification of corrective feedback and error types was adapted from Lyster and Ranta's 1997 study on classroom interaction. The current study used only three out of the four error and feedback codes identified by Lyster and Ranta (1997). The error type that was excluded in the current study was errors in grammatical gender. In the original study, Lyster and Ranta investigated the corrective feedback in French-immersion classes; therefore, the role the errors in grammatical gender played was paramount. However, since the current study was conducted in an EFL academic writing class and grammatical gender in English is almost non-existent except for the pronominal system, this error type was not expected to occur; thus, it was excluded from the current study. However, as mentioned above, the errors in pronominal gender would be classified as errors in the use of closed classes. In the second error type, lexical errors, Lyster and Ranta identify two subtypes: inaccurate or inappropriate choices of lexical items in open classes (nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives) and non target-like nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives including

errors in affixation. The current study made use of both subtypes of the lexical errors. The third type Lyster and Ranta observed is phonological errors which consist of errors in decoding or reading, mispronunciations, absence of obligatory elision, absence of obligatory liaison, and addition of other elements or phonetic sounds. Since the current study was conducted in an EFL academic writing class, this type of error was not expected to be the focus of the study; therefore, it was not included in the analysis. Finally, Lyster and Ranta identify errors that they have labeled "unsolicited uses of L1" which are the use of L1 when L2 would have been preferred. However, in the current study, the first language is Thai, and unlike French and English where words are sometimes so similar that some students may mistakenly assume that a particular English word has an exact counterpart in French, Thai and English differ greatly both in the sound inventory and grammar. Thus, this type of error was not expected to occur during the study and it was excluded from the analysis.

Briefly put, the error types adapted from the 1997 study by Lyster and Ranta were of three subtypes of grammatical errors and both subtypes of lexical errors. However, since Lyster and Ranta did not investigate corrective feedback in a composition class, certain elements considered focal in writing classes were not included. Thus, in addition to the above two major types of errors, the current study made use of another type of error adapted from Ferris' dichotomy of treatable versus untreatable errors (1999). Ferris asserts that treatable errors are rule-governed and can be remedied through the teaching of grammar rules. Some examples of treatable errors are errors concerning subject-verb agreement, run-ons, comma splices, articles, and so on. On the other hand, Ferris views lexical errors and errors concerning sentence structure as untreatable. It is the last type of untreatable errors that Lyster and Ranta (1997) did not take into account which is understandable since Lyster and Ranta investigated oral corrective feedback in content-based classes, whereas Ferris examined written corrective feedback in composition classes which emphasized more on accuracy. Since the current study examined the oral corrective feedback in a composition class, an error type that concerned accurate sentence structures was needed, and they were labeled

errors concerning clarity in writing in the current study. After transcribing the tapes, the researcher identified two subtypes in this classification: semantic redundancy which referred to errors resulting from repeating what has been written already, including what is usually referred to as "round-about writing," and semantic ambiguity which refers to grammatical sentences that do not seem to be connected coherently including vagueness in writing.

Each error was treated as a prompt that was followed by a series of corrective feedback devices. The sequence of corrective feedback as employed to respond to a particular error did not reflect the real-time order of occurrence. That is, during one talk turn, the participant may give feedback on one error and move to another error that may have occurred unexpectedly and consequently have to provide another set of feedback before returning to the previous error to give more feedback on it. However, since one of the research questions posed above was to explore the relationship between error types and corrective feedback types, the sequences of corrective feedback in the current study were based on the types of errors as the real-time order of occurrence had little relevancy to the target of investigation.

Results

The macro analysis in which the three-episode framework adapted from Weissberg (1994) was used revealed that the class under study consisted of all three episode types. However, the explore/generate episodes, because they tended to be embedded within the analysis episodes, were included in the analysis episodes in the current study. However, the time spent on each type of episode was not equally distributed. Table 1 shows the length of time spent on each episode in minutes. As can be seen, the episodes that occupied the greatest amount of time were the instruct episodes as this course was classified as lecture mode rather than seminar mode and had a total duration of 331 minutes or about five hours and 30 minutes. The analysis episodes followed with the total length of time of 136 minutes or about two hours and 15 minutes. There were eight short explore/generate episodes embedded within the sequences of corrective feedback.

