MOTIVATING STUDENTS THROUGH SELF CORRECTION

Abdul Majid Khan Rana[1], Uzma Perveen[2]

Institute of Education and research (IER),
University of the Punjab, Lahore,
PAKISTAN.

[1] puierfaculty@gmail.com, [2] pu.uzma@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Providing feedback is an ethical and professional responsibility of the teacher. Students seldom make good use of the feedback and they often repeat the same mistakes in future writing assignments. This paper highlights how students can be encouraged to improve their written work by using "Self Correction" tool proposed by McDonough and Shaw (2003). The findings are based upon a classroom of Business and Technical Writing of BSIS at Punjab University College of Information Technology. The students were asked to correct their mistakes through self correction. The study reveals that the use of Self Correction enhanced the student's linguistic competence. In addition, students were able to identify specific problems with their written work and this in turn motivated them to revise their work until they were able to produce better quality work.

Keywords: Motivation, self-correction, linguistic

INTRODUCTION

In many countries like Pakistan where English is taught as a second language or a foreign language, the shift from a teacher centered classroom to a learner centered 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.

This practice does not give enough time to practice different innovative ideas and skills. This has the potential to create a demotivated learner who fails to see how to involve the learner actively in the learning process, thus creating teacher dependent individuals who know a great deal about the language but, lack actual application learning of the target language may help him or her in the real world. 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 promote learner independence, confidence and motivation.

This paper aims at investigating how a shift from the traditional technique of providing feedback on written work to a group of adult learners has helped create learners who were encouraged to reflect on the teacher's feedback, identify the mistakes and rewrite till they produce work which satisfied both the teacher and the learner.

Profile of the learner

The learners concerned were a class of 25 students, with an advance (BICS) Basic Interpersonal communication Skills proficiency level of English, studying a 4 month Business and Technical writing in English Course in the 4th semester of BSIS Degree at Punjab University, College of Information Technology. Classes of one and half hour each duration were held twice a week. Students were encouraged to submit their homework through e mail and at least 23 of them made use of the facility.

Role of feedback

Feedback is widely seen in education as crucial for both 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 the learner about his or her performance on a learning task, usually with the objective of improving their performance" (Ur, P. 1996. p.242). Harmer (2001, cited in McDonough and Shaw, 2003, p. 166) 'regards the teacher as a 'motivator' and a 'feedback provider'.

Furthermore, 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". Thus it can be stated that it is of absolute importance that the teacher motivates the learner by providing continuous feedback on his/her performance which aims at helping the learner become a competent user of the target language. Leki (1991, cited in Hyland & Hyland, 2006) and Schachter (1991, cited in Hyland & Hyland, 2006) claim that ESL learners have less of their self worth invested in L2 writing than L1 writers in their native language. As such, they are not discouraged when mistakes are pointed out to them. In fact, these learners constantly request feedback on their performance.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

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 rewriting a composition and would prefer to simply put away their corrected work 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 or duration of the course, the average learner was rarely motivated to resubmit their written work for better feedback.

This made the writer reflect carefully on the feedback techniques used by him with a view to revising them should the need arise. The technique which had been used previously was one where the teacher identified and corrected the mistakes herself. In other words, the students were given explicit negative feedback in the form of recasts and reformulations.

This obviously provided no opportunity for the learner to do anything other than glance at the already corrected piece of work and tuck it away inside a book or a file. As such, it was strongly felt that there was a need was to change the practice. The next technique employed was to underline or circle the mistakes in their written work. This also failed in achieving 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.

An Alternative - Providing Metalinguistic Feedback to encourage Self Correction

Thus, it was obvious that the learners needed guidance in order to identify the types of mistakes they make. In other words, there was a need to provide metalinguistic cues which provide students the opportunity to understand where the error is. ***The teacher's task in this technique is to indicate the mistakes, but not to correct them***. There are various ways of providing metalinguistic cues. For instance, the indication of the mistake can be performed by underlining errors and coding them (T for a wrong tense, SP for a wrong spelling,).

Lyster and Ranta (1997, cited in Lightbown and Spada, 1999, p.106) in one of their studies on feedback in French Immersion classrooms found out that "student uptake was least likely

to occur after recasts and much more likely to occur when they receive feedback in the form of elicitations, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback and repetition.

