Error Correction in Student Writing: Strategies for Tackling the Perennial Headache

Frank Conrow and Fiona Cotton, University of Tasmania

Introduction
The idea for this workshop arose from a short but intensive action research project that two teachers carried out in the classrooms of the English Language Centre at the University of Tasmania, which aimed to focus on the error correction process in student writing. In this workshop, we wanted to take the opportunity to share with the delegates the steps we followed in the formulation and execution of our project. We outlined the rationale for undertaking the research, the background and context of the project, the specific objectives we decided upon, the methods we used to reach our objectives both at the macro and the micro level and finally we discussed the outcomes of our research. We concluded by making some suggestions and recommendations that delegates might like to try in their own language centres and classrooms.

Action Research Rationale
The rationale for the research project came from the frustration felt by ELT teachers when so much time is spent on marking students' writing with so little apparent effect. Whilst research indicates there is a gap between the receptive and productive stages of language acquisition and that language students go through a long process of making the same errors many times before they are able to correct or avoid common errors of form, it was felt that there must be some way to 'speed up' this process and assist students through this stage of learning.

The fluency - accuracy model of language learning is the one followed by the two teachers concerned. However, this particular project focused on the accuracy end of the spectrum, the 'icing on the cake' to repeat the phrase used by Scott Thornbury in his address. It needs to be pointed out that much time was spent on the fluency aspects of writing and the process of writing as well as the importance of clear structuring, but for the purposes of the action research project and of this workshop, only the accuracy end of the model was considered.

Review of the Literature
Depending on the objectives of the lesson teachers can check their students' writing for a variety of error types. Written errors include errors of:

1. Content eg. story line, description, theme, main points, elaboration, etc
2. Presentation and lay-out especially important for resumes and
3. Form eg. grammar use, vocabulary-use, spelling, punctuation, conjunction and referencing.

The interest of our action research was to concentrate on helping our students to correct their errors of form. In particular, the students' attention was drawn to:

1. Slips which can be corrected by proof reading,
2. First language interference which lessens with learning, and particularly to
3. Their application of "guessed rules"

When discussing error making it is important to keep in mind that each learner has their own patterns of errors and that errors are patterned ie. rule governed.
A useful distinction for the purposes of our research project was that made by Long (in Makino1993:338) between error correction and error feedback. He defined error feedback as "teacher cues or hints which are given to learners to encourage self-correction" as distinct from the correction of error by the teacher or by the student without the aid of teacher cues.

Error correction should be viewed as a facet of language learning. Students learn by doing and by having their over-generalized rules about the language challenged, their limits exposed and their modified rules internalized.

There are important advantages to providing students with error feedback. Firstly, it requires students to pay more attention to the structural forms they have written. They are also required to "activate their linguistic competence in correcting their own errors" and to "improve their linguistic creativity" (Makino 1993: 340). Discussion of written errors and how they should be corrected assists the learner to understand and internalize the rules.

When choosing the most appropriate form of error feedback and/or correction teachers have a number of considerations to make. There is the well known desire of students to have every error marked (Leki 1990: 62) which the teacher may support or ignore. The goals set for the writing class will go a long way toward determining how the teacher responds to the students' writing (Leki 1990: 59). Also to consider is that one method of error feedback may suit lower level students while another method may be more beneficial for advanced students. A general observation is that advanced learners require less specific cues and are able to correct more of their errors using feedback cues than lower level learners.

Makino (1993;340) found that students can correct their own first draft errors to some extent without cues given by the teacher. More errors were corrected with the help of teacher cues while more detailed cues lead to a higher ratio of self-correction.

The background and context for the Action Research Project

The teachers were given two parallel writing classes, one which could broadly be described as 'upper intermediate' and one 'intermediate' level. There were nine students in the top group and ten in the intermediate group. The classes were made up of mixed nationalities: Japanese, Korean, Thai, Hong Kong Chinese, Sri Lankan and Indonesian. These students had enrolled in a ten week program but at least half of them were intending to sit IELTS at the end of the fifth week of the module, ready for the mid-year intake at TAFE. Because the Centre is small it was not possible to have a separate IELTS class so it was necessary to design a course which would meet the needs of both the IELTS students and those students with more general aims. The outline to be followed by both classes is set out in appendix 1, although changes were incorporated as the students' particular needs became apparent. The lower level group worked much more slowly through the course. Both writing classes occurred twice a week and occupied a total of approximately four hours per week in the timetable.

