

Developing a motivated learner through self correction essay sample



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In countries where English is taught as a second language or a foreign language (ESL / FL), the shift from a teacher centered classroom to a learner centered one has been a great challenge. This happens because the teacher, obviously, a person of superior linguistic skills is expected to impart as much knowledge as possible within a limited number of hours. Confirming this, Tsui (1985) in a study where she observed two ESL classrooms found that teacher talk took up more than 80% of the total talk time. This practice creates teacher dependent learners who are not actively involved in the learning process. It also creates individuals who know a great deal about the language but, lack actual application skills.

If learners feel what is taught in the classroom has no or little relevance in the real world, they will not be motivated to learn. Since the ability to communicate is the ultimate target of learning a language, it is of crucial importance that the teacher explores new avenues which would help the learner tackle the linguistic challenges he / she may encounter in the world outside the classroom. This paper discusses how a shift from the traditional technique of providing explicit negative paper based feedback on written work to a group of adult ESL learners has helped create learners who would reflect on the teacher's feedback, identify the mistakes and rewrite till they produce a piece of writing which satisfied both the teacher and the learner.

Theoretical Background

Role of feedback

Feedback is widely seen in education as crucial for encouraging and consolidating learning (Anderson, 1982, Brophy, 1981, Vygotsky, 1972, cited in Highland and Highland, 2006). It is defined as ' information that is given to

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the learner about his or her performance of a learning task, usually with the objective of improving their performance” (Ur, P. 1996. p. 242). In the same vein, Lightbown and Spada (2006, p. 197) define corrective feedback as “any indication to the learner that his or her use of the target language is incorrect” According to researchers such as Long & Robinson (1998, cited in Sauro, 2009), DeKeyser, (2005, cited in Sauro) corrective feedback plays a valuable role in facilitating the acquisition of certain target language forms, which may be difficult to learn through input alone, including forms that are rare, low in perceptual salience, semantically redundant, do not typically lead to communication breakdown, or that lack a clear form-meaning relationship (Sauro, 2009, p. 96).

Elaborating this, Harmer (2001, cited in McDonough and Shaw, 2003, p. 166) claims that “ feedback given to students is formative - concerned with a developmental process - as well as summative - the evaluation of the end product”. The role played by the teacher is pivotal where feedback on learner performance is concerned. Confirming this, Harmer (2001, cited in McDonough and Shaw, 2003, p. 166) ‘ regards the teacher as a ‘ motivator’ and a ‘ feedback provider’. Alroe (2011) claims that error correction of second language learners’ texts is assumed to be an important and beneficial practice by both teachers and students, specially in Asian countries. Thus, it is apparent that teachers are expected provide continuous feedback on learners’ performance in order to help them become competent users of the target language.

Feedback on students’ writing

There is a variety of corrective feedback techniques available for teachers in <https://assignbuster.com/developing-a-motivated-learner-through-self-correction-essay-sample/>

relation to students' writing. Corrective feedback can both be explicit and implicit and may or may not include metalinguistic information. The table below illustrates the different categories of written corrective feedback.

The availability of many options, although positive, may create confusion since teachers quite often wonder which method would guarantee maximum learner uptake. Students too have to struggle a lot in figuring out how to implement the feedback received. However, it is the responsibility of the teacher to figure out the best possible way to provide feedback that facilitate maximum uptake. For those whose second language is English, attaining accuracy in their academic or workplace writing is of crucial importance. Thus, they expect their teachers to give feedback on their writing even though they may fail to or not motivated to incorporate corrections. Leki (1991, cited in Hyland & Hyland, 2006) and Schachter (1991, cited in Hyland & Hyland, 2006) claims that ESL learners have less of their self worth invested in L2 writing than L1 writers in their native language. Hence, they are not discouraged when corrections are pointed out to them. The Study

Profile of the learner

The learners concerned were a class of 18, with an intermediate proficiency of English, following a 15 week Business English Course conducted by the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. Classes of four hour duration were held once a week. They were learners from all walks of life. There were both male and female students whose ages varied between 18 - 53. It has been a common observation that the learners in these extension courses are more motivated than the average undergraduate since the former has an

immediate need to study the target language. Hence, majority of the
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students attended classes regularly and completed at least the minimum number of homework assignments they were given.

