

**A Study of the Effect of Different Types of Corrective Feedback
on Foreign Language Student Writing Observed in the First Year Students
at Yangon University of Foreign Languages**

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Abstract

The value of corrective feedback on foreign language learner student writing becomes prominent in recent years. This paper aims to analyse the use of feedback given in teaching writing skills at Yangon University of Foreign Languages (YUFL) and their effects, and to focus on the better way to support students' writing development. This research paper deals with the performance of the YUFL first year students on writing skills. In this research, it is investigated whether the type of feedback (direct, implicit written feedback with correction code and student-researcher 2-minute individual conferences; direct, explicit written feedback only; no corrective feedback) given to two groups of different specialization students on the types of linguistic errors which most frequently occurred in their task resulted in improved accuracy in their new piece of writing. An analysis is made of the outcomes obtained in these three groups. The significant variations in accuracy across two writing tasks statistically support that there is a significant effect for the combination of written and conference feedback on accuracy improvement. It is hoped that the present study will be useful for both teachers and learners who are trying to develop their writing skills in second language teaching and learning setting.

Key words: corrective feedback, student writing skills, linguistic errors

1. Introduction

As the students at Yangon University of Foreign Languages are learning a language as a foreign language, they meet many kinds of learning problems dealing with all four language skills. The teachers have been trying to find out the ways to enable students to find the solution of these problems is necessary. Finding the ways to improve their writing skills is also one of the considerable points. The present study is a kind of classroom-oriented research, in which the main purpose is to investigate the effect of corrective feedback in writing skills development.

There are some problems in researches on the productive skill: writing. First, most of researches focus on fluency, whereas accuracy and complexity are considered as one aspect of fluency to be examined. Secondly, at recent, communicative teaching method and task-based teaching method are very popular and accepted by most researchers and teachers. But, these two teaching method also take on some limitations. The most problem is that these two methods overemphasize the importance of the speed and performance while overlook the accuracy.

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Second language acquisition (SLA) researchers' opinions on the effectiveness of corrective feedback are different. One group holds that corrective feedback is necessary (White, 1991) because it can draw the learners' attention to structures that have not been mastered, thus initiating a learning process; while another group maintains that changes in the learner's primary linguistic data, not by corrective feedback and some researchers even advocate to abandon the corrective feedback in classroom interaction due to its limitations (Truscott, 1999). A number of studies have examined whether corrective feedback in writing is effective (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Lightbown & Spada, 2003; Saxton, 1997).

Corrective feedback has a positive effect on accuracy. It is hoped that the present study will be useful for both teachers and learners who study second or foreign languages at Yangon University of Foreign Languages. As the corrective feedback can help the students to improve their writing skills as well as linguistics, the type of feedback should be used in teaching and learning process.

2. Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives to do this paper are as follow:

- to identify the possible outcomes of using corrective feedback in the context
- to focus the different ways of giving feedback on student writing and their effects
- to find out the pedagogical implications for using corrective feedback in teaching writing

3. Literature Review

3.1. Corrective feedback

In second language acquisition (SLA), the role of feedback becomes one of the interesting factors. Feedback in SLA research and second language writing (L2W) is defined as “corrective feedback” and can be either implicit or explicit. Corrective feedback is information given to learners regarding a linguistic error they have made. (Loewen, 2012) According to Kregar (2011), “corrective feedback is any type of oral or written comment, information or question provided to learners that indicates that there is an error in their usage of the L2 and it can help the learner to develop their future performance”.

3.2. Research evidence on whether error correction results in improved accuracy

There have been a few studies which have attempted to directly investigate whether L2 students who receive written corrective feedback on their errors are able to improve

the accuracy of their writing compared with those who do not receive error feedback. Each of these studies (Kepner, 1991; Polio, Fleck, & Leder, 1998; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986; Semke, 1984; Sheppard, 1992) reported that there was no significant difference in the writing accuracy of the students. However, it needs to be noted that three of the studies (Polio et al., 1998; Robb et al., 1986; Sheppard, 1992) did not include a non-feedback control group. Although Fathman and Whalley (1990) found that fewer grammatical errors were made by students who received error feedback, this particular study examined text revisions and not new pieces of writing over time. Thus, there is clearly a need for research that not only compares the effects of receiving corrective feedback and no corrective feedback but also examines the long-term effects of such treatments (Ferris, 2002, 2004; Truscott, 1999).