Action Research Objectives

The objectives for the project were as follows:

a. To get students to focus on their own errors of form
b. To enable students to take more responsibility for correcting their own errors of form

c. To enable students to derive maximum benefit from the teacher's corrections

Having established the reasons for undertaking the research and having decided what the objectives would be, it was necessary to decide how to achieve these objectives, what methods would be most appropriate to reach our goals. At this stage of the workshop, we discussed the first task on the delegate questionnaire (Appendix 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASK 1 FOCUSING STUDENTS' ATTENTION ON THEIR ERRORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which methods have you used to focus students' attention on their own errors of form?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Which methods do you consider most effective?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) using classtime to get students to correct their own mistakes</td>
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<tr>
<td>b) creating a students' mistake worksheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) getting students to answer a questionnaire on their writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) getting students to keep a journal reflecting on their writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) other..............................................................</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Discussion indicated that delegates had tried a number of methods for focusing students on their own errors. Several delegates indicated that the most effective method was to ensure the students had the chance to work with the teacher on an individual basis. Although there was general agreement on this, it was pointed out that it is not always possible to timetable individual sessions for students. Another delegate suggested that working in pairs or small groups discussing each other's mistakes is a very effective way of focusing students' attention on their own errors, a point with which most delegates agreed and which was an integral part of our research project. It was important to try to design a program that incorporated as far as possible a number of the methods known to be effective, and to see how the students reacted.

**Action Research Methods**

The methods we employed in both classes were as follows: In the first writing lesson the students completed a questionnaire which drew their attention to their own attitudes and strategies to writing.

At the end of each writing class, students were required to write a text based on the classwork to be handed in at the next writing lesson. The teachers then corrected the written work and drew attention to the errors of form by underlining the errors and using a previously agreed code which the students had already been taught.

For the first four writing lessons, the homework was returned to the students at the beginning of each lesson and the students were asked to correct as many of their own errors as possible. They were encouraged to work in pairs to help each other find the mistakes and they spent up to forty minutes on the task. At the same time the teacher talked to each student in turn, giving hints and clues as to how each error might be corrected.
For the second stage of the research, i.e. the next four writing lessons, both teachers made a 'mistakes' worksheet composed of sample sentences each containing one or more errors of form, taken from the students' homework from the previous lesson (Appendix 4). The errors were not coded or underlined as they had been in the earlier lessons. For the first forty minutes or more of each lesson, the students were required to find as many errors in the 'mistakes' worksheet as possible. As before, the students were encouraged to work together on this task.

Throughout the period of the project, the students from the upper-intermediate class completed a short questionnaire after each error correction session, while the students from the intermediate class were asked to keep a reflective journal about the writing lessons.

At the end of the five week period, all those participating in the project completed a final questionnaire evaluating the effectiveness of the project (Appendix 5).

For the purposes of this project it was necessary for the two teachers concerned to reflect on the way they correct student errors. In order to be able to draw conclusions from the research across both classes it was important to be consistent in the methods of error correction adopted. Conference delegates were asked to reflect on their own techniques and procedural methods for marking written work and discussion centred on task two of the delegate questionnaire.

**TASK 2. WRITING CORRECTIONS**

Which methods do you consider most appropriate for correcting student writing?

a. write in the corrections for the student
b. mark each error with a code only
c. underline mistakes and allow students to find their own mistakes
d. a combination of all of these
e. other........................................................................

Which method of error correction do you mostly favour - a,b,c,d or other?

It was felt that the method employed depended a great deal on the context, the type of student, the type of writing task, the focus of the lesson, and the time available. It was also pointed out that lower level students would be unable to find their own mistakes, and the teachers concerned need to be very sensitive to the needs of the individual student. Although one delegate mentioned that it is often easier to write the corrections for the students rather than to get them to correct their own, it is our contention that though time consuming and sometimes difficult, it is important to allow students sufficient time in class to find their own mistakes.

For the purposes of our research project, we chose to underline and code students' work and allow them sufficient time to correct their own mistakes working in pairs or small groups. The teacher then circulated around the class assisting each student in turn. Up to forty minutes of each writing session was devoted to this activity, since we found that students needed this amount of time to complete their corrections.
It was also necessary to decide on the type of code to use. Although Professor Jackson in his keynote address mentioned that procedural competence is quickly developed before teachers develop what he terms 'teachers' maxims, in many teacher training courses scant attention seems to be paid to the most efficient marking procedures and most useful codes to adopt. The delegates at the workshop were thus invited to consider three codes from three different sources (Appendix 6) and to discuss task 3 in the delegates questionnaire.