Rationale for the study

The students were given writing activities such as memos, letters, reports and minutes as homework assignments either once a week or once in two weeks during their 15 week English course. Since the course contained 8 modules, the total number of writing activities they would do varied between 8 and 12. The majority of the students did these writing assignments as instructed and submitted them to the teacher for feedback. Though feedback on student work is considered to have "more effect on achievement than any other single factor" (Black and William, 1998 cited in Harmer, 2007), learners, usually are reluctant to spend time revising an already corrected draft and would prefer to simply put it away and forget about it. This has been a personal observation of the writer for a considerable period of time. Irrespective of the learners' course of study, gender, age, level of competence, duration of the course, the average learner was rarely motivated to resubmit their written work for better feedback. As a result of this, their written work, which was confined to 8 or 10 for the entire programme showed little or no visible improvement in relation to the quality of language.

This made the writer reflect carefully on the feedback techniques used with a view to revising them should the need arise. The technique which had been used was one where the teacher identified and corrected the mistakes herself (Direct corrective feedback). In other words, the students were given explicit negative feedback in the form of recasts and reformulations. This <https://assignbuster.com/developing-a-motivated-learner-through-self-correction-essay-sample/>

obviously provided no opportunity for the learner to do anything other than glancing at the already corrected piece of work and tucking it inside a book or a file. Thus, a need was strongly felt to change this practice. The next technique employed was to underline or circle the mistakes in their written work (Indirect corrective feedback). This also had failed to achieve the expected result - a motivated learner, who would use the feedback provided to improve his / her writing skills. This technique, according to them, was beyond their linguistic ability. They found it an extremely daunting task to fathom the type of mistake they had made. Alternative Strategies implemented

Thus, in order to motivate students to incorporate teacher feedback and produce rewrites in the most effective and economical way, two strategies were implemented. 1. Providing Metalinguistic Feedback encouraging self correction 2. Providing electronic corrective feedback

Strategy 1 - Providing Metalinguistic Feedback Encouraging Self Correction It was apparent that the learners needed guidance in order to identify the types of mistake they make. In other words, providing metalinguistic cues which gave students the opportunity to understand the nature of the error, proved to be an ideal solution for this problem. Metalinguistic feedback is the process of providing a linguistic clue for the targeted error(s). According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), it supplies the language learner with negative evidence regarding the non target like nature of their language. They categorize metalinguistic feedback as " comments / information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the student's utterance, without explicitly providing the correct form" (p. 47).

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Hence, the teacher's task is to indicate the presence of mistakes with no overt corrections made. There are various ways of providing metalinguistic cues. As stated in table 1 above, the explanation can take the form of abbreviated error codes (Table 2) or can come in the form of a longer and more detailed explanation.

Lyster and Ranta (1997, cited in Lightbown and Spada, 1999, p. 106) in one of their studies on feedback in French immersion classrooms found that " student uptake was least likely to occur after recasts and much more likely to occur when they receive feedback in the form of elicitation requests, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback and repetition. Taking the above views into consideration, this group of learners was advised on the importance of regular homework submission. How they would be given feedback, what they were expected to do once the feedback was received and how they could use the feedback to further enhance their written work were discussed in great detail prior to the introduction of the new strategies. . Feedback was provided on the following areas:

Communicative quality

Logical organization

Grammar

Vocabulary

Punctuation and spelling

(Adapted from Writing Profile by Hopkins and Tribble, cited in MacDonough & Shaw, 2003) When marking scripts, detailed comments and suggestions were made under each section with a view to correcting their syntactic level

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errors as well as improving other general writing skills, namely, the logical flow of ideas, coherence and cohesion. Thus, the students were expected to figure out their mistakes with the help of metalinguistic feedback given. It should be noted that in the current study, abbreviated codes indicating the mistake type were not used. Instead, the mistake was pointed out using a longer phrase (e. g. - incorrect tense / correct word, but incorrect form). The feedback they received was not conclusive and silently demanded some kind of action from the learner. The students too had strong opinions regarding their feedback preferences. Almost everyone expressed their wish to receive feedback on all their mistakes and preferred to have some sort of metalinguistic explanation instead of just a direct correction or no explanation.

According to McDonough and Shaw (2003, p. 167), although “ the red pen method” employed by the teacher is “ inherently negative” there is no reason as to why feedback should not be positive. Thus, the learners, most of the time, were given feedback on the positive aspect their writing as well. For instance, in addition to comments on the surface level mistakes, detailed comments on the quality of their written work were made. Comments such as “ You have understood the structure of a letter of request well. It contains all the important elements you need to include” boosted the self confidence and the motivation of the learners. The new method encouraged them to make use of the comments given and revise their work. A few extremely motivated learners made 3 - 4 resubmissions depending on the importance of the task. Each resubmission was found to be better than the previous one (see annexure for examples). A comparison of the first draft with the

subsequent drafts of written work proved that they had understood the type of mistakes they had made in the first draft.

