IML Discourse II

**Discussion on Teacher’s Corrective Feedback in Language Classes**

**Mr. Khalid Karim, a former faculty member of NSU English Department - currently a PhD Candidate (ABD) in Applied Linguistics, University of Victoria, Canada - made a highly informative presentation based on his PhD research into corrective feedback on second language writing on 13 February, 2013 at the Institute of Modern Languages**.

The presentation was an event of M. Shahedul Haque’s lecture series IML Discourse II that encourages faculty research and presentation about language and communication issues at North South University.

In the introduction, Mr. Haque brought the issue of feedback into perspective and said that teacher’s remarks on students’ writing samples are integral part of his teaching and contribute to the students’ learning process to a great extent, and ignorance and wrong uptake usually lead to slow and unsuccessful learning. Students and learners need to learn how to use teacher’s comments and remarks to underpin and expedite their learning.

In his presentation, Mr. Khalid Karim discussed whole spectrum of vital points about the corrective feedback in writing courses like Eng 103 or Eng 102 in the private universities of Bangladesh. The most important point about corrective feedback in the courses like Eng 103 is that students do not simply get any kind of corrective feedback since they do not bother about viewing the academic papers after they have been graded by the teachers. Again, the students cannot be blamed totally for this mistake. Some of this blame goes even to the designers of curriculum of academic writing courses, because in the course designs there is no option for draft-writing before the development of the final paper. It’s through these step by step drafts that students get to know about their writing flaws and have chances to correct them in the subsequent drafts. But mostly because of time lack and other minor reasons, this process cannot be implemented in the academic writing courses in the private universities in Bangladesh.

In academic writing, corrective feedback is information provided to a learner or a group of learners about how his/her writing styles can be improved to a better level. "Corrective Feedback" is not the same as criticism. It means to be a reflection of what has been put out by the person or group receiving it.

The teacher works as a mirror that reflects the student with all his strengths and weaknesses

Here, the teacher (supposedly unbiased) works as a mirror that reflects the real perception of their writing works. To be of best use, corrective feedback must be delivered in such a way and by such a person that it will be attended to, rather than simply arousing defensiveness, denial, or anger. That means that the ideal provider of feedback is someone the recipient trusts and respects, and that the provider conveys the feedback as sensitively as possible.

**Why Corrective Feedback?**

“Corrective Feedback” in general may have important purposes that can improve learners’ performance and confidence in a number of ways:

* To help students in their personal writing development
* To improve relationships between the teacher and learner
* To help students improve their overall performance
* To increase the effectiveness of an educational activity or initiative
* Create a pleasant, relaxed learning atmosphere and eliminate debilitating anxiety.
* Increase the learner’s linguistic self-confidence.
* Make the learning interesting.
* Promote learner autonomy (independence and personal responsibility).
* Consolidate the learner’s way to his/her goal.
* Familiarize learner with the target language culture.

**Types of Teacher’s Feedback:**

There are two major types of written corrective feedback:

i) Direct CF:The correct linguistic form or structure is provided above or near the linguistic error. It may include: the crossing out of a word/phrase, the insertion of a missing word/phrase or the correct form or structure is provided.

ii) Indirect CF:It indicates that an error has been made in the form of underlining the error, using a code to show where the error occurred and what type of error it is. Students are left to resolve and correct the problem that has been drawn to their attention.

**The Legendary Debate: *Which type of feedback is more effective?***

The answer is not very straightforward. Corrective Feedback in writing has been of much debate regarding second language teaching for years.

***Argument for Focused/Direct FB:***

“Learners are likely to attend to correction directed at a single (or limited number of) error type(s) and more likely to develop a clear understanding of the nature of the error and correction needed” *(Ellis et al. 2008; p. 356).*

***Argument for Unfocused/Indirect FB:***

In Sheen’s (2010) opinion, studies that have all investigated the same grammatical feature (e.g. English articles), could not make it clear “whether focused correction will prove generally effective in improving learners’ linguistic accuracy” (p. 173). Although Research has not yet been shown what type of FB is more effective, more evidence is there about the usefulness of FB.

**Errors can be marked for 2 reasons*:***

* To submit as portfolio assignment;
* To keep track of errors throughout the semester

**Criteria that can help teachers make decisions about which errors to mark:**

**Types of the Errors:**

i) Errors affecting communication significantly

ii) Errors having stigmatizing effects on the reader

iii) Errors occurring frequently

**Methods of Identifying the Errors:**

**1. Direct**

-when students are at the beginning levels of English proficiency

-when errors are ‘untreatable’ (e.g., word choice, word form, awkward or unidiomatic sentence structure)

-to focus student attention on particular error pattern

**2. Indirect**

-when students are able to take more responsibility for their errors

-to make students reflective and analytical about their errors

**3. Locating the errors**

-By circling it, highlighting it, putting a check mark in the margin.

(puts responsibility on the students to figure out the nature of the problem and its solution)

**4. Identifying the errors**

-using codes, symbols, verbal comments

Teachers use codes or symbols for speed and efficiency in providing feedback. But teachers need to be consistent and make sure that students understand the meanings of the codes/symbols.

**5. Using textual corrections and end notes**

**“***Study hard and work hard differences language and culture to adopt in …”*

Comment in margin**:** Rewrite this sentence. Break into two sentences.

End note: I’m not sure I understand this sentence. Can you rewrite it and make it clearer? You might try making it simpler by dividing it into two sentences. *(Ferris, 2002; p. 70-71)*

**Last Words**

How the student reacts to the teacher’s feedback will depend partly on how he/she presents it, and partly on the student’s attitude and motivations. However, the teacher can also affect those attitudes and motivations by presenting him/herself and his/her intentions in positive ways. The following tips might help a teacher to guide the interactions with the learners:

* Setting personal examples with the teacher’s own behavior.
* Creating a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere.
* Developing a good relationship with the learner.
* Increasing the learner’s linguistic self-confidence.
* Making the discussion interesting.
* Promoting learner autonomy.
* Increasing the learner’s goal-orientation.
* Familiarizing learners with the target language culture.

*Written by a participating member of the IML Research and Information Team*