3.3. Research evidence on the effect of different feedback strategies on improved accuracy

An increasing number of studies have also been investigating whether certain types of corrective feedback are more likely than others to help L2 students improve the accuracy of their writing. In reviewing some of these studies, Truscott (1996) reported that none of them (Kepner, 1991; Semke, 1984; Sheppard, 1992) found significant differences across any of the different treatment groups (content comments only; error correction only; a combination of content comments and error correction; error identification, but no correction).

A good number of studies have distinguished between direct and indirect feedback strategies and investigated the extent to which they facilitate greater accuracy (Ferris, 1995a,b; Shortreed, 1986). Direct or explicit feedback occurs when the teacher identifies an error and provides the correct form, while indirect strategies refer to situations when the teacher indicates that an error has been made but does not provide a correction, thereby leaving the student to diagnose and correct it. Additionally, studies examining the effect of indirect or implicit feedback strategies have tended to make a further distinction between those that do or do not use a code. Coded feedback points to the exact location of an error, and the type of error involved is indicated with a code (for example, PS means an error in the use or form of the past simple tense).

Contrary to surveys which reveal that both students and teachers have a preference for direct, explicit feedback rather than indirect feedback (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Roberts, 1999), several studies report that the latter leads to either greater or similar levels

of accuracy over time (Ferris et al., 2000; Ferris & Helt, 2000; Frantzen, 1995; Robb et al., 1986). However, neither the Lalande nor the Robb et al. studies had control groups which received no correction and neither study found statistically significant differences between the treatment conditions.

3. 4. Research evidence on the effect of corrective feedback on different linguistic error categories

SLA insights (Truscott, 1996) and studies of error correction (Chaney, 1999; Ferris, 1995a; Lalande, 1982) point to the fact that different linguistic categories should not be treated as if they are equivalent because they represent separate domains of knowledge that are acquired through different stages and processes.

Ferris (1999) introduced a distinction between “treatable” and “untreatable” errors, suggesting that the former (verb tense and form, subject-verb agreement, article usage, plural and possessive noun endings, and sentence fragments) occur in a rule-governed way, and so learners can be pointed to a grammar book or set of rules to resolve the error, while the latter (word choice errors, with the possible exception of some pronoun and preposition uses, and unidiomatic sentence structure, resulting from problems to do with word order and missing or unnecessary words) are idiosyncratic and so require learners to utilize acquired knowledge of the language to correct the error.

As the preceding sections have revealed, a number of issues concerning the value of error correction feedback on ESL student writing have been investigated, but it is equally clear that further research needs to examine the effects of corrective feedback: (1) on new pieces of writing, (2) on a wide range of linguistic error categories, and (3) in ways that involve different feedback strategies and combinations of strategies. In order to start addressing these needs, the following study was undertaken with 38 students at Yangon University of Foreign Languages to investigate the extent to which corrective feedback on targeted linguistic forms under different treatment conditions helped students improve the accuracy of new pieces of writing.

4. Research Methodology

4. 1. Research Questions

The following research questions are formulated for this study.

1. Is corrective feedback needed for students who are studying a language as a foreign language?

2. To what extent does the type of corrective feedback on linguistic errors determine accuracy performance in new pieces of writing?
3. What pedagogical implications can be drawn for the teachers in teaching writing in teaching a language as a foreign language setting?

4. 2. Research Method

All the three key components of an experimental study design: (1) *pre-post test design*, (2) a *treatment group* and a *control group*, and (3) *random assignment* of study participants are used in the research, so it is an experimental research. Because of the pre-post tests, treatment and control groups, and group random assignment, experimental studies address more threats to internal validity than any other type of study. Furthermore, any findings from an experimental study can be applied to the population from which the study's samples were drawn.

As the study also focuses more in counting and classifying features and constructing statistical models and figures to explain what is observed, the quantitative method is used in this research.