This confirms Fathom and Whally's (1998, Ferris, 2002, Ferris & Helt, 2000 cited in Hyland & Hyland, 2006, p. 4) findings since they claim, " studies measuring student improvement longitudinally suggest that students who receive error feedback over a period of time can improve their language accuracy. The framework for the current study is based primarily on the work of Vygotsky and Piaget and their respective forms of social and cognitive constructivism. The basic theory of constructivism promotes active learning since the learner is expected to (co) construct knowledge. Metalinguistic corrective feedback provides this opportunity and encapsulates the tenets of constructivism by encouraging learners to build their own knowledge in a scaffolded manner. It allows for self - discovery since it provides only clues and not direct answers while still providing guidance within a students' zone of proximal development. Although the teacher is required to provide the metalinguistic cues, it is the student who has to construct the knowledge by internalizing the linguistic cues and adapting this new knowledge into old schemata (Anderson, 2010). Benefits of Self Correction

Self Correction is believed to instill in the learner feelings of self-sufficiency and success and provide them the opportunity to take a more active role in their own learning. In fact, self correction and rewriting help wean students from dependency on the teacher for correction. Anderson (2010) claims that, in this situation, students rely on the teacher only as a guide and not as the ultimate source of information. Although the teacher is available to help the learner whenever the need arises, the learner is encouraged to work out on <https://assignbuster.com/developing-a-motivated-learner-through-self-correction-essay-sample/>

his/her own how the mistake can be rectified using the metalinguistic cues provided. This can actually boost the level of confidence of the learner especially when they compare their revised work with the original. Learners appreciate individualized comments since it enables them to understand what their strengths and weaknesses are. The teacher too gets the opportunity to understand language related issues of each individual learner through the use of this technique. Furthermore, it allows the teacher to prescribe remedial action when a particular mistake recurs in a learner's work. Strategy 2 - Electronic corrective feedback

The change in the feedback technique was not the sole reason that motivated learners to make revisions to their written work. In fact, it is the other strategy which is related to the medium in which they were asked to resubmit which further motivated them. This strategy is discussed in detail below. Since the students had classes during the weekend, they met the teacher only once a week. Consequently, the homework was also submitted once a week or once in two weeks. The teacher would collect all the homework assignments and would return the marked assignments the week after. This was a long and tedious process and by the time the feedback is provided, students had difficulty remembering the original task.

Taking this into consideration, the writer decided to make use of the technology available in order to encourage them to rewrite incorporating feedback given. Elaborating the use of technology in the ESL classroom, Sauro (2009) states that " with the tools of technology making their way into the L2 classroom, corrective feedback delivered via written synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) holds particular promise". Since <https://assignbuster.com/developing-a-motivated-learner-through-self-correction-essay-sample/>

the majority of these students were employed, they had access to computers and the internet and were able to e mail their homework assignment. Those who did not have these facilities were encouraged to use the Self Access Centre of the Colombo University. Thus, the new method enabled the students to communicate with the teacher on a regular basis.

Prompt feedback was given in the form of metalinguistic cues. Since they had the soft copies, they were able to incorporate the feedback straight away into the original documents. It saved a lot of time for the students. The teacher was also able to maintain a continuous dialogue with each individual student since they too were quite prompt in sending their revised drafts due to the convenience of the method. Another advantage of this was that it enabled both the teacher and the students to maintain records of written work and the feedback given.

Due to this method, the teacher was able to write elaborate comments on the students writing legibly using a selection of colours. It also gave the teacher the opportunity to “ provide hyperlinks to concordance files that provided examples of correct usage” (Ellis, 2009, p. 98). The students were also happy that the programme involved new technology and made full use of it. Their writing continued to improve as a result of the two strategies implemented. Corroborating this, Yeh and Lo’s (2009) study of 50 Taiwanese college students’ use of electronic feedback found that an online feedback annotation system slightly outperformed traditional paper-based feedback.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that the use of metalinguistic feedback in

place of explicit negative feedback exercised a positive influence on the learners' writing since metalinguistic cues provided them the necessary information to understand their mistakes without they being corrected explicitly. It made writing a challenging task since they were required to solve the problems in their writing themselves. They were able to witness their own progress which, in turn increased their motivation to work harder. As stated above, majority of the learners showed progress in the written output they produced. However, not every student made use of this. Sometimes, their workload impeded on the motivation to write and rewrite homework assignments. However, the fact that they were able to communicate with the teacher on line gave them the opportunity for immediate feedback on their performance motivated the majority of the students to submit and revise work on a regular basis.

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