

Writing Development Through Three Feedback Methods

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine and classify features of errors in paragraph writing and to investigate the effects of different methods of feedback upon accuracy and fluency in paragraph writing. Data were collected from four paragraphs written by 105 participating students in three groups, each group receiving one of three different methods of feedback on three progress writings. Group A (N=32) received direct feedback, i.e., corrections were made for all errors on students' paper. Group B (N=38) received comment at the end feedback, i.e., all errors were underlined and comments were written at the end of students' paper pointing out the types of errors without teacher's correction. Group C (N=35) received coded feedback, i.e., all the errors were underlined and coded with symbols representing kinds of errors without teacher's correction. The data were analyzed and tested by using Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test. Analyses on all four writings found 27 features of errors. The three most frequent features of errors were wrong "sentence structure", wrong use of "noun" and wrong or inappropriate "word choice". Statistical tests found significant decrease of total error rate in the final writing in every group. Meanwhile, the amount of words significantly increased in group A and group C.

Keywords : writing, direct feedback, comment at the end feedback, coded feedback, writing fluency, accuracy

Introduction

As English has become the most important language for global communication at the present time, writing is also increasingly necessary for people in the modern world because they need to contact with each other via written message for various purposes. To

illustrate, international business operations need to use English as a medium for both speaking and writing contacts. Regarding educational dimension, it is evident that most of articles and journals are being published in English. As a result, writing skill is a necessary

factor for people to be up to date with the movement of the innovative world. The crucial role of English writing has been

realized by language educators and educational institutes in all countries. In Thailand, even though Thai people have realized the importance of writing proficiency, most of them face difficulty in writing development and their writing ability is still far from satisfaction (Watcharapunyawong and Usaha, 2013).

To teach students to be competent writers, writing teachers themselves must be competent in writing. They must master various components and mechanics of writing such as grammar, organization of ideas, vocabulary, giving feedback, and evaluation (Mutsuda, 2000). Teachers should know the weak points in students' writing by investigating from errors that occur in their writing. The errors are evidences telling what features of language that students need to be addressed. Even though some language educators argue that when students are immersed in English native speaking environment, they can learn the language implicitly, and teacher explicit feedback is not necessary, many ESL and EFL teachers whose students lack input in English native speaking environment rebut this notion. They argue that to perform English productive skills effectively, output, some of which is attributed from adequate correction, is necessary (Scarcella, 1996, cited in Alroe, 2011; Ferris, 2004). ESL writers expect an appropriate assistance in improving their language accuracy (Ferris and Hedgcock, 1998, cite in Kroll, 2001).

Body of research conducting on Asian EFL students' writing feedback has found that provided methods of feedback toward students' writing contribute to positive effects on their writing accuracy (Sheen, 2007; Ferris, 2003; Ho, 2004; Chandler, 2003). In Thailand, some studies on writing error were conducted both in secondary schools and universities. The findings were mainly about types of errors (Nonkukhetkhong, 2013; Panto, 2007; Chownahe, 2000; Rujikietgumjorn, 1994) and result of a remedial program (Chownahe, 2000). Comparison of different methods of error correction also investigated (Rujikietgumjorn, 1994), but the study was conducted with students enrolling in technical English courses. The insight into writing difficulties of students who are the future English teachers in their paragraph writing course is also very essential. It is necessary for writing teachers to find out what the problematic points of language were in writing various types of paragraphs, and to find the suitable ways of feedback to help improve students' writing in terms of accuracy and fluency.

Objectives of the study

- 1) To examine, analyze and classify types of errors in the paragraphs of different genres written by students in 3 groups;
- 2) To compare the error rates and the percentages of students making errors in writing 1 and in the final writing of each group; and
- 3) To compare writing fluency before and after receiving specific method of feedback.