4. 3. Data Collection

The method of data collection is cluster sampling through the students' performance. It consists of describing trends and comparing groups. The data were collected from the students from two different specializations: Russian and English. This study involves 36 first year English specialization students and 38 first year Russian specialization students who are studying English as a foreign language in the Yangon University of Foreign Languages. The students have learnt English for 12 years. In other words, they are not the beginners in English and their proficiency level can be Pre-Intermediate or Intermediate.

In this study, each class is divided into three groups: A, B and C. In English Specialization, Group A and B have 13 students each and Group C has 10 students. In Russian, Group A has 12 students; Group B and C have 13 students each. The data are collected from the performance of all three groups of the students on writing skills. The three linguistic errors (preposition, infinitive and direct/ Indirect Object) in English specialization class and the errors (preposition, verb tense and definite article) chosen in Russian Specialization class to be targeted in this research were those which occurred most frequently during the first writing task.

4.4. Research Procedures

At the beginning of the research, all the three groups in each class are asked to do the two writing tasks in each class. Each writing task was of a similar type – an informal letter writing on what they did last weekend or summer. It can be varied in content but it is needed to provide the students with the opportunities to use the targeted form. The study emphasized on the errors which occurred most frequently during the first writing task. All the errors in the first writing task were identified and categorized in each group. After the first writing task, the students were divided into three treatment groups. Group A students were given indirect, implicit written feedback with correction code and student-researcher 2 minute individual conferences and Group B students were given direct, explicit written feedback only. For Group C, no corrective feedback was given but the errors were just underlined or circled. However, they were given feedback on quality and the content.

For Group A students, their work were collected and corrected them using the correction code. The errors are underlined added the codes, and it is made the students to notice them. (See example in Appendix A) The implicit written feedback gives the students opportunities to self-correct their errors. It shows the learners where the errors are and what kind they are, and then they try to correct them by themselves. The students found this very motivating. Then they had the student-researcher 2 minute individual conferences. The conference sessions gave participants the opportunity to ask questions about their errors and the corrections they had received as well as the chance to receive additional explanations and examples. Each conference session began with the researcher asking the student which corrections he or she did not understand or wanted further examples of. When additional explanations of the corrective feedback were given, the researcher wrote down a new sentence with the same error in it for the student to correct. The researcher then referred to other instances of the error in the student's text and asked him/her to correct them. The researcher drew particular attention to errors that were made in different linguistic environments. In each conference session, all three targeted categories of error were discussed (if errors had been made in these categories).

For Group B students, direct written feedback took the form of full, explicit corrections above the underlined errors. (see example in Appendix B) However, no explicit instruction on the targeted linguistic errors was given for them. Group C students

did not get any corrective feedback but their errors were identified in the form of underlined and circled. (see example in Appendix C)

To check the effect of the different types of corrective feedback, they are asked to do the similar task as the first one. In each group, the errors in three targeted areas were collected. The students were measured on a quantitative variable: accuracy performance. This was calculated as the percentage of the incorrect usage of each targeted linguistic form.

5. Findings and Discussion

In the beginning stage of the research, the students were asked to do the first piece of writing. All the errors in the first writing task were identified and categorized according to the three treatment groups. The data and results collected from the *English specialization students* are show firstly.

The data collected from the first piece of writing of English Specialization students are shown in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Errors from the first piece of writing of English Specialization students

Error categories	Group A (out of 110 errors)		Group B (out of 119 errors)		Group C (out of 112 errors)	
	No of errors	%	No of errors	%	No of errors	%
<i>Articles</i>	8	7.3	6	5.0	6	5.4
<i>Adjectives</i>	8	7.3	9	7.6	8	7.1
<i>Adverbs</i>	7	6.4	7	5.9	9	8.0
<i>Conjunctions</i>	4	3.6	8	6.7	9	8.0
<i>Gerund</i>	6	5.5	8	6.7	6	5.4
<i>Infinitive</i>	10	9.1	12	10.1	10	8.9
<i>Modals</i>	7	6.4	8	6.7	5	4.5
<i>Nouns</i>	8	7.3	9	7.6	6	5.4
<i>Object: DO, IO</i>	11	10.0	10	8.4	10	8.9
<i>Prepositions</i>	12	10.9	14	11.8	12	10.7
<i>Pronouns</i>	8	7.3	3	2.5	7	6.3
<i>Verb duplication</i>	6	5.5	8	6.7	9	8.0
<i>Verb tenses</i>	10	9.1	9	7.6	9	8.0
<i>Word order</i>	5	4.5	8	6.7	6	5.4