The micro analysis yielded a total of 61 prompts and 186 occurrences of corrective feedback. Table 2 shows the overall distribution of corrective feedback by feedback types excluding the repeated explicit correction. As can be seen from Table 2, the most frequently employed corrective feedback was metalinguistic clues at 52.7%. The second most frequently used type of corrective feedback was explicit correction with a total of 38.2%. The rest were repetition, clarification requests, and recast at 5.4%, 2.7%, and 1.1%, respectively.

Table 1

Length of time for the three types of episodes (total 467 minutes)

Episodes	Length of time	Percentage
Instruct episodes	331	71
Analysis and Explore/Generate	136	29

Table 2

Overall frequency and distribution of corrective feedback by feedback types (N = 186)

Types of CF	No. of occurrences	Percentage
Metalinguistic	98	52.7
Explicit correction	71	38.2
Repetition	10	5.4
Clarification request	5	2.7
Recast	2	1.1

Table 3 and 4 illustrate the frequency and distribution of corrective feedback by task types. The results show that,

contradictory to the first set of results, for both types of tasks the most frequently used corrective feedback was metalinguistic clues at 52.9% for the spontaneous tasks and 52.4% for the non-spontaneous tasks. The second most frequently used was explicit correction accounting for 40.2% and 35.7% for the spontaneous tasks and the non-spontaneous tasks, respectively. Repetition only accounted for 1% during the spontaneous tasks; however, it accounted for 10.7% during the non-spontaneous tasks.

Table 3

Frequency and distribution of CF by task types

Types of CF	**Spontaneous** No.	Percentage	**Non-spontaneous** No.	Percentage
Metalinguistic (MF)	54	52.9	44	52.4
Explicit correction (EC)	41	40.2	30	35.7
Clarification request (CR)	4	3.9	1	1.2
Recast (RT)	2	2.0	0	0.0
Repetition (RN)	1	1.0	9	10.7
Total	102		84	

Table 4

Frequency and distribution of corrective feedback by task types in the correct order

Spontaneous		Non-spontaneous	
MF	52.9%	MF	52.4%
EC	40.2%	EC	35.7%
CR	3.9%	RN	10.7%
RT	2.0%	CR	1.2%
RN	1.0%	RT	0.0%

Table 5 presents the distribution of error types in the entire database used in the micro analysis. As can be seen, about 47% were lexical errors, 27% were errors concerning clarity in writing, and 22% were grammatical errors. Although at the beginning phonological errors were excluded from the data analysis process because they were not expected to occur, there was one phonological error found in the database. Therefore, the researcher decided to include it as part of the analysis.

Table 5

Number and percentage of errors (N = 61) by error types

Error types	Number	Percentage
Lexical errors	29	47.5
Errors concerning clarity of writing	17	27.9
Grammatical errors	14	22.9
Phonological error	1	1.6

Table 6 shows the distribution of corrective feedback by error types. Metalinguistic clues were most frequently employed as the responses for most error types except for errors on closed classes (1a), and errors on pluralization, negation, question formation, word order (1c). Recasts occurred twice in the database. Functioning as the response to the only phonological error, it accounted for 100% of the phonological errors. Another recast followed an error on closed classes, in which category it accounted for 10%. Table 6 also shows that errors that occurred more frequently were in turn responded to more frequently. Errors on word selection (2a) which occurred most frequently, accounting for over 40%, were responded with the highest number of corrective feedback.

Table 6

Frequency and distribution of corrective feedback by error types (N=186)

	Pronoun	1a	1b	1c	2a	2b	3a	3b
MF		40%	53.85%	42.86%	52.63%	63.64%	50.00%	56.82%
EC		40%	30.77%	57.14%	43.42%	27.27%	33.33%	34.09%
CR					3.95%	9.09%		2.27%
RT	100%	10%						
RN		10%	15.38%				16.67%	6.82%

Notes: Pronoun: phonological error

1a: errors on closed classes, 1b: errors on tense, verb morphology, subject-verb agreement, 1c: pluralization, negation, question formation, word order

2a: errors on word selection, 2b: non-target-like words

3a: semantic redundancy, 3b: semantic ambiguity

Discussion

Before any conclusion regarding the study can be drawn, it is necessary to take note of the limitations of the study. First, the study was small in scale, focusing on one EFL teacher in Thailand; hence, the results should not be viewed as examples of common practice in Thailand. Second, the classroom under study was a composition class; thus, any conclusion drawn about the class and the teaching behavior appearing in it should not be viewed as a representation of what actually goes on in every EFL class in Thailand. Nonetheless, the study has shed light on how corrective feedback is employed in EFL academic writing at the graduate level in Thailand. The discussion and implications below may only be applicable to similar EFL contexts.

