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## ERROR CORRECTION IN WRITING

*In this article, the study of error correction in writing is carried out. Useful and new methods of correcting errors and the usage of the best techniques in writing error correction have been thoroughly researched. Besides, the error feedback strategies have been determined, the accuracy and objectiveness of teachers' error feedback have been analysed. In general, error feedback in writing is challenging for teachers. Though students prefer to receive written corrective feedback over alternative feedback such as peer and oral feedback, teachers face some difficulties in explaining their errors when it is written.*

*According to researches, there are two general approaches to error correction in writing: 1. Comprehensive 2. Selective.*

*The comprehensive (or unfocused) approach is an approach which involves that the teachers correct all errors in the written texts without categorizing them. If students are in the final stages of producing a text and teachers want to show them the need for carefully proofreading and editing an entire piece of writing, they might use more comprehensive feedback. The selective approach (or focused) is the method of correcting the errors belonging to any category, for example linguistics point only, leaving the other unfocused errors uncorrected. If teachers' goal is to help students identify and learn to edit their most pervasive error patterns, they may provide selective, pattern-oriented error feedback at a particular point in time. Research on error correction has repeatedly pointed out that there are advantages and disadvantages of these two approaches in correcting errors of the written tasks. Besides disadvantages, a comprehensive approach has an advantage. This approach may help students to focus their attentions not only on errors in writing, but also on other aspects of the language such as grammar, punctuations, usage of vocabulary. It is proven that more error feedback may lead to faster development of grammatical accuracy in writing. Evaluation criteria and percentage on grammar, punctuation or context and organization errors for objective evaluation have been given in the result of the article.*

**Key words:** error correction, writing, spelling, feedback, correction codes.

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## ВИПРАВЛЕННЯ ПОМИЛОК У ПИСЬМОВІЙ ФОРМІ

*У цій статті проводиться вивчення виправлення помилок у письмовій формі. Ретельно досліджені корисні та нові методи виправлення помилок та використання найкращих методик виправлення помилок. Крім того, визначено стратегії зворотного зв'язку з помилками, проаналізовано точність та об'єктивність зворотного зв'язку вчителів. Загалом зворотний зв'язок з помилками в письмовій формі є складним для викладачів. Хоча учні вважають за краще отримувати письмові корективні відгуки щодо альтернативних зворотних зв'язків, таких як зворотний зв'язок з однолітками, але вчителі стикаються з певними труднощами в поясненні своїх помилок під час написання.*

*Згідно з дослідженнями є два загальні підходи до виправлення помилок у письмовій формі: комплексний, вибірковий.*

*Комплексний (або нефокусований) підхід – це підхід, який передбачає, що викладачі виправляють усі помилки в написаних текстах, не класифікуючи їх. Якщо учні перебувають на завершальній стадії створення тексту, а вчителі хочуть показати їм необхідність ретельної коректури та редагування цілого твору, вони можуть використовувати більш вичерпні відгуки. Вибірковий підхід (або сфокусований) – це метод виправлення помилок, що належать до будь-якої категорії, наприклад, лише мовної лінгвістики, залишаючи невиправленими інші помилки. Якщо мета викладачів – допомогти учням визначити та навчитися редагувати їх найпоширеніші шаблони помилок, вони можуть надавати вибіркові, орієнтовані на зразки та зворотний зв'язок з помилками в певний момент часу. Дослідження виправлення помилок неодноразово вказували на наявність переваг*

та недоліків цих двох підходів у виправленні помилок у написаних завданнях. Крім недоліків, комплексний підхід має і перевагу. Такий підхід може допомогти студентам зосередити свою увагу не лише на помилках у письмовій формі, а й на інших аспектах мови, таких як граматики, пунктуація, використання лексики. Доведено, що більше зворотного зв'язку з помилками може призвести до швидшого розвитку граматичної точності в письмовій формі. Критерії оцінювання та відсоток від граматики, пунктуації або контексту та організаційних помилок для об'єктивного оцінювання наведені у висновках.