As Table 1 reveals that the greatest difficulty occurred with the use of preposition (10.9% of 110 errors in A, 11.8% of 119 errors in Group B and 10.7% of 112 errors in Group C), followed by the Infinitive (9.1% of the errors in A, 10.1% in Group B and 8.9% in Group C), and the Direct/ Indirect Object (10.0% of all errors in A, 8.4% in Group B and 8.9% in Group C). It is noted that the percentage are slightly different. It is surprisingly found that the error the most frequently occurred is *Preposition*. However, it can be said that the linguistic errors which occurred most frequently during the first writing task are preposition, Infinitive and Direct/ Indirect Object. These errors were chosen to analyse in this research and the student were given feedback according to their treatment group. Group A students received indirect, implicit written feedback with correction code and student-researcher 2 minute individual conferences and Group B students received direct, explicit written feedback only. Group C participants, received no corrective feedback on the targeted features but, their errors were identified.

After given feedback, the participants did the second piece of writing task. In this stage, the data collected are on the three most frequently occurred linguistic errors. The result is shown in the following table: *Table 2*.

Table 2: The targeted errors from the second piece of writing of English Specialization students

Error categories	Group A (out of 98 errors)		Group B (out of 106 errors)		Group C (out of 107 errors)	
	No of errors	%	No of errors	%	No of errors	%
<i>Preposition</i>	3	3.1	9	8.8	10	9.7
<i>Infinitive</i>	4	4.1	8	7.8	9	8.7
<i>Object: DO/IO</i>	4	4.1	8	7.8	8	7.8

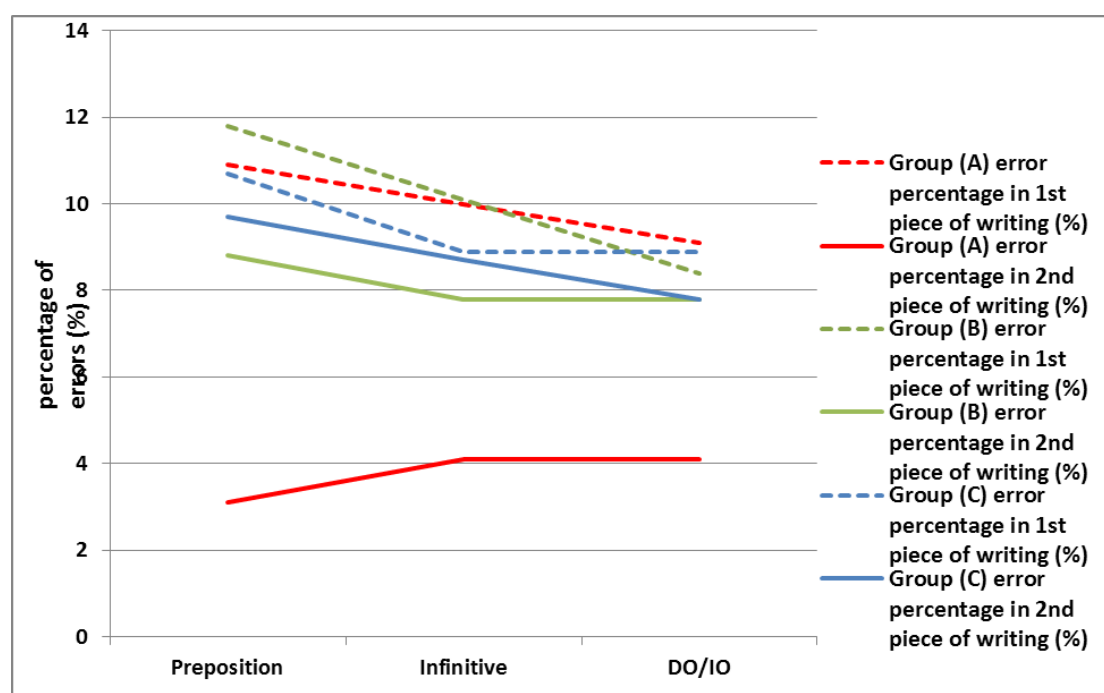
The comparative results of the percentage of each error area of the three different treated groups in two pieces of writing are shown in the given in *Table 3*.