Corrective feedback as the research focus

In answering the first and the second research questions (1. what kinds of oral corrective feedback are employed? and 2. to what extent does the participant use oral corrective feedback devices?), the data from the current study revealed that five corrective feedback types out of the six identified by Lyster and Ranta (1997) were employed by the participant. The participant used metalinguistic clues (52.7%) and explicit correction (38.2%) most frequently. However, repetition (5.4%), clarification requests (2.7%), and recast (1.1%) were much less in number. The corrective feedback type that was not present in the database of the current study was elicitation.

The results seem to contrast with those of Lyster and Ranta's 1997 study. Lyster and Ranta found recast to be the most frequently used and explicit correction and metalinguistic clues to be the least frequently used. Also, elicitation accounted for 14% in their study, while none was observed in the current study. In the same light, Lyster (2001) found that recast (59.9%) was the most frequently used in the French immersion classes in his study, followed by what Lyster had termed "negotiation of form" corrective feedback which included elicitation, repetition, clarification request, and metalinguistic clues under one umbrella term. In addition, in Lyster's study, explicit correction only accounted for 6%. Moreover, Suzuki (2004), when studying corrective feedback in ESL classrooms, also found that recast (60%) was the preferred choice and that explicit correction (2%) and metalinguistic clues (1%) rarely occurred. Also, though much less in number when compared to that of Lyster and Ranta's study, elicitation in Suzuki's study accounted for 6% of the total instances of corrective feedback. Along the same lines, although representing a different classroom context, Lochtman (2002) found that recast (30.5%) was also the most frequently used feedback and elicitation closely followed by recast accounting for 30.2% in analytic German as a foreign language classes. However, it must be noted here that the contradictory results observed in these studies and the current study may be attributable to the different classroom contexts. Also, all four studies mentioned above were non-composition classes, whereas the class in the current study was a composition one.

As mentioned above, each episode was identified either as containing spontaneous or non-spontaneous tasks. During the spontaneous tasks, the participant asked the students in the class to use the skeletal sentence patterns in the textbook to form new sentences of their own. Subsequently, the participant showed the newly formed sentences on the projector and critiqued them. On the other hand, during the non-spontaneous tasks the participant brought with him samples of sentences produced by students in other course sessions and critiqued them. All together, there were two non-spontaneous tasks and three spontaneous tasks. A close examination of the distribution of corrective feedback in these two task types revealed that metalinguistic clues were the most frequently employed corrective feedback with 52.9% during the spontaneous tasks and 54.2% during the non-spontaneous tasks. In addition, explicit correction was used to the same extent in both task types. Thus, it seems clear that when taking metalinguistic clues and explicit correction into consideration, it can be concluded that task types do not affect the employment of the two corrective feedback devices. However, the same cannot be said about other corrective feedback types. During spontaneous tasks, repetition only accounted for 1%, whereas during the non-spontaneous tasks, this feedback type accounted for 10.7%. This is rather surprising as one would expect repetition to be used more frequently when the students responsible for the given erroneous forms were present in the class.

Regarding the use of recast, there were only two accounts of recasts in the current study and both were observed during the spontaneous tasks. However, it is interesting to note that both accounts of recasts occurred when there were multiple errors at hand, and when the errors were spoken rather than written which also explains why recasts in the current study only occurred in the spontaneous tasks. Recasts were observed to be in accordance with Lyster's (1998) conclusion that recasts tend to be used when the forms being discussed are well beyond the learners' interlanguage. Another explanation for the low percentage of recasts in the current study may be that most mainstream studies on corrective feedback such as some of those mentioned above focused on experiential content-based classes, while the current study examined a more

analytical content-based class. The main aim of the teachers in experiential content-based classes may be to encourage immediate self-repair or uptake and to keep the learners' attention on the content; thus, recasts were used more frequently. Lyster (1998) asserts that recasts are used to keep learners' attention on the content and to move the lesson ahead. However, in the more analytic class under study, the aim may be to encourage internalization of rules for future language production; thus, metalinguistic clues were used in order to allow the students to take in as much information about a given error as they could.

Given the contradictory and unanticipated nature of the distribution of different corrective feedback, attention needs to be paid to the relationships between the corrective feedback and the errors that prompted it. The current study examined the relationships between corrective feedback and three broad types of errors *(Grammatical errors*: la: errors on closed classes, lb: errors on tense, verb morphology, subject-verb agreement, lc: pluralization, negation, question formation, word order; *Lexical errors: 2a:* errors on word selection, 2b: non-target-like words; *Errors concerning clarity in writing:* 3a: semantic redundancy, 3b: semantic ambiguity). However, as mentioned above, there was one phonological error observed in the database which was unforeseen. Nevertheless, the phonological error was analyzed for its relationship with the corrective feedback.

