

The function of feedback in second language writing

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Abstract

Feedback plays an important role in language learning. Feedback-seeking behavior (FSB) includes feedback monitoring and inquiry and the diagnostic information obtained through FSB can help seekers improve their performance. Most of the previous studies have explored the factors that influence FSB, such as language mindsets and motivational factors. However, FSB itself has an important role to play in second language writing. Therefore, this study tries to combine FSB with second language writing to investigate the following questions: 1. What is the role of FSB in second language writing? 2. How can FSB exert its influence in second language writing? This research has selected 20 senior students from science class to join in an semi-structural interview and questionnaire. The results reveal that monitoring feedback unconditionally but inquiring feedback conditionally. Herein, implications for L2 writing pedagogy are provided.

Keywords

Feedback; Feedback-seeking behavior; Second language writing

1. Introduction

Written corrective feedback (WCF), which refers to teachers' written comments regarding various aspects of students' writing, has been a heated topic in second language (L2) writing research over past decades[6, 11, 15]. Existing research has attempted to determine the most effective types of feedback. For example, Ferris[6] demonstrated that indirect WCF, incorporating implicit corrections of language errors, was more effective than other types of feedback, whereas Bitchener and Knoch[3] argued that direct WCF involving explicit error corrections was better. Drawing on the various types of feedback, most research on WCF has focused on how teachers use feedback as an instructional tool. Bitchener and Storch[4] called for an attentional shift to examine students' perceptions of WCF. Researchers and educational practitioners need to investigate how students actively seek feedback to gain a better understanding of their engagement in L2 writing[12]. Feedback-seeking behavior (FSB) includes feedback monitoring and inquiry, and the diagnostic information obtained through FSB can help seekers improve their perfor-

mance[2].

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition of FSB

FSB was initially studied in the realm of organizational psychology. It permits individuals to access information useful for subsequent behavioral adaptation and performance improvement[1]. In the L2 writing context, FSB refers to learners' "intentional, calculated, and strategic attempts to gather feedback information on their L2 writing performance"[9]. Sung[10] perceives that FSB is shaped not only by personal goals but also by social norms, habits, and cultural contexts. Whether individuals process feedback automatically depends on how they seek it out [1].

2.2. Types of FSB

Feedback monitoring and feedback inquiry are two strategies for seeking feedback. Feedback monitoring involves L2 learners' observations of their environment and the actions of others. In other words, they monitor the feedback they receive from teachers. Feedback inquiry involves actively seeking views or evaluations of one's own L2 written work from teachers. The decision to use a particular strategy is based on an individual's perceptions of the costs and benefits of seeking feedback[9]. Feedback value refers to the importance that L2 learners place on the feedback they receive from their teachers. Conversely, feedback cost refers to the fear of humiliation and shame that L2 learners feel when asking for feedback. Higher levels of perceived value and lower levels of perceived cost result in more frequent FSB.

2.3. Factors that may influence FSB

First, some researchers have begun to investigate the impact of language mindsets on FSB. Papi et al.[9] found that a growth mindset for language was positively related to the value of feedback, feedback monitoring, and feedback inquiry, while a fixed mindset for language was positively related to the cost of feedback and negatively related to feedback monitoring. Yao and Zhu [13] modeled the relationships between language mindsets, goal orientations, and FSB. They found that L2 learners with learning-oriented growth mindsets used feedback monitoring, whereas those with performance-oriented growth mindsets used feedback inquiry. To summarize, L2 learners with a growth mindset preferred to use feedback monitoring or inquiry in their writing processes.

Second, the influence of the ideal L2 self and other motivational factors on FSB has been explored. Zhan et al. [14] tested a mediation model from the ideal L2 writing self to story continuation writing performance through feedback monitoring and inquiry. The results showed that ideal L2 writing positively predicted feedback monitoring and feedback inquiry among high-, middle-, and low-proficiency groups of high

school students. Sharing similar findings, Xu and Wang[12]reported that the ideal L2 writing self, together with a growth mindset and academic buoyancy, positively predicted FSB among Chinese university students. These findings demonstrate that the more motivated students are, the more FSB they exhibit.