**Ключові слова:** виправлення помилок, написання, написання, написання зворотного зв'язку, коди виправлення.

**Introduction.** Error correction is the most widely used method for responding to student's knowledge. It plays an important role in foreign language teaching because it shows an accomplishment of any student's work and helps students to understand their mistakes and work on them. It is often regarded as the most exhausting and time-consuming of teachers' work. (Ferris 2002; Mantello 1997) Errors can be seen in writing more obviously. Error correction in writing can be considered more visual evidence than correction in speaking and it is the most challenging one. It always arose the question among the researchers if it is important to give error feedback to students and what to correct: grammar, punctuation, or word spelling. The lively debate on these topics can be obviously seen in the works of Truscott (1996) and Ferris (1997, 2002). While Truscott (1996) strongly argued for the abolition of grammar correction in writing courses, Ferris (1995) puts forward that students appreciate their teachers pointing out their grammar problems. Though some authors (Hillocks 1986, Knoblauch & Brannon 1981) think that error correction has no importance in acquiring a language well, nowadays error correction remains one of the main evaluation points of student's knowledge because students want to have their errors corrected and teachers think it is their responsibility to correct errors.

In general, error feedback in writing is challenging for teachers. Though students prefer to receive written corrective feedback over alternative feedback such as peer and oral feedback, teachers face some difficulties in explaining their errors when it is written. They are afraid of being not objective or cannot explain the correction thoroughly. Researches and studies (Cohen 1991, Ferris 1995, 1997, Leki 1991, Hedgcock & Lefkowitz 1994) which were conducted to investigate student preferences about correction prove that students prefer their teachers' written feedback. However, teachers have some hesitations in giving feedback to students' writing. Some of them tend to correct each error in writing, while the others consider some errors don't need correction.

### 1. Strategies in error correction

*Which errors should be corrected? When should error feedback be provided? How should teachers give error*

*feedback?* These questions have always been debatable among the researchers for finding the most effective strategies in error correction of writing. Excessive attention to error correction in writing may affect to students' motivation badly and may be time consuming for teachers. Some teachers pay more attention to grammar constructions, the usage of tenses appropriately and give feedback on grammatical mistakes; others think content and vocabulary usage are the more important parts for writing and error feedback should be based on them. Students are eager to receive written feedback corrective feedback over alternative feedback such as peer and oral feedback from their teachers. For finding the best strategies in error correction in writing, some ways are suggested by the experts.

#### 1.1. Comprehensive versus Selective Error Correction

In the error feedback techniques that teachers use, one fundamental question is whether to mark all student errors or not. In a study by Ferris (2006), the three English as a second language composition teachers, who were attempting to mark and code nearly all of the student errors in conjunction with the research project, would sometimes mark well over 100 errors on one paper (slightly less than 800 words long) – and yet the researchers noted that the instructors did not, despite their best efforts, catch all of the students' errors. Some authors (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz 1996) suggested that error feedback may be most effective when it focuses on patterns of error. They think that these selective feedbacks can help students to understand their weak points and to work on their weakness. Both sides of the comprehensive versus selective debate have their own reasons for supporting their points.

According to researches, there are two general approaches to error correction in writing:

- 1) comprehensive;
- 2) selective

The comprehensive (or unfocused) approach is an approach which involves that the teachers correct all errors in the written texts without categorizing them. If students are in the final stages of producing a text and teachers want to show them the need for carefully proofreading and editing an entire piece of writing, they might use more comprehensive feedback.

For example: Teacher gives summary to any writing with the feedback:

- Work on the strong sentence skills (grammar, punctuation, vocabulary)
- There are many irrelevant sentences.
- Give more examples and support.

In this example, the teacher doesn't categorize the errors, just gives general feedback on the writing.

The selective approach (or focused) is the method of correcting the errors belonging to any category, for example linguistics point only, leaving the other unfocused errors uncorrected. If teachers' goal is to help students identify and learn to edit their most pervasive error patterns, they may provide selective, pattern-oriented error feedback at a particular point in time.