The analysis of error types revealed that there were 186 errors in the entire database. The most frequently observed errors were lexical errors (46.8%); among them 40.9% were errors on word selection and 5.9% non-target-like words. The lexical errors were followed by errors concerning clarity in writing (36.6%); among them, semantic redundancy accounted for 12.9% and semantic ambiguity accounted for 23.7%. As for the grammatical errors, only 30 accounts (16.2%) were observed: ten were errors on closed classes; 13 were errors on tense, verb morphology, subject-verb agreement; only seven were errors concerning negation, question formation, word order. Finally, the only phonological error found accounted for 0.5%. The results of the current study can be compared with those of Lyster's (2001). In the 2001 study, Lyster found that grammatical errors accounted for 50% of all the errors

observed, followed by lexical errors (18%), and phonological errors (16%). By examining the errors observed in the class under study, one can clearly see that the problems lie not in the grammar knowledge but in that of vocabulary and idea organization. This is contradictory to what Lyster has found. This can be explained by the fact that the students in the class under study can be considered as intermediate-to-advanced learners of English. It also points to the need for classroom researchers to focus also on individual differences.

Regarding the relationships between the errors and the corrective feedback used to respond to them, it was found that most error types tended to invite metalinguistic clues and to a lesser extent explicit correction except for the phonological error and grammatical errors concerning pluralization, negation, question formation, and word order. The phonological error was responded to with a recast (100%), and errors concerning pluralization, negation, question formation, and word order tended to invite more explicit correction (57%). When viewing the error types in the same vein as Ferris (1999), the treatable errors in the current study, namely grammatical errors, mainly invited metalinguistic clues. Although given the fact that Ferris (1999) investigated written feedback while the current study examined oral feedback, the results can be said to confirm those of Ferris'. That is, treatable errors tend to be followed by indirect feedback except for the errors on pluralization, negation, question formation, and word order. Untreatable errors in the current study, namely lexical errors and errors concerning clarity of writing, seem mainly to invite metalinguistic clues. This finding, however, contrasts with that of Ferris' (1999) study in which it was found that untreatable errors tended to lead to direct feedback. The differences in the findings may be due to the fact that Ferris examined written feedback which, by its nature, is usually not too elaborate due to the fact that it may consume too much time for the teacher to provide extensive written feedback, whereas the oral feedback in the current study allowed for quick but extensive discussion of the untreatable errors, providing the teacher with an opportunity to explore and explain the wrong choices of words and ambiguity in the students' writing.

Another point worth mentioning regarding the relationships between error types and corrective feedback concerns repetition. It was noted earlier that repetition was high in percentage during the non-spontaneous tasks where the students in the class under study did not produce the sentences being critiqued. This, however, was somewhat unexpected as one would expect repetition to be used when it could lead to immediate student-repairs. However, a possible explanation surfaced when the relationship between repetition and the error types was taken into consideration. It was found that seven out of ten accounts of repetition followed errors concerning clarity in writing. The rest followed grammatical errors. None followed lexical errors. After a closer examination of errors on clarity of writing and the two tasks in the study, 11 out of 17 errors on clarity of writing occurred during the two non-spontaneous tasks, while only six of them occurred in the three spontaneous tasks. In other words, the errors of this type occurred mostly in the non-spontaneous tasks.

The previous section provides the results and explanations for corrective feedback when it is viewed in isolation from other accompanying elements involved in a dynamic classroom discourse. However, it seems important to note that corrective feedback always operates within a dynamic context. Thus, to address this point, the next section will discuss the nature of the class under study and how various elements are comprised together to make up the discourse of this EFL academic writing class.

Corrective feedback as part of a dynamic classroom discourse

To understand the dynamism of the class under study, Figure 1 is provided to show the various components of the class which make up its unique classroom discourse. As can be seen from Figure 1, four major frequently dichotomized notions are included. The first two notions are composition and non-composition classrooms. The class under study exhibits characteristics of both classroom contexts. That is, the class is, by label, a composition class, dealing with mostly written prompts; at the same time, it makes use of oral corrective feedback which is a tool used mostly in non-composition classes. This overlap seems to be the result of the classroom size and the limited time allowed for

each session of the class. This seems to confirm the conclusion given by Syananondh and Padgate (2005) that oral corrective feedback is a promising alternative for Thai EFL writing classes as it is time saving. Moreover, it can also be concluded from the current study that with its synchronous reaction, more extensive discussion can be provided.