Methodology

The participants of this research were three groups of third year English majored teacher students from the Faculty of Education, enrolling Formal Paragraph Writing in the first semester of the 2013 academic year. Each of these three groups consisted of students with mixed English competency levels, regarding to their GPAs. The design of the research was to

analyze and classify types of errors in the paragraphs of different genres of each group and to investigate the rates of errors in final writing comparing to the rates in the first writing of students in three groups which received different methods of feedback. The duration of the research was 16 weeks. The design is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 Research design

Group	Writing process/Feedback				
	Week 1-3	Week 4 - 7	Week 8 - 11	Week 12 - 15	Week 16
A N=32	- Introduction to paragraph	Descriptive and Narrative	Exemplification and	Comparison & Contrast and	Final Writing
	- Paragraph organization	Writing 1	Classification	Cause & Effect	
	- Paragraph workshop	Feedback (Direct Correction) Rewriting	Feedback (Direct Correction) Rewriting	Feedback (Direct Correction) Rewriting	
B N=38	- Introduction to paragraph	Descriptive and Narrative	Exemplification and	Comparison & Contrast and	Final Writing
	- Paragraph organization	Writing 1	Classification	Cause & Effect	
	- Paragraph workshop	Feedback (Comment at the end) Rewriting	Feedback (Comment at the end) Rewriting	Feedback (Comment at the end) Rewriting	
C N=35	- Introduction to paragraph	Descriptive and Narrative	Exemplification and	Comparison & Contrast and	Final Writing
	- Paragraph organization	Writing 1	Classification	Cause & Effect	
	- Paragraph workshop	Feedback (Coded marks) Rewriting	Feedback (Coded marks) Rewriting	Feedback (Coded marks) Rewriting	

Data were collected from 4 writings:

Writing 1: “My Most Impressive Writing Class”

Writing 2: “Business in Mahasarakham”

Writing 3: “Teacher VS Nurse”

Final writing: “What are prominent careers in Thailand? If you can choose, which career would you choose and where would you like to work: in rural or urban area? Why?”

Data were analyzed to categorize the types and investigate the rates of errors. The rates of errors and the amounts of words in writing 1 and the final writing were tested by using Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test.

Results

This section presents the answers for the research questions:

1. What are the errors that students make and what errors are found in each paragraph of different genre?

2. Do three methods of feedback affect writing accuracy?

3. Do three methods of feedback affect writing fluency?

1. Findings for question 1 :

1. Errors occurred in all paragraphs of all groups

Errors found from four writings of students in all three groups can be categorized into 27 types. The rates of errors and percentages of students who made the errors are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Overall rates of errors and percentages of students making errors

Features of errors	Err rate	Rank	% of Std	Rank
1. subject and object	0.15		19.76	
2. main verb	0.57	6	51.59	4
3. word choice (wrong/ inappropriate word)	1.14	3	76.05	3
4. run-on	0.56	7	48.23	6
5. fragment	0.49	10	45.44	9
6. subject complement	0.12		15.05	
7. sentence structure	2.16	1	89.53	1
8. modal verb	0.12		15.81	
9. noun (article, count, non-count , singular and plural)	1.44	2	81.16	2

Features of errors	Err rate	Rank	% of Std	Rank
10. dangling modifier	0.10		13.35	
11. parts of speech	0.45	11	47.29	7
12. spelling	0.41	12	40.85	12
13. punctuation and connector	0.52	8	51.05	5
14. preposition	0.39	13	42.96	11
15. capitalization	0.60	5	43.11	10
16. verb to be	0.30		32.06	15
17. subject-verb agreement	0.51	9	46.47	8
18. gerund and to infinitive	0.13		15.64	
19. tense	1.01	4	40.39	13
20. passive voice	0.15		21.35	
21. pronoun	0.36	14	37.00	14
22. Thai structure influence	0.25	15	27.53	
23. irrelevant phrase	0.18		26.03	
24. redundancy	0.09		12.84	
25. defining phrase	0.08		9.98	
26. parallelism structure	0.16		20.12	
27. subjunctive sentence	0.04		4.85	

Table 2 shows that top-ten frequent errors were “sentence structure”, “noun”, “word choice”, “tense”, “capitalization”, “main verb”, “run-on”, “punctuation and connector”, “subject-verb agreement”, and ‘fragment’. “Sentence structure” was counted as the highest rate, approximately 2.16 times per one hundred words. Meanwhile the number of students who made this error was 89.53%.