Table 3: The comparison of the results from the first and the second pieces of writing of English Specialization students

Error categories	Group A		Group B		Group C	
	In the 1 st piece of writing (%)	In the 2 nd piece of writing (%)	In the 1 st piece of writing (%)	In the 2 nd piece of writing (%)	In the 1 st piece of writing (%)	In the 2 nd piece of writing (%)
<i>Preposition</i>	10.9	3.1	11.8	8.8	10.7	9.7
<i>Infinitive</i>	10.0	4.1	10.1	7.8	8.9	8.7
<i>DO/IO</i>	9.1	4.1	8.4	7.8	8.9	7.8

It can clearly be seen in the following graph: Figure 1.

Figure 1: The comparison of the results from the first and the second pieces of writing of English Specialization students



The improvement can be measured between the distance between the first line and the second line in each group. According to the results, it is clearly found that the performance of the students in Group A is much better than the students in Group C. In

Figure I, it can be seen that the result after the first test, the percentage of the targeted errors made by the students of those three groups are higher. The percentage of the targeted errors done after the second test becomes significantly fewer in Group A, so that the result of the improvement can be seen clearly in accord with respective feedback.

To analyse the performance of the Russian Specialization students with different types of feedback, the procedure done in this research is the same way as what it is done in English specialization. The different is that the linguistic errors frequently found are preposition, verb tense and definite article. It is surprised that Preposition error rate is the highest one in both classes.

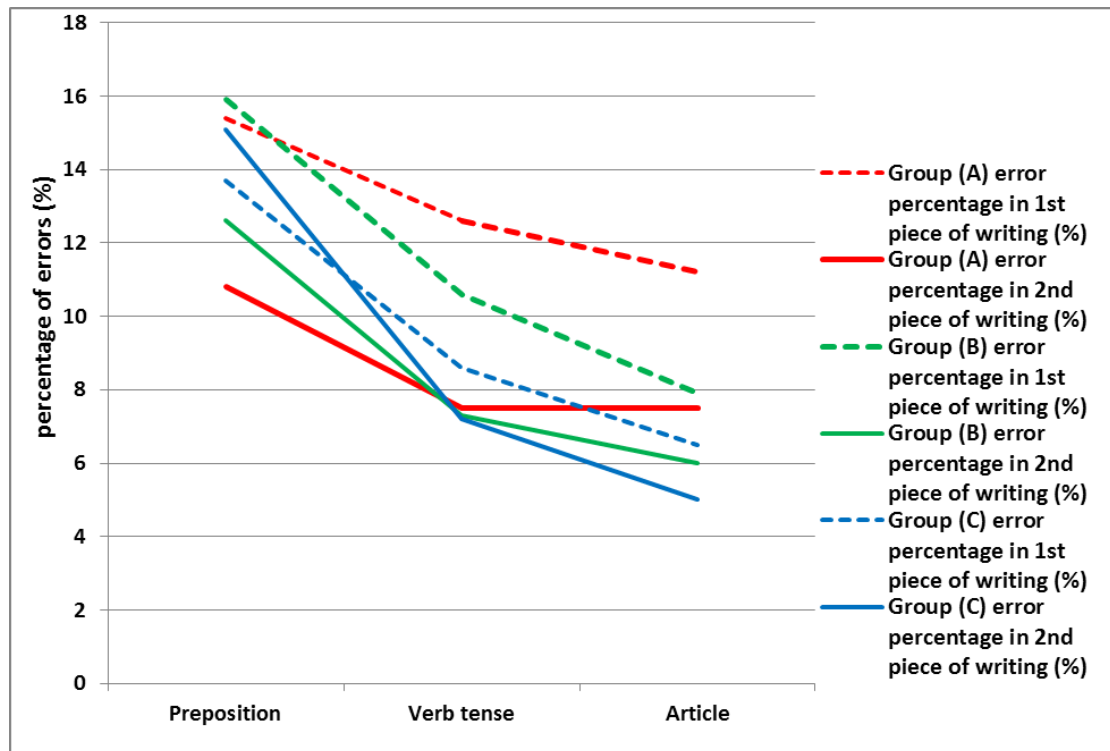
The following table, *Table 4*, shows that the comparative results of the percentage of each error area of the three different treated groups in two pieces of writing of the Russian specialization students.