Research on error correction has repeatedly pointed out that there are advantages and disadvantages of these two approaches in correcting errors of the written tasks. Zamel (1982, 1985) has pointed out that excessive attention to student errors has turned writing teachers into grammar teachers, deflecting them from other more important concerns in writing instruction. Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam (2006) state that a comprehensive approach is not an effective approach because students have limited processing capacity. They consider that error correction that covers all linguistic aspects may lead to a cognitive overload. Another problem with comprehensive error feedback is that when teachers adopt this approach, they may end up spending time and effort improving students' writing style, apart from marking grammatical errors. It is proven that more error feedback may lead to faster development of grammatical accuracy in writing.

Besides disadvantages, a comprehensive approach has an advantage. This approach may help students to focus their attentions not only on errors in writing, but also on other aspects of the language such as grammar, punctuations, usage of vocabulary. The selective approach has its positive and negative sides too. The disadvantage of the selective approach is that selecting some aspects to check and give error feedback can put aside the other aspects which also need correction. As noted by Ferris (2010), we do not really know what the "optimal" number of error types to treat at one time might be – two? five? ten? Students have a right to know about their all mistakes and they need to learn how to edit *all* of their errors, not simply the few patterns picked out for them by teachers or researchers. In this case, unfocused approach to error feedback may help the students' to improve their writing better than a focused, selective approach.

Besides its disadvantages, the selective approach has advantages which are put forward by many

experts. Error feedback is most effective when it "focuses on patterns of error, allowing teachers and students to attend to, say, two or three major error types at a time, rather than dozens of disparate errors" (Ferris, 2002, p. 50), that is, when teachers choose to give error feedback selectively. This selective error-correction strategy helps students learn to make focused passes through their texts to find particular types of errors to which they may be most prone and to master grammatical terms and rules related to those specific errors. Writing is not based on grammar and punctuation correctness only; it has its own characteristic features, which must be focused in checking and correcting as well.

After analyzing these approaches, we can say that both approaches are important in error correction. Teachers should know when and how to use these approaches. If the teacher's goal is to help students identify and learn to edit their important error patterns, he or she may give selective, pattern-oriented error feedback at a particular point in time. Besides, if students are at an early stage of developing their writing skill and teachers aim to focus their feedback especially on content rather than language, the teacher should provide selective error feedback. However, if students are in the final stages of writing and teachers want to show them the need for carefully proofreading and editing an entire piece of writing, it is advisable to prefer more comprehensive feedback.

### 1.2. Direct versus Indirect Feedback

In the process of error correction in writing, teachers use direct or indirect feedback strategies. In direct (overt) feedback teachers provide students with explicit written corrections in response to error. "If students are revising or rewriting their papers after receiving teacher's feedback, they are expected merely to transcribe the teachers' suggested corrections into their texts" (Ferris 2011). Indirect feedback is when the teacher underlines errors using general comments, gives students the opportunity to fix errors themselves. Some teachers, when giving indirect feedback, locate errors directly by underlining or circling the errors, while others may locate errors indirectly, for instance, by putting a mark in the margin to indicate an error on a certain line. Whether teachers locate errors directly or indirectly, they can further decide if they want to identify the error types – by using symbols, codes, or verbal comments. For direct location of errors, teachers normally put the symbols, codes or comments right above or next to the errors underlined or circled. For indirect location of errors, teachers may put a code or symbol in the margin to identify the error type on a certain line.

Example:

**Direct feedback:** The first and foremost reason formulating the viewpoint is that the early childhood are<sup>is</sup> the most intensive stage of mind development in a life of a human being. Children who are 0-7 years old have young and black<sup>blank</sup> brains that are very active and ready to grasp all information. Child's<sup>Child's</sup> brain creates new outlook and knowledge from each experience. It is sensitive to all influences of the environment. At these ages, the brains of children can be easily directed and formed to any desired way. Therefore, early childhood should be under strict<sup>strict</sup> control. Aristotle had wide information about the stage of the brain development, and he put forward this idea to explain that early childhood is the decisive stage for shape<sup>shaping</sup> the brain of any person.