The second most frequent error feature was wrong use of “noun”. The rate was 1.44 and the percentage of students was 81.16. The third frequent feature was “word choice”. The rate of this feature was 1.14 and the percentage of students was 76.05. Examples of these features of errors are as follows :

Note : All examples are the intact sentences or phrases written by students.

1. “sentence structure” (err rate: 2.16 / student: 89.53%)

1. The first group of laundry shop have too many in Maha Sarakham because students not washer or lazy

2. He good studying in mate but bad in English be opposite me.

2. “noun”: article, count, non-count , singular and plural nouns, (err rate: 1.44 / student: 81.16%)

1. In my family are five peoples. Name-ly mother, father, sister and me.

2. Since he is police officer.

3. “word choice” (err rate: 1.14 / student: 76.05%)

1. So immovable business like dormito-

ries, hotels accommodations and hire-house are many in Maha Sarakham to reply the customers.

2. It brings much money to come in the province.

4. “tense” occurred at a high rate (1.01) but the percentage of students who made this error was 40.39%, which was not too high comparing with the error rate. The examples are as follows:

1. When I was child, I have been inspired from the first teacher, she is a good teacher.

2. Although he barely had weekend and time to rest, he gets salary more than a teacher.

2. Errors occurred in each paragraph of all groups

Table 3 Types and rates of errors in each of four writings

Features of Errors	Error Rates			
	Writing 1 (descrip & narrat)	Writing 2 (classifi & exem- pli)	Writing 3 (cause/effe& compa/contra)	Final writing (Mixed genre)
1. subject and object	0.25	0.12	0.10	0.14
2. main verb	0.82	0.40	0.75	0.32
3. word choice	1.41	1.28	1.12	0.73
4. run-on	0.85	0.45	0.55	0.41
5. fragment	0.36	0.64	0.47	0.48
6. subject complement	0.23	0.08	0.10	0.08
7. sentence structure	2.13	1.76	2.67	2.07
8. modal verb	0.05	0.09	0.20	0.16
9. noun	1.37	1.32	1.85	1.23
10. dangling modifier	0.27	0.07	0.01	0.05
11. parts of speech	0.47	0.24	0.68	0.40

12. spelling	0.41	0.32	0.53	0.36
13. punctuation and connector	0.71	0.47	0.46	0.42
14. preposition	0.41	0.33	0.49	0.34
15. capitalization	0.83	0.73	0.56	0.28
16. verb to be	0.39	0.23	0.39	0.20
17. subject-verb agreement	0.50	0.30	0.85	0.40
18. gerund and to infinitive	0.22	0.02	0.17	0.12
19. tense	3.14	0.04	0.41	0.46
20. passive voice	0.22	0.16	0.07	0.16
21. pronoun	0.31	0.25	0.46	0.41
22. Thai structure influence	0.43	0.21	0.19	0.17
23. irrelevant phrase	0.19	0.15	0.13	0.24
24. redundancy	0.16	0.05	0.09	0.07
25. defining phrase	0.13	0.08	0.06	0.05
26. parallelism structure	0.37	0.04	0.17	0.06
27. subjunctive sentence	0.07	0.02	0.01	0.04
Total	16.69	9.85	13.54	9.85

Table 3 illustrates rates of error occurred in each paragraph during the process of writing. The most frequent error found in the first writing was “tense”, at 3.14 times per a hundred words. “Tense” error decreased in the following three writings, but was quite prominent in the final and the third writings. The errors which occurred with a high frequency in every writing were “sentence structure”, “noun” and “word choice”. “Capitalization” error was found high in the

first three writings. Meanwhile “pronoun” error was found prominent in the final and the third writings. “Fragment” and “run-on” were found quite often in all writings but the rates were not very high. The wrong use of “verb” was found quite high in the first and third writings. Some features of error were found occurring at the low rates since only few students used these types of phrases and sentences in their four writings.