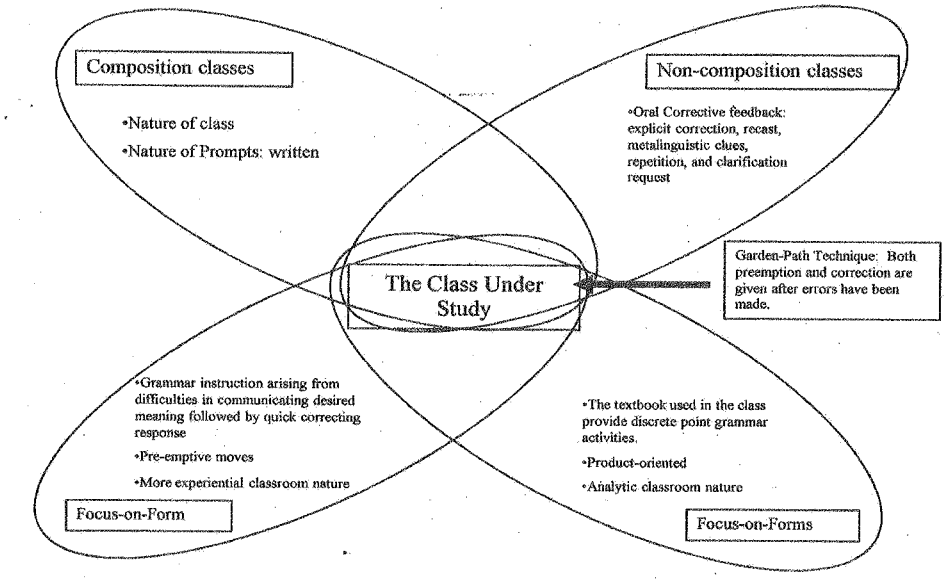

Figure 1: The illustration of the nature of the EFL academic writing class under study

Another dichotomy observed in the study is that of focus-on-form versus focus-on-forms. As can be seen from Figure 1, the class in the study exhibits once again an overlap of the two form-focused instructions. Following Sheen's (2003) definition of focus-on-form, first of all, the class can be considered focus-on-form because it involved grammar instruction arising from difficulties in communicating desired meaning followed by quick correcting responses. Sheen (2003) maintains that focus-on-form involves the correction of "unplanned problems in communication arising during communicative activities, [and] there is no grammar syllabus" (p. 226). However, Sheen does note that "the only grammar to be dealt with is that which causes a problem of communication and not with

a problem of form" (ibid: 226). This is where the class under study departs from the notion of focus-on-form as many accounts of correction observed in the study arose not from problems of communication but rather from problems with accuracy. That is, the teacher was observed to extensively correct prompts that did not create communication breakdowns. More often than not, the teacher in the current study had the correct forms in mind when employing the corrective feedback devices. Thus, this raises some questions concerning the definition of corrective feedback. Long (1996) refers to input modifications such as partial repetition, semantically contingent responses such as recasts, and conversational modifications such as clarification requests as features in what he has termed 'negotiation of meaning.' However, in the class under study, these corrective feedback devices were not employed to negotiate for meaning since, as stated earlier, the teacher was observed to have the correct form in mind, pointing to the fact that he clearly understood what the students meant. Thus, mutual comprehension tends to be the norm.

A close examination of the class under study showed negotiation of any kind was rare due to the large number of students in it. However, it seems that the extensive use of metalinguistic clues in the class under study compensates for the rare negotiation. That is, the teacher used a lot of indirect corrective feedback devices to allow the students some time to think about the correct forms before he used more direct devices. Thus, it seems that the teacher in the current study, although making use of corrective feedback which is usually employed in a more reciprocal interactional context, focused on giving instruction rather than negotiating either for meaning or form. Although his teaching may be most similar to McHoul's 'clueing,' his teaching did not exhibit reciprocal interaction. In fact, this non-reciprocal interaction may explain the lack of elicitation as elicitation requires students to complete blanks in the teacher's correction.