**TASK 3 USING A MARKING CODE**
Consider the following marking codes. (Appendix 6) Which codes are most appropriate for correcting overseas student writing. Can you anticipate any problems with using these codes? Can you add any extra symbols which you have found useful?
Use the codes provided to correct the text on the next page. Discuss any difficulties you encounter.

Discussion of task 3 focused on which symbols cause the students the most difficulties. Thus 'Gr' can be considered too general and not particularly helpful for the student, and 'WW' is equally confusing. As one student wrote in their feedback sheet, 'I always put down what I think is the right word, so if the teacher marks it "wrong word", how do I know what is the right word?'

It was also pointed out that 'C' for concord was a difficult symbol and that 'Ag' for Agreement might be more appropriate. Discussion then focussed on the importance of introducing the codes systematically. It was suggested that some symbols, such as 'Rf', are only really of use for more advanced students and could be introduced at a later stage.

Samples of student writing were included for the delegates to practise the different codes. (Appendix 7)

**The Results of the Research Project.**
The final part of the workshop outlined the results of the research project and the feedback received by the students.

*The initial questionnaire*
The initial questionnaire, the idea for which originated from Tricia Hedge (1988), was used not so much for any numerical revelations it might reveal, but as an instrument to stimulate the students' consideration of their own approaches to writing. However, a collation of the responses did reveal one or two interesting points (Appendix 8). Most notably, all the students indicated that they wanted the teacher to write 'comments' about their writing as well as give them a grade and correct the errors. This serves as a reminder that teachers would be wise to write instructive comments where possible.

*The journals*
The journal writing was intended to get students to reflect on what they had learned and any difficulties that they had encountered and was only indirectly linked to the focus of the project on error correction. Nevertheless it was valid as a 'focusing' devise and as an opportunity to ask questions or discuss problems. This type of task is
especially pertinent where the teacher only sees a group of students for a limited period of time - in this case only two mornings a week. For those needing guidance, some sample questions were suggested which they could choose to address in their journals. These were as follows:

1. What did you learn in this writing lesson?
2. How difficult was the lesson?
3. Do you have any problems?
4. Do you have any grammar questions to ask about?
5. Do you have any other questions?

The results from the final evaluation seem to indicate that the journal writing was a valid exercise from the students' point of view. No-one indicated that it was not useful, four students indicated that it was quite useful, three said it was useful, two that it was very useful and one that it was very useful indeed.

The teacher concerned found the journal entries a valuable means of maintaining continuous contact with the students' perceptions and needs. A practical example of this was that repeated mention was made of the desire for specific information and practice of the use of 'articles', to the extent that the teacher incorporated a session devoted entirely to the use of articles. This was perceived to be a prompt response to their stated needs, and the atmosphere in the group was increasingly positive and focused.

Although journal writing is often used as a means of increasing writing fluency, in this case the journals were used to focus students' attention on the actual learning process and as a direct means of discussing this process. This is particularly useful with students from cultures who are inclined to be reticent about stating their views openly in class. Thus the journal was a way of overcoming those cultural barriers which keep some of the students quiet in class.

An additional and unforeseen benefit of the journal writing, was that some students chose to comment on problems they had with aspects of language learning other than writing. For example, two students expressed a need for much more pronunciation work, information which proved valuable to the class coordinator in addressing the students' perceived needs.

The final evaluation questionnaire

The results from the final questionnaire and the comments made by students (appendix 9) indicate their overall satisfaction with the participation in and the outcomes of the research project. Thirteen of the students indicated that they were more aware of the types of errors they made and the majority indicated that they could correct more errors of form in their writing than previously. Predictably, the upper intermediate class generally seemed more able to correct their own errors without help with three of that class indicating they could correct up to 50% and five students indicating that they could correct about 75% of their errors of form.

Their satisfaction with the time spent in class on correcting their errors is shown in the responses to question 6 and 7. Fifteen students indicated that time should be spent
on error correction activities in every writing lesson. The popularity of the class mistakes worksheets was also indicated by the numbers of students who put this as their first preference in answer to question 9, 'Which method of error correction did you find most useful?' Ten students indicated that the mistakes worksheets were their first priority and nine students indicated their preference for marking their own errors in class.