3. Errors found in each writing of each group

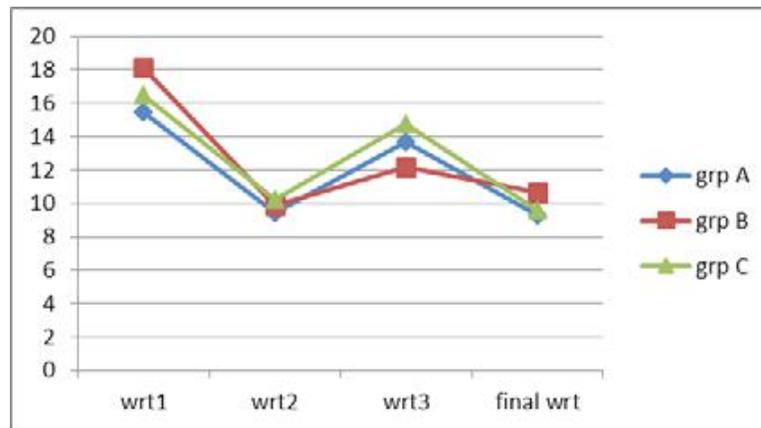
Table 4 Errors found in each writing of each group

Features of Errors	Error Rates											
	Writing 1			Writing 2			Writing 3			Final Writing		
	Gr A	Gr B	Gr C	Gr A	Gr B	Gr C	Gr A	Gr B	Gr C	Gr A	Gr B	Gr C
1. subj. & obj.	0.29	0.27	0.19	0.07	0.08	0.21	0.08	0.09	0.13	0.11	0.16	0.16
2. main verb	0.69	0.99	0.77	0.44	0.41	0.34	0.90	0.68	0.66	0.28	0.32	0.35
3. word choice	1.29	1.58	1.36	1.71	1.01	1.13	1.31	0.85	1.19	0.54	0.99	0.67
4. run-on	0.60	1.10	0.84	0.42	0.71	0.21	0.50	0.68	0.47	0.44	0.35	0.44
5. fragment	0.19	0.47	0.42	0.63	0.71	0.59	0.50	0.32	0.59	0.50	0.43	0.51
6. subj. complement	0.13	0.27	0.28	0.12	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.12	0.13	0.08	0.15	0.02
7. sentence structure	2.36	1.84	2.18	1.81	2.22	1.24	2.58	2.20	3.22	2.65	1.50	2.07
8. modal verb	0.06	0.06	0.03	0.00	0.09	0.17	0.17	0.19	0.23	0.10	0.21	0.18
9. noun	1.58	1.13	1.39	1.27	1.06	1.62	2.00	1.47	2.08	1.12	1.65	0.91
10. dangling modifier	0.50	0.20	0.12	0.07	0.00	0.15	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.06	0.08	0.01
11. parts of speech	0.52	0.45	0.44	0.25	0.28	0.19	0.50	0.77	0.78	0.39	0.53	0.27
12. spelling	0.44	0.47	0.33	0.30	0.33	0.34	0.44	0.15	1.00	0.36	0.29	0.43
13. punct.& connect.	0.73	0.49	0.91	0.35	0.25	0.80	0.42	0.49	0.47	0.41	0.29	0.57
14. preposition	0.50	0.27	0.47	0.14	0.24	0.61	0.54	0.48	0.44	0.11	0.51	0.39
15. capitalization	0.44	0.93	1.13	0.67	0.71	0.82	0.52	0.54	0.61	0.19	0.25	0.39
16. v. to be over use	0.33	0.62	0.23	0.37	0.17	0.15	0.29	0.49	0.40	0.18	0.29	0.13
17. subj-v.agreement	0.31	0.49	0.71	0.14	0.39	0.36	0.73	0.97	0.85	0.28	0.51	0.40
18. gerund & to infin	0.31	0.11	0.23	0.00	0.02	0.04	0.25	0.06	0.19	0.10	0.20	0.05
19. tense	2.09	4.41	2.91	0.05	0.06	0.02	0.56	0.46	0.21	0.49	0.47	0.41
20. passive voice	0.29	0.17	0.19	0.07	0.09	0.32	0.10	0.03	0.09	0.10	0.24	0.13
21. pronoun	0.40	0.37	0.17	0.16	0.33	0.27	0.54	0.56	0.27	0.21	0.57	0.46
22. Thai influence	0.52	0.41	0.35	0.02	0.39	0.21	0.19	0.22	0.17	0.15	0.24	0.12
23. irrelevant phrase	0.13	0.27	0.16	0.14	0.11	0.21	0.04	0.09	0.27	0.16	0.27	0.30
24. redundancy	0.19	0.14	0.16	0.07	0.05	0.02	0.10	0.00	0.17	0.08	0.08	0.06
25. defining phrase	0.15	0.20	0.05	0.16	0.03	0.06	0.13	0.05	0.00	0.08	0.03	0.04
26. parallelism	0.27	0.40	0.44	0.02	0.03	0.06	0.21	0.22	0.08	0.10	0.07	0.01
27. subjunctive	0.19	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.05	0.01	0.05
Total rate/ %mean	15.49	18.11	16.47	9.47	9.87	10.21	13.69	12.20	14.74	9.31	10.68	9.57