2.4. Research purposes

Most of the previous studies have explored the factors that influence FSB, such as language mindsets and motivational factors. However, FSB itself has an important role to play in second language writing. FSB can provide feedback on second language writing and help students realize and correct their mistakes, so that learners can improve the quality and competence of second language writing. Therefore, this study tries to combine FSB with second language writing to investigate the following questions: 1. What is the role of FSB in second language writing? 2. How can FSB exert its influence in second language writing?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

In this study, 20 students from a senior high school in Nanchong city were randomly selected as survey participants. They were all senior in the science class. There were 10 males and 10 females among these 20 students whose English scores were averaged at 100 points, which belonged to the upper-middle level.

3.2. Instruments

Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used in this study. The questionnaire is a five-level scale with positive and negative questions. The data from the questionnaire will be processed in SPSS. Semi-structured interviews will be recorded and analyzed in the form of audio and notes.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

Most students preferred to read and carefully consider feedback from their teachers as their first step. S1 explained, "I hesitated to approach my writing teacher for assistance, opting to carefully consider and reflect on the feedback provided independently." S2 stated, "The time lag between completing a written work and receiving feedback has unfortunately caused me to prioritize simply reading the feedback, rather than actively engaging in communication with my teacher about my writing." Regarding the following situations, the students would like to talk with the teacher about the feedback received. S2 pointed out, "When an important English test was approaching and I was facing difficulties with writing, I would seek guidance from my teacher to understand the feedback I received and work toward improvement." In addition to the influence of test-taking on FSB, S3 shared the following reasons for

engaging with the teacher regarding feedback received.

I used to be very extreme. Whenever I completed a writing task and felt good about my writing after getting feedback, I would actively seek out my teacher to discuss my work, showcasing the strengths of my writing to impress him/her.

In summary, students often prioritized feedback monitoring when receiving feedback because they preferred processing feedback on their own rather than burdening teachers or adding to their workloads. Additionally, students might have relied exclusively on feedback monitoring when faced with delayed feedback. The desire to feel successful in their writing abilities and pass examinations appeared to play a crucial role in invoking students' use of feedback inquiry.

4. Discussion

4.1. Teachers should give students timely feedback

Based on the interviews, it is clear that one of the reasons why students are reluctant to engage in inquiring feedback is the delayed nature of the feedback. From the time students complete the writing, to the time they receive the feedback, and finally the time they revise the writing based on the feedback, the process is not short. This long process may also make students reluctant to take the feedback and communicate further with the teacher due to reasons such as forgetting what they wrote or laziness.

Therefore, teachers should revise and provide specific and positive feedback when they are presented with original student writing. At the same time, students are encouraged to take the feedback and share it with the teacher.

4.2. Teachers should help students build motivation to complete tasks

Some students just see writing as a task. Therefore, they do not pay attention to revising or improving the quality of their writing after completing the task.

Teachers should encourage students to pursue the quality of writing and the process of progressing their personal writing ability. For example, teachers can enable students to see their improvement through portfolios, peer assessment and other formative assessments.

4.3. High linguistic knowledge do not mean good writing skills

Based on the interview, it is clear that confidence in linguistic knowledge inhibits students' desire to take the feedback and communicate with the teacher. Because they believe that what the teacher needs to say has already been reflected in the topic and in their daily learning. They are confident that they know about what the teacher will provide further feedback on. Thus, overconfidence in their linguistic knowledge does not facilitate students' further revision of their writing.

According to the General Senior High School Curriculum Standards for English[7],

language ability includes five aspects: listening, speaking, reading, writing and viewing. However, we cannot simply equate one's performance in English exams with one's language ability. Therefore, teachers should teach students to learn with an open mind and improve their language ability in all aspects.

5. Conclusion

In the Chinese context, students must pass various examinations to earn credit for future job searches and career development[5]. This prerequisite explains why students who participated in the present study actively sought evaluations of their written work prior to important upcoming tests. Students are externally motivated to seek written feedback. As shown in our study, students' unwillingness to bother teachers is another aspect of the learning culture. Xu and Wang[12]found that students sometimes intended to build rapport with course instructors, so they chose to seek feedback and make inquiries. Regardless of what students choose, they often regard teachers as central—similar to their view of authorities—and care about their feelings. The Chinese education system is characterized by a strong emphasis on teachers' authority, with learners expected to follow instructions and receive feedback from their teachers[8]. To summarize, distinct learning and testing cultures may be characterized by different feedback-seeking patterns.

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