**Outcomes**
The final question to be considered was whether or not the project had achieved its original objectives. There can be no doubt that the students did become more focused on their own errors of form and seemed to take more responsibility for correcting their own errors. As they had to correct their own errors in class, it seemed as if the teachers' efforts in marking the written work were not wasted. The journals, feedback sheets and the results from the final evaluation sheets indicated that the students believed that their writing had improved. There was increased 'client' satisfaction, an important consideration when management are increasingly emphasizing the importance of meeting client needs. Despite the fact that the project took place over a relatively short timespan, the teachers noticed improvement in the student's texts, copies of which were kept for later analysis. While no claims could be made that the error correction project was the main factor responsible for the improvements in the students' writing, there was sufficient evidence to suggest that it had made a significant contribution.

The benefits for the teachers in participating in such action research were many. It enabled the teachers to reflect on their own practices and priorities. It motivated them to be more disciplined in the planning, management and execution of their classes and it provided the opportunity for those involved to stimulate and encourage each other. All these elements contributed to both improved teacher performance as well as teacher satisfaction.

Some observations can be made about the project which had not been not anticipated. It was both surprising and pleasing to discover how effective the journals proved to be as a means of continuous evaluation. Several of the symbols which are frequently used by teachers proved to be of little value. It was also interesting to note how much grammar students learnt from an examination of their own errors.

It must be repeated that spending time on the correction of errors of form should be seen in context as only one part of the whole process of writing. The teachers involved in the project are well aware of the potentially negative effects which can be caused by too much emphasis on the importance of presenting correct forms and structures. Nevertheless, an increased amount of classtime spent on this activity over short periods of time, seems to be justified in the light of the short research project. More work needs to be done on precisely which methods adopted and which aspects of the project were most directly responsible for the positive outcomes, but even without such research, the consistent use of lesson journals, mistakes worksheets, a previously agreed marking code as well as the use of short informal evaluation questionnaires are all to be recommended as means of meeting the needs of our international students.
REFERENCES


1. An introduction to the marking code
   - practise identifying error types
2. An appraisal of:
   - individual approaches to writing
   - methods used to improve writing
3. An introduction to the paragraph
   - basic structure
   - basic cohesive devices (linking)
4. Defining and classifying
5. Describing a process
6. Describing a graph
7. Comparing and contrasting
8. Cause and effect
9. The Essay (part 1)
   - its basic structure
   - types of essay
10. The Essay (part 2)
    - presenting an argument
    - supporting evidence
DELEGATE QUESTIONNAIRE

FOCUSING STUDENTS’ ATTENTION ON THEIR ERRORS

1. Which methods have you used to focus students' attention on their own errors of form? Which methods do you consider most effective?
   a) using classtime to get students to correct their own mistakes
   b) creating a students' mistake worksheet
   c) getting students to answer a questionnaire on their writing
   d) getting students to keep a journal reflecting on their writing lessons
   e) other ..............................................................

WRITING CORRECTIONS

2. Which methods do you consider most appropriate for correcting student writing?
   a) write in the corrections for the student
   b) mark each error with a code only
   c) underline mistakes and allow students to find their own mistakes
   d) a combination of all of these
   e) other ..............................................................

3. Which method of error correction do you mostly favour - a, b, c, d or other?

USING A MARKING CODE

4. Consider the marking codes on page 2. Which codes are most appropriate for correcting overseas student writing. Can you anticipate any problems with using these codes? How can you overcome these potential problems? Can you add any extra symbols which you have found useful?

5. Use the codes provided to correct the texts on page 3. Discuss any difficulties you encounter.

BEFORE AND AFTER

6. Look at the texts on pages 4 and 5, written by the same students towards the end of the research project. Can you see any improvements?
Appendix 3

WRITING QUESTIONNAIRE

1. I enjoy writing in my first language.
2. I write a lot in my first language.
3. Writing is important to me because:-
   - I have to write English in my job.
   - I have to pass examinations in English.
   - I need English for my studies.
4. I like to talk about the topic before I start writing.
5. I write a plan of my essay before I start writing.
6. I start writing as soon as I have the essay topic.
7. I like to do a lot of writing in class.
8. I like to work together with other students on writing tasks.
9. I would like to see other students' writing.
10. I prefer to work alone in the writing class.
11. I like to make several drafts of my writing before I give it to the teacher.
12. I like my friends to correct my writing before I give it to the teacher.
13. I like to write and correct mistakes while I am writing.
14. I like the teacher to correct my mistakes while I am writing.
15. I like to correct mistakes as soon as I have finished.
16. I check my spelling before I give it to the teacher.
17. I like the teacher to correct all my mistakes.
18. I like the teacher to give a grade as well as correct the mistakes.
19. I like the teacher to underline and code my mistakes and let me correct them myself.
20. I want the teacher to write comments about what is good or not good in my writing.