Table 4 shows that students in each group had similar problems in writing each paragraph. The most obvious problem students were facing in their writing was using incorrect or improper “sentence structure”, “noun” and “word choice”. The errors in these three features were high in all paragraphs of each

group. Besides the three prominent features, there were some others features that stayed at almost the same rates or even higher in the following paragraphs, and in the final writing. However, regarding the rates of total errors, the rates fluctuated as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 The rate of total errors in each paragraph of each group



The graph in figure 1 shows that the rates of total errors in every group were quite similar. That is the rates were high in writing 1 (descriptive and narrative paragraph), declined sharply in writing 2 (classification and exemplification paragraph), rose up again in writing 3 (comparison – contrast and cause – effect paragraph) and fell to low level again in the final writing (mix of all genres).

Findings for question 2: Do three methods of feedback affect writing accuracy?

To answer the research question ‘Do three methods of feedback affect writing accuracy?’, the result from Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test is shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Comparison of error rates in writing 1 and final writing by Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

Group/N Feedback	Wrt1-Final	Mean of errors	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
A/32 Direct cor- rection	Wrt1	15.49	5.20	7.60	26.36	-4.3338	.000**
	Finalwrt	9.31	2.90	3.60	15.33		
B/38 Comment At the end	Wrt1	18.11	6.84	2.96	34.07	-4.924	.000**
	Finalwrt	10.68	3.86	2.40	17.89		
C/35 Coded mark	Wrt1	16.47	6.47	6.57	31.21	-4.717	.000**
	Finalwrt	9.57	3.62	4.62	19.37		

The result from Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test in Table 5 indicates that the differences of error rates between writing 1 and the final writing in all three groups were statistical significant. The p value was .000, which was less than .01. This finding indicates that the rates of errors decreased significantly in all groups. So it can be concluded that these three different ways of feedback had positive effects on accuracy development in paragraph writing.

Findings for question 3 : Do three methods of feedback affect writing fluency?

For the question ‘Do three methods of feedback affect writing fluency?’, the result from Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test is shown in Table 6.

Table 6 Comparison of amounts of words in writing 1 and final writing by Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

Group/N Feedback	Wrt1-Final	Mean of words	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
A/32 Direct cor- rection	Wrt1	149.88	40.15	88.00	274.00	-3.338	.001**
	Finalwrt	189.28	62.33	99.00	353.00		
B/38 Comment At the end	Wrt1	186.18	62.76	112.00	457.00	-1.595	.111
	Finalwrt	197.61	47.82	113.00	296.00		
C/35 Coded mark	Wrt1	163.97	44.08	63.00	257.00	-4.718	.000**
	Finalwrt	234.46	63.34	150.00	383.00		

Table 6 shows that students in all three groups were able to increase their average amounts of words in their final writing, comparing to their first writing. The results from Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test reveals that the increases of words in groups A and C were statistically significant because p. values of both groups were less than 0.01. This can be concluded that the Direct Correction Feedback in group A and the Coded Mark Feedback in group C had positive effects on writing fluency.