**Indirect feedback:** The first and foremost reason formulating the viewpoint is that the early childhood are<sup>er</sup> the most intensive stage of mind development in a life of a human being. Children who are 0-7 years old have young and black<sup>ww</sup> brains that are very active and ready to grasp all information. Child's<sup>er</sup> brain creates new outlook and knowledge from each experience. It is sensitive to all influences of the environment. At these ages, the brains of children can be easily directed and formed to any desired way. Therefore, early childhood should be under strict<sup>er</sup> control. Aristotle had wide information about the stage of the brain development, and he put forward this idea to explain that early childhood is the decisive stage for shape<sup>er</sup> the brain of any person.

Researches show that the majority of students prefer direct feedback; they think teachers' correction are helpful to them; however, teachers use indirect strategy more frequently stating that this method makes students think over their mistakes and not repeat them again. It forces students to be more reflective and analytical about their errors than if they simply transcribed teacher corrections. Like the other methods, direct and indirect feedbacks have advantages and disadvantages too. The advantages of indirect feedback are the followings:

- Studies show that indirect feedback "is more helpful to student writers in most cases because it leads to greater cognitive engagement, reflection, and 'guided learning and problem-solving'" (Ferris 2011).

- Although the number of errors is greatly reduced from one draft to the next as students respond to direct feedback, students' writing as a whole improves over time as a result of indirect feedback when students are asked to find errors, and solutions to errors, on their own. Since students are required by indirect feedback to take more responsibility

for their errors, they are likely to learn more from the process, to acquire the troublesome structures, and to make long-term progress in finding, correcting, and eventually avoiding errors.

- It has great potential to help students grow in autonomy in monitoring their own writing. Researches support this argument for indirect error feedback in writing courses. In a classroom-based study of teachers' error correction strategies and student progress in revision and over time, it was found that while direct error correction led to a higher percentage of correct *short-term revisions* (from one draft to the next), students who received more indirect feedback made more progress in *long-term written accuracy* (Ferris, 2006). Where students have been asked to evaluate their options for receiving teacher error feedback, they have consistently opted for the indirect option, likely sensing that this would be most beneficial to them in the long run (for example, Ferris 2006; Ferris et al. 2010; Ferris & Roberts 2001; Leki 1991).

Direct feedback has its own advantages such as:

- when students are at beginning levels of English language, direct feedback is more preferable. Students at these levels are not enough knowledgeable to edit and correct their work.

- when errors are "untreatable". As it is known, there are treatable and untreatable errors in writing. Treatable error is "related to a linguistic structure that occurs in a rule-governed way. It is treatable because the student writer can be pointed to a grammar book or set of rules to resolve the problem" (Ferris 2011). An untreatable error is "idiosyncratic, and the student will need to utilize acquired knowledge of the language to self-correct it" (Ferris 2011). The most common errors of this type are errors in word choice, word form, and awkward or unidiomatic sentence structure. In such cases, it may be more helpful for the teacher to suggest a different word or a restatement of the sentence than to simply underline the word or sentence and mark "wc" (word choice) or "ss" (sentence structure). It also may be more effective to address more complex untreatable errors in direct way.

- Finally, direct correction may be useful if the teacher gives direct feedback about an error for students to focus their attention primarily on some other pattern of error. For instance, when students make many errors in tense forms, indirect feedback will not be more helpful. It is better to give direct feedback in order to focus student's attention on this error pattern but not others.

Though students prefer direct feedback, its frequent usage can make them lazier to learn on their mistakes because it requires less effort on their part to

make the correction. Overuse of direct feedback may also lead to teacher “appropriation” of the student text. A potential danger of direct feedback is that the teacher, in providing the correction rather than guiding the writer to do his or her own editing, will misinterpret the student’s original intent about what she or he wanted to say.