21. I study the corrections in detail.
22. I make a careful note of the teacher's corrections.
23. I write out a correct copy of my writing.

Appendix 4

Sample Mistakes - Worksheet 1
(keyed from hand written original)

Work with a partner. Find the mistakes.

1. Between 1920 and 1945 the averaged number of cigarettes smokes a steady rise.
2. There was suddenly increase in the number of cigarettes from 1940 - 1945.
3. Most people have interestind in their healths.
4. In 1958 and 1963 there was a slight dip.
5. There was a rapid fall in the number of cigarettes smoked per head that the cause of reduction of import.
6. These dips shows that probably tobacco tax increasing would have influenced many smokers.
7. In the 1970s the number of cigarettes smoked fell steadily. Because people discovered that smoking will cause the cancer.
8. In 1945 there was a peak in the smoking rate at 800 cigarettes smoked per head of populations in a European county, but, however, after the early of 1945, the smoking rate until 1950.
9. Many people were without work between nineteen thirtys and nineteen forty-five the graph was steadily increased and have a peak time.
10. Between 1945 and 1951 the level was a rapid fall.
11. It was very busy day to me. All day I spend my time with my friends and we enjoyed very much.

Appendix 5

ERROR CORRECTION EVALUATION

Name..................

Date..................

During the last five weeks, you have spent sometime studying your errors during each writing class. In order to help the teachers to develop better writing courses can you please answer the following questions.

Please tick your answer and write comments where possible.
1. How helpful was the error correction code?
   - not helpful
   - quite helpful
   - helpful
   - very helpful
   - very helpful indeed

   Comment

2. Did you know the types of errors you made before the start of the writing course?

   Comment

3. Are you more aware of the types of errors you make, after five weeks of the writing course?

   Comment

4. Which kinds of error do you make most frequently? (eg: articles, wrong tense etc)

   Comment

5. How many errors can you now correct in your writing without help?
   - 0%
   - about 25%
   - about 50%
   - about 75%
   - 100%

   Comment

6. Was it useful to spend classtime correcting your own errors?
   - not useful
   - quite useful
   - useful
   - very useful
   - very useful indeed

   Comment

7. How often should students spend time correcting their errors in class?
   - every day
   - every writing lesson
   - once a week
   - not at all

   Comment

8. How useful did you find the class mistakes worksheets where you had to find the errors?
   - not useful
   - quite useful
   - useful
   - very useful
   - very useful indeed

   Comment
9. Which method of error correction did you find most useful?
(Number them in order of preference)

- correcting own errors in class
- correcting own errors at home
- correcting errors on the class mistakes worksheets

Comment _________________________________________________________________

10. How useful was the journal writing/feedback sheet?

not useful   quite useful   useful   very useful   very useful
indeed

Comment _________________________________________________________________

11. What was the purpose of writing the journal/feedback sheet?

__________________________________________________________________________

12. How much do you think your writing has improved as a result of the time spent on error correction?

0%  about 25%  about 50%  about 75%
100%

Comment _________________________________________________________________

Appendix 6

Appendix 6 unfortunately is not included because of difficulties encountered in scanning the material.
Appendix 7

(Keyed from written material)

In Elicos class, when we talk with someone, we have to speak English. When I talk with teacher, I can practice to listen and speak English. Also, when I talk with my classmate from Thailand, Korean or China, I can practice them. These are very useful for me. While I had been studying English in Japan, I had not been needed to speak English because all my friends were Japanese. However, after I came here, I have a lot of English everyday.