Conclusion and Discussion

The finding for the first research question indicates that errors made by students of all groups in their four paragraphs were categorized into 27 types. Ten most frequent errors, ranging from the highest to lower, were “sentence structure”, “noun”, “word choice”, “tense”, “capitalization”, “main verb”, “run-on”, “punctuation and connector”, “subject-verb agreement”, and ‘fragment’. This finding is in line with Chownahe (2000) who found Thai high school students committed almost all of the errors above, except “fragment” and “run-on”. These two exception were counted by Chownahe as “word-by-word translation”. Some errors found in this study are congruent with those found in Rujikieatgumjorn’s study (Rujikieatgumjorn , 1994) which revealed that top six types of error that students committed in Technical English course were “3rd person

marker”, “orthography”, “word choices”, “tenses”, “verb forms”, and “word order”. Meanwhile three errors in this study were also found in Panto’s study conducted with third year English majored students (Panto, 2007). She found that the most frequent errors made by her students were misuse of “nouns”, “verbs”, “misspelling”, “prepositions”, “adjectives”, “pronouns”, “capitalization”, and “adverbs”. The findings indicate that the difficulties in writing English for Thai students still center around the use of “noun”, “verb”, “word choice”, ‘ sentence structures or word order”, “capitalization”, and “tense”.

When genres are focused, the finding suggests that different genres bring different features of language and different difficulties besides the common difficulties occurring in all kinds of paragraph. In the writing1 which was assigned as a narrative and descriptive paragraph, besides the three common errors, students also faced difficulties on the use of “verb”, “run-on”, “punctuation and connector”, and “capitalization”. In writing 2 which was a paragraph of classification and exemplification, students faced difficulty in “capitalization” and “fragment”. When writing a paragraph with cause & effect and comparison & contrast genres, students encountered additional difficulties on using “main verb”, “run-on”, “parts of speech”, and “subject-verb agreement”. However, after the processes of feedback and correction, most of errors were decreased, except errors on the use of “noun” and “sentence structure”.

The finding for the research question ‘Do three methods of feedback affect writing accuracy?’ from Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test indicates that the total error rates of each group decreased significantly with the p. values in each group was .000 (< .01). This can be concluded that the three different ways of feedback had positive effects on accuracy rate in paragraph writing. The finding conforms to findings of studies conducting on Asian EFL students’ writing feedback. Sheen’ study (2007) has found that direct correction on focused errors has been beneficial for ESL writing, especially when it is accompanied by explicit explanation on problematic grammar points. Meanwhile Ferris’ study (Ferris, 2003) shows that indirect feedback increases student engagement and attention to learn and overcome the difficult points of language in writing. It is beneficial for students’ long-term writing development. Ho’s study (Ho, 2004) has found that error codes help students locate and identify types of error easily, and eventually remedy their errors by studying from the sources provided for them. Chandler (2003) has found that giving feedback by underlining the errors and having students amend those errors can help them write more accurately.

For the research question ‘Do three methods of feedback affect writing fluency?’, the result indicates that students in all three groups were able to increase their average amounts of words in their final writing, comparing to their first writing. However, the

result from Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test reveals that the increases of words in groups A and C were statistically significant ($p < .01$). This can be concluded that the direct correction feedback in group A and the coded mark feedback in group C had positive effects on writing fluency.

Recommendation

1. In this study, all three methods of feedback positively affected the accuracy in EFL writing. Writing teachers need to consider the amount of time and energy spending on each method as a deciding factor to choose the feedback method for their writing class. Therefore, writing teachers should decide to give the feedback that save their time and energy. Comprehensive feedback as given to students in group A is an exhausting task for teachers. Direct correction should be selected to use with only untreatable error, such as error on syntax or word choice.

2. Teachers should be flexible in locating and correcting errors, and choose the feedback appropriate to students or natures of errors.

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