Apart from the corrective feedback, the results also revealed another element working alongside and overlapping corrective feedback. It was observed that apart from giving reactive focus-on-form, the teacher in the study also gave pre-emptive focus-on-form, defined by Ellis et al. (2002) as 'attempts by the students or the

teacher to make a particular form the topic of the conversation even though no error (or perceived error) in the use of that form has occurred.' In addition, a close examination of these pre-emptive elements led to a new classification consisting of five types of pre-emptive focus-on-form. First, the most frequently employed pre-emptive element was *pre-emptive correction.* These are pre-emptive elements, which, initially were labeled as repeated explicit correction, which referred to instances where the teacher repeated the correct forms already given in the same interactional turn. However, a close examination of their function led to the conclusion that they did not seem to function as correcting devices in the class under study. Rather, they served the teacher's need to make sure that the students heard the correct version he had given, thus representing pre-emptive focus-on-form rather than reactive focus-on-form. The second type of pre-emptive elements found was *pre-emptive translation* which refers to incidents where the teacher decided to translate corrective feedback into the L1 in order to make sure that the students understood what he had said. However, it is interesting to note here that Panova and Lyster (2002) introduced a corrective feedback labeled translation in their study to refer to the feedback moves following students' errors with unsolicited uses of the L1. Nonetheless, the pre-emptive translation in the current study and the translation reactive feedback in Panova and Lyster's study cannot be compared because first of all, the current study did not include errors concerning unsolicited uses of L1, and second of all, the translation feedback in Panova and Lyster's study was given to students' utterances, whereas the pre-emptive translation in the current study followed teacher feedback. The third type found was *pre-emptive lexical feedback* which refers to incidents where the teacher in the current study explained the meaning of certain vocabulary he felt may have been problematic for his students even though no difficulties were signaled by the students themselves. The fourth type observed was *pre-emptive spelling* which refers to incidents where the teacher spelled out certain words he felt his students may have had problems with. Finally, *pre-emptive academic* feedback refers to incidents where the teacher gave brief instruction on academic writing during the analysis episodes. According to the data, pre-emptive correction was the most frequently used, accounting for 48.3%. Pre-emptive translation, pre-

emptive lexical feedback, pre-emptive spelling, and pre-emptive academic feedback, accounting for 28.3%, 18.3%, 3.3%, and 1.7%, respectively, followed it.

Regarding the similarities shared between the class under study and other focus-on-forms driven classes, the class can be said to represent focus-on-forms instruction because of its analytic nature. The prompts dealt with during the analysis episodes in the class were single independent sentence samples. Moreover, the role accuracy played in the class was paramount. The textbook used in the class played an important role in that it served as 'a discourse determiner' (Weissberg, 1994). Wiessberg (1994) found that the textbook provided the class with predictable and repetitive classroom behavior. The data of the current study also confirmed the repetitive discourse created by the textbook, especially during spontaneous tasks. During these tasks, the students produced their own sentences using skeletal sentence patterns provided in the textbook. The teacher then asked to see the finished sentences, showed them to the whole class, and started critiquing the sentences.

Another point worth examining is the extent that the class under study exemplified the Garden Path Technique introduced by Tomasello and Herron (1988, 1989). The Garden Path Technique leads students down 'the garden path' where they are introduced to language samples and encouraged to form and generalize rules only to find that their hypotheses are sometimes incorrect because they are at this point unaware of any exceptions to the rules previously introduced. It is at this stage that immediate corrective feedback is given to correct their sentences, allowing them to clearly notice the gap between their interlanguage and the target language. The class under study seemed to utilize this technique because there was no in-class introductory instruction on grammar. Even though the instruct episodes occupied most of the class time, the instruction in those episodes was almost all academic-writing-related. When it was grammar-related, the grammar points covered in those episodes did not represent all the errors found in the database. Thus, the teacher in the current study can be said to use the Garden Path Technique because he allowed his students to be induced into making errors and provided corrective feedback to

them. However, it must be noted here that Tomasello and Herron did not mention pre-emptive feedback in their study. Thus, in this respect, the use of pre-emptive feedback seems to differentiate the technique used in the class under study from the Garden Path Technique.

Implications

First, one cannot always expect neat classification as many elements, in real use, tend to overlap one another. This calls for more observational research that allows practice to inform theory. Second, it seems that only teachers themselves can reveal the real intended functions of certain teaching behavior. Thus, there is a need for further research with an emic perspective. Finally, further research is needed to examine whether common patterns exist and whether different teachers employ corrective feedback in the same manner provided that it is in a similar context and whether the same teacher exhibits the same correcting pattern in a different context.

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