Vickers EFB5

Vickers EFB5 was made by British in 1915. Features of this plane are double wings which are called biplane and that it has two seats for an observer and a pilot. It possessed only one machine gun, but the observer thought only to shoot the enemy without thinking to pilot the plane so it was more accuracy. Although it possessed 100 horsepower engine, its maximum speed was 112 km per hour. Probably it was because of two crews and double wings.
## Appendix 8

### WRITING QUESTIONNAIRE

#### Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I enjoy writing in my first language.</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>7/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I write a lot in my first language.</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>4/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Writing is important to me because:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I may have to write English in my job.</td>
<td>9/5</td>
<td>0/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I have to pass examinations in English.</td>
<td>9/8</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I need English for my studies.</td>
<td>8/8</td>
<td>0/0</td>
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#### Planning

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. I like to talk about the topic before I start writing.</td>
<td>6/8</td>
<td>2/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I write a plan of my essay before I start writing.</td>
<td>5/7</td>
<td>2/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I start writing as soon as I have the essay topic.</td>
<td>3/1</td>
<td>2/1</td>
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#### Process

<table>
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<th>Sometimes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. I like to do a lot of writing in class.</td>
<td>0/3</td>
<td>5/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I like to work together with other students on writing tasks.</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I would like to see other students' writing.</td>
<td>4/7</td>
<td>4/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I prefer to work alone in the writing class.</td>
<td>4/1</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I like to make several drafts of my writing before I give it to the teacher.</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>4/2</td>
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#### Proof Reading and Editing

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<tr>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>12. I like my friends to correct my writing before I give it to the teacher.</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>6/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I like to write and correct mistakes while I am writing</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>5/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I like the teacher to correct my mistakes while I am writing.</td>
<td>9/5</td>
<td>1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I like to correct mistakes as soon as I have finished.</td>
<td>4/6</td>
<td>4/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I check my spelling before I give it to the teacher.</td>
<td>6/5</td>
<td>4/2</td>
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#### Teacher Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>17. I like the teacher to correct all my mistakes.</td>
<td>6/7</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I like the teacher to give a grade as well as correct the mistakes.</td>
<td>8/6</td>
<td>0/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I like the teacher to underline and code my mistakes and let me correct them myself.</td>
<td>4/8</td>
<td>2/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I want the teacher to write comments about what is good or not good in my writing.</td>
<td>10/9</td>
<td>0/0</td>
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#### Response to Teacher Feedback

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21. I study the corrections in detail.</td>
<td>3/6</td>
<td>3/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I make a careful note of the teacher's corrections.</td>
<td>6/6</td>
<td>1/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I write out a correct copy of my writing.</td>
<td>5/5</td>
<td>2/2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### WRITING QUESTIONNAIRE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I enjoy writing in my first language.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I write a lot in my first language.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I think writing in English is more difficult than speaking.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Writing is important to me because:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I may have to write English in a job.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
-I have to pass examinations in English. 9 1
-I need English for my studies. 8 1

5. I like to talk about the topic before I start writing. 6 2 2
6. I plan my writing in my head before I start writing. 9 1
7. I write a plan of my essay before I start writing. 5 2 3
8. I start writing as soon as I have the essay topic. 3 2 5

9. I like to do a lot of writing in class. 0 5 5
10. I like to work together with other students on writing tasks. 3 3 4
11. I would like to see other students' writing. 4 4 2
12. I prefer to work alone in the writing class. 4 2 4
13. I prefer to do a lot of writing by myself at home. 6 1 3
14. I like to make several drafts of my writing before I give it to the teacher. 3 4 3

15. I like my friends to correct my writing before I give it to the teacher. 1 6 3
16. I like to write and correct mistakes while I am writing 2 5 3
17. I like the teacher to correct my mistakes while I am writing. 9 1 0
18. I read through my writing and correct mistakes as soon as I have finished. 4 4 2
19. I read through my writing and correct mistakes after some time. 9 1 0
20. I use a dictionary to check my spelling before I give it to the teacher. 6 4 0

21. I like the teacher to correct all my mistakes. 6 0 4
22. I like the teacher to give a grade as well as correct the mistakes. 8 0 2
23. I like the teacher to underline and code my mistakes and let me correct them myself. 4 2 4
24. I want the teacher to write comments about what is good or not good in my writing. 10 0 0
24. I usually read the comments and look at the grade but I don't study the corrections in detail. 10 0 0
25. I make a careful note of the teacher's corrections when I get my work back. 6 1 3
26. I sometimes write out a correct copy of my writing. 5 2 3

COMMENTARY

The questionnaire has been divided into six sections as follows: questions one to seven provide background material, questions 5 to 8 focus on planning, questions 9 to 14 focus on the process, questions 15 to 20 focus on proof reading and correcting the final draft, questions 21 to 24 focus on teacher feedback and corrections and questions 25 to 27 focus on the students' response to teacher feedback on their writing.