It is advisable to use direct feedback with great care and only under the specific circumstances previously outlined. Direct feedback also requires teachers to have a high degree of confidence that they are correctly interpreting the student writer’s intentions. It is also a time-consuming method for teachers to give detailed feedback on each error.

Error correction research is fraught with controversy regarding the benefits of different error correction strategies. Is direct feedback more beneficial than indirect feedback, for instance? There is research evidence showing that direct and indirect feedback has no different effects on student accuracy in writing

However, there are studies which suggest that indirect feedback brings more benefits to students’ long-term writing development than direct feedback (Ferris 2003; Lalande 1982) through “increased student engagement and attention to forms and problems” (Ferris 2003). The danger of direct feedback, according to Ferris (2002), is that teachers may misinterpret students’ meaning and put words into their mouths. Direct feedback, however, may be appropriate for beginner students and when the errors are “untreatable,” that is, when students are not able to self-correct, such as syntax and vocabulary errors (Ferris 2002, 2003).

In short, both ways of giving feedback to error in writing are helpful if they are used appropriately. Teachers should take into account students’ level, their knowledge while choosing the direct or indirect error feedback.

**2. Error Correction Codes**

While teachers think of identifying errors as part of indirect or direct correction, they must choose whether to use a set of error codes, to use correction

symbols. There were always arguments whether to give coded or uncoded feedback. Is it more beneficial than uncoded feedback? Coded feedback rests on the premise that students are better able to correct errors when alerted to the error types. One advantage of coded feedback is that the error codes provide a common ground for teachers and students to discuss errors (Raimes 1991). Error identification, however, can be “cumbersome for the teacher and confusing for the student” (Ferris 2002) However, Lee (1997) has cautioned that teachers may be overestimating students’ ability in using marking codes, and that teachers may be “using a wider range of metalinguistic terms than students could understand” The usefulness of marking symbols/codes has been further questioned by Ferris & Helt (2000) and Ferris and Roberts (2001), who found that students did not correct more errors when they were provided with error codes. Research has yet to find out how useful and meaningful it is for teachers to mark student writing all over the place with codes, especially with codes that are unfamiliar to or not yet mastered by students.

Using codes or symbols is speedy and effective. Teachers can write “*sp*” more quickly than “*spelling*,” and as they mark hundreds or even thousands of errors during a course, this labor-saving device is not insignificant. The use of error codes to help students correct their writing has often been proved to be an effective method to facilitate error correction. Riddell (2001) states that teachers can use correction symbols (correction codes) to give feedback to students on their writing, and teachers can underline the errors to signify the errors and write the symbols for these errors in the margin. Then students can correct the errors by themselves. Hedge (1988) suggests that teachers can indicate “an error and identify the kind of error with a symbol, e.g. wo -wrong word order”. Correction symbols are also called minimal marking. Using correction codes is a convenient way of giving learners information on where they have gone wrong and “it is convenient to have a system of signals to the pupil in

Table 1

**Similar effects of direct and indirect feedback**

Type of error feedback	Explanation	Example
Direct feedback	Locate and correct errors	Has <u>went</u> <sup>gone</sup>
Indirect feedback (Direct location of errors)	Locate errors	Has <u>went</u>
	Locate errors and identify error types	Has <u>went</u> <sup>verb form</sup>
Indirect feedback (Indirect location of errors)	Indirectly locate errors	e.g., putting a mark in the margin to indicate an error on a specific line
	Indirectly locate errors and identify error types	e.g. by writing “verb form” (or “v”) in the margin to indicate a verb form error on a specific line

(Robb, Ross, & Shortreed 1986; Semke 1984)

order to help him to know what he is looking for before he has acquired much proof-reading skill” (Bright & McGregor 1970). In addition, “this technique makes correction neater and less threatening than masses of red ink and helps students to find and identify their mistakes” (Hyland 2003) and “makes correction look less damaging” (Harmer 2007)). This means that teacher can use correction codes when giving feedback on writing tasks and then students should find out the errors they made from the symbols and re-write their text again with the corrected mistakes. This strategy “encourages learner independence” (Riddell 2001) and students become more responsible for their learning. On the other hand, teachers who use codes or symbols must take extreme care to mark consistently and to make certain that students understand what codes or symbols mean. Surveys of student reactions to teacher feedback have found that student writers resent cryptic codes or symbols that they do not understand for example, Ferris 1995b; Straub 1997). Some teachers, likewise, may find it more time consuming to learn, remember, and use a coding system consistently than to simply write the key word or term on a student’s paper. Even when using complete words or phrases, though, the burden is on instructors to make sure that students understand what those references mean as well.