Where this group of students was concerned, in order to enhance comprehension of the feedback provided, they were told that feedback would be given on the following areas of their written work:

- a. Communicative quality
- b. Logical organization
- c. Grammar
- d. Vocabulary
- e. Punctuation and spelling

(Adapted from Writing Profile by Hopkins and Tribble, cited in MacDonough & Shaw, 2003)

Detailed comments and suggestions were made under each of these sections with a view to correcting their syntactic level errors as well as improving other general writing skills, namely, the logical flow of ideas. According to McDonough and Shaw (2003, p. 167), although "the red pen method" employed by the teacher is "inherently negative" there is no reason why feedback should not be positive. Thus, the learners, most of the time, were given feedback on the positive aspects of their writing as well.

BENEFITS OF SELF CORRECTION

Self Correction is believed to instill in the learner feelings of self-sufficiency and success and provide them with the opportunity to take a more active role in their own learning. In fact, self correction and re-writing helps weak students away from dependency on the teacher for correction. Although the teacher is available to help the learner whenever the need arises, the learner is encouraged to work out 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 rewritten work with the original.

Learners appreciate individualized comments since it enables them to understand what their strengths and weaknesses are. Thus, the teacher also gets the opportunity to understand the individual learner's abilities through the use of this technique. When a particular mistake recurs in a learner's work, the teacher is able to prescribe remedial action.

The Outcome

Taking all these into consideration, the learners were advised on the importance of regular homework submission. It has been a common observation that the learners in Business and Technical writing courses are more motivated than the other courses because of the growing global Economic, Business and English language needs s. Hence, the majority would faithfully do the homework regularly. However, resubmissions have never been a practice, most probably because, as mentioned above, either the work has already been corrected or the feedback given was beyond their comprehension.

Before the learners submitted their written work they were told how they would be given feedback and what they were expected to do once the feedback was received. How they could use feedback to further enhance their written work was discussed in great detail.

When the learners submitted their work, detailed comments were made and guidance was provided to help them understand the types of mistakes. The feedback they received was not conclusive and silently demanded some kind of action from the learner. A majority of the

learners found it difficult to ignore the feedback given due to its nature. Below are extracts of letters written by two students and the feedback provided using metalinguistic cues.

Example 1a

I am very interested in studying this computer course and would like to have the following details you had advertised.

Example 1b

Dear Mr. Jerom

PRICES OF COLOUR LASERJET PRINTER

I'm writing this letter to you get a quotation regarding a high quality color printer. We would like to offer more facilities to students so that please consider about following requirements:

In addition to this, detailed comments on the quality of their written work were made.

Even though there were a number of errors pointed out, 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 their self confidence. They made use of the comments given and frequently resubmitted their work. A few extremely motivated learners made 3 – 4 resubmissions depending on the importance of the task. Each resubmission was perceived to be better than the previous one.

According to Fathom and Whally (1998, Ferris, 2002, Ferris & Helt, 2000 cited in Hyland & Hyland, 2006, p.4) l "studies measuring student improvement longitudinally suggest that students who receive error feedback over a period of time can improve their language accuracy. This was evident in their resubmitted written work. The following extracts are illustrative of the progress made by one student.

Example 2a

I must insist that you take remedy action on correction as soon as possible and send it immediately.

Example 2b

I must insist that you take remedial action as soon as possible and send it immediately.

As illustrated above, a majority of the learners showed progress in the written output they produced. However, not every student made use of this. Sometimes, their workload impeded the motivation to write and rewrite homework assignments. However, the fact that they were able to communicate with the teacher online gave them the opportunity for immediate feedback on their performance and this motivated them to submit work on a regular basis.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be stated that the use of metalinguistic feedback in place of explicit feedback exercised a positive influence on the learners' motivation to improve their writing through rewrites since metalinguistic cues provided them with information to understand a mistake type without it being corrected explicitly. It made writing a challenging task since they were required to solve the problems themselves. They were able to witness their own progress which, in turn increased their motivation to work harder.

REFERENCES

[1]   Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching*. Pearson Education Limited.

[2]   Hyland, K. & Hyland, F. (2006). *Interpersonal aspects of response: Constructing &interpreting teacher written feedback.* In Hyland,K. & Hyland,F. Feedback in second language writing (pp.206-224). Cambridge: Cambridge.

[3]   Hyland, K. & Hyland, F. (2006). *Contexts and issues on feedback in second language writing*. In K. Hyland, & F. Hyland, Feedback in second language writing (pp. 1-22). Cambridge: Cambridge.

[4]   Lightbown, P. (1999). *How languages are learned.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[5]   McDonough, J. (2003). *Materials & methods in ELT*: A teacher's guide. Blackwell publishing.

[6]   Ur, P. (1996). *A course in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.