Whilst the usefulness of the initial questionnaires as a valid measuring instrument is questionable, it was useful to bring the writing process into conscious focus and as such was a valuable initial tool. It also served to introduce the aims of the research project and to highlight the differing learning styles of different students. In addition it opened debate about differing methods of teaching and learning and their relative effectiveness.

With regard to the results of the questionnaire, the only statement with which everyone agreed was that students expect teachers to write constructive comments at the end of their written work. In the workplace where ever increasing demands are made of teachers, it serves as a reminder that inspite of these demands, teachers must not neglect to write qualitative comments for each individual student in order to meet the needs of the 'client' group.

On the other hand, question one was revealing in that the two students who expressed the most 'hang-ups' with their writing tasks in the English classes were the same students who said that
they did not enjoy writing and that they did not write much in their own language. Again, this is a timely reminder that with the current emphasis on 'meeting the clients' needs', some factors which influence language acquisition are beyond the control of teachers and that they should not always be held accountable for any client dissatisfaction. There are significant differences between the packaging and selling manufactured articles and the packaging and selling of language learning and acquisition.

Trialling such a questionnaire taught us valuable lessons as to how we might improve and develop it as a reliable measuring instrument in future writing classes. It was clear almost from the start that there were too many questions for discussion of each one to be fruitful. It also became clear that some of the questions were too ambiguous and might be interpreted in a number of different ways. Any results from these questions should be disregarded. For example, question 13 is irrelevant unless it can be inferred that the students wish to be given a great deal of writing homework! Similarly, question 25 is worded in such a way that one cannot be sure whether the students are responding 'yes, I don't study the corrections in detail' or No, I don't study the corrections in detail.' but even with the unreliability of such results, there seems to be a measure of support for our depressing hypothesis that the labour intensive teacher task of correcting student errors bears little fruit.

Appendix 9

ERROR CORRECTION EVALUATION - RESULTS

1. How helpful was the error correction code?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>not helpful</th>
<th>quite helpful</th>
<th>helpful</th>
<th>very helpful</th>
<th>very helpful indeed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Did you know the types of errors you made before the start of the writing course?

No: 7 + 3 = 10
Yes: 2 + 6 = 8
Knew some errors = 1

3. Are you more aware of the types of errors you make, after five weeks of the writing course?

Yes: 6 + 8 = 13
No: 1 + 1 = 2
A little bit : 2
Not sure : 1

4. Which kinds of error do you make most frequently? (eg: articles, wrong tense etc)

Articles: 8 + 6 = 14
spelling: 3 + 1 = 4
grammar: 4 + 1 = 5

Wrong word : 6 + 4 = 10
Prepositions : 2 + 1 = 3

Plural or singular : 1
Tense : 1
Very long sentences : 1
5. How many errors can you now correct in your writing without help?

- 0%  
- about 25%  
- about 50%  
- about 75%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Was it useful to spend classtime correcting your own errors?

- not useful     
- quite useful   
- useful         
- very useful    
- very useful

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>indeed</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. How often should students spend time correcting their errors in class?

- every day    
- every writing lesson
- once a week  
- not at all

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>every day</th>
<th>every writing lesson</th>
<th>once a week</th>
<th>not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. How useful did you find the class mistakes worksheets where you had to find the errors?

- not useful     
- quite useful   
- useful         
- very useful    
- very useful

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>indeed</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

9. Which method of error correction did you find most useful?

- correcting own errors in class:  
  - first preference  = 5/4 = 9
  - second preference = 5/3 = 8
  - third preference  = 0/1 = 1

- correcting own errors at home  
  - first preference  = 0/1 = 1
  - second preference = 2/0 = 2
  - third preference  = 8/5 =13

- correcting errors on the class mistakes worksheets  
  - first preference  = 6/4 =10
  - second preference = 2/4 = 6
  - third preference  = 2/0 = 2

10. How useful was the journal writing/feedback sheet?

- not useful     
- quite useful   
- useful         
- very useful    
- very useful

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>indeed</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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</table>
12. How much do you think your writing has improved as a result of the time spent on error correction?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>about 25%</th>
<th>about 50%</th>
<th>about 75%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
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