Correction symbols refer to the indication of types and locations of students’ mistakes through the use

of correction codes such as those suggested by Oshima & Hogue (1997). The application of correction codes is “normally done by underlining the mistakes and using some kind of symbols to focus the attention of the students on the kind of mistake they have made” (Byrne 1988). When teachers locate errors directly for students, they are assuming that students are unable to do so. Robb et al. (1986) have found that students’ performance in error correction was not affected by the salience of error feedback, including whether error location was made explicit for students. In Lee’s (1997) study, it has been shown that direct prompting of error location was more helpful than indirect prompting, since students were able to correct more errors when errors were directly located for them.

**Conclusions.** Errors are important for both learners and teachers. They are important in teaching to show learners accomplishment; on the other hand, they are equally important for learners, as students can learn from these errors.

– Teachers should try to create a friendly atmosphere to help freshmen learners to overcome this fear, as it is very important stage in their education.

– Teachers should set realistic goals for error feedback. Error correction should not be seen as the means to eradicate of all student errors but to encourage gradual but consistent improvement in accuracy over time, acquisition and application of linguistic knowledge,

#### Correction symbols:

Symbol	Meaning	Example of error	Corrected Sentence
P	Punctuation	I live <sup>p</sup> , and go to school here	I live and go to school here.
^	missing word	I <sup>^</sup> writing a letter right now.	I am writing a letter right now.
Cap	Capitalization	We live in boston <sup>cap</sup>	We live in Boston
Vt	verb tense	I work <sup>vt</sup> as a doctor 5 years ago.	I worked as a doctor 5 years ago.
s/v agr	subject-verb agreement	She listen <sup>s/v agr</sup> to music every day.	She listens to music every day.
pron agr	pronoun agreement	Everyone was waiting for <u>their</u> <sup>pron agr</sup> relatives.	All were waiting for <u>their</u> relatives.
Ro	run on	George came to school late he was punished. <sup>ro</sup>	George came to school late, so he was punished.
Frag	Fragment	Came to school <sup>frag</sup>	He came to school.
Ww	wrong word	The food is delicious. Besides <sup>ww</sup> , the restaurant is always crowded.	The food is delicious. Therefore, the restaurant is always crowded.
Sp	Spelling	She was unaware <sup>sp</sup> about it	She was unaware about it
sing/pl	singular or plural	She treats her employees like slave <sup>sing/pl</sup>	She treats her employees like slaves
Cs	comma splice	George came to school late, he was punished. <sup>cs</sup>	George came to school late, so he was punished.
Wf	wrong word form	This film is interested. <sup>wf</sup>	This film is interesting.
X	unnecessary word	My the <sup>x</sup> new dress was torn.	My new dress was torn.
Ref	pronoun reference error	The restaurant’s specialty is fish. They <sup>ref</sup> are always fresh.	The restaurant’s specialty is fish. It is always fresh.
not //	not parallel	Most of our regular customers are <u>friendly and and generous tippers</u> . <sup>not//</sup>	Most of our regular customers are friendly and and tip generously

(Oshima & Hogue 1997)

and development of effective self-editing strategies (Ferris 2008).  
– Teachers should remember that teacher-student conferences (whether out of class or mini-conferences during class), peer feedback, and self evaluation are legitimate and valuable alternatives to written feedback for various phases of the writing process, including the editing phase (Ferris 2003; Ferris & Hedgecock 2005).

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