Table 4: The comparison of the results from the first and the second pieces of writing of Russian Specialization students

Error categories	Group A		Group B		Group C	
	In the 1 st piece of writing (%)	In the 2 nd piece of writing (%)	In the 1 st piece of writing (%)	In the 2 nd piece of writing (%)	In the 1 st piece of writing (%)	In the 2 nd piece of writing (%)
<i>Preposition</i>	15.4	10.8	15.9	12.6	13.7	15.1
<i>Verb tense</i>	12.6	7.5	10.6	7.3	8.6	7.2
<i>Article</i>	11.2	7.5	7.9	6.0	6.5	5.0

The result can be clearly seen in the following graph: *Figure 2*.

Figure 2: The comparison of the results from the first and the second pieces of writing of Russian Specialization students



As the same way as the first one, the improvement can be measured between the distance between the first line of the result and the second line of the result in each group. According to the results, it is clearly found that the performance of the students in Group A is much better than the students in Group C. The percentage of the targeted errors done after the second test becomes fewer, group A group B, but the result in group C is slightly increased. However, it can be seen that the Group A result is the greatest one among them.

The data from both classes indicate that the improvement of the students from the Group who received indirect, implicit written feedback with correction code and student-researcher 2 minute individual conferences is the highest one among three groups. And the students who received only the direct, explicit written feedback could improve in their writing but the rate is not high as the first group. The students who received no corrective feedback on the targeted features have a little improvement or no improvement.

The research is also statistically calculated. To obtain more information for each group, dependent paired-samples *t* test was conducted. The result of *t* test stated that there was significant difference between pre-test and post-test of Group A in English specialization at .05 level and in Russian specialization is at .01 level (see *Table 5 and 6*).

To be specific, Group As reported significantly higher level of accuracy development than Group Bs and Cs. It is found that the result is statistically significant.

Table 5: The result of t test for the targeted error differences between First piece of writing and second piece of writing of English specialization students

	t	df	p	Std. Error Mean
Group A	7.553	2	.017	.825
Group B	2.760	2	.110	.713
Group C	2.692	2	.115	.285

Table 6: The result of t test for the targeted error differences between First piece of writing and second piece of writing of Russian specialization students

	t	df	p	Std. Error Mean
Group A	10.905	2	.008	.410
Group B	6.071	2	.026	.467
Group C	.526	2	.651	.950

According to the percentage of the errors and the statistical data, the present study found that the types of feedback provided had a significant effect on the accuracy with which the participants used the separate linguistic categories in new pieces of writing. The provision of indirect, implicit written feedback together with individual conference feedback resulted in significantly greater accuracy. It is proved that the self-study should also be used in correcting errors and given feedback. Self-motivation also has to be emerged in doing the self-correctness. The use of full, explicit written feedback also resulted in better accuracy. It is suggested that the way which only identified the errors should not be used in giving corrective feedback in teaching foreign language writing. It can be seen that giving written feedback and student-teacher individual discussion emerged in the foreign language writing class, seemed to point towards active student and teacher participation. The results of the study show the answer for the third research question “What pedagogical implications can be drawn for the teachers in teaching writing in teaching a language as a foreign language setting?” as it is found that the particular type of feedback provided had a significant effect in foreign language writing.

6. Conclusion

In order to contribute to the need for further research on the value of providing corrective feedback to L2 writers (Ferris, 1999; Truscott, 1996), the present study investigated the extent to which different types of feedback on three targeted error categories helped foreign language writers improve the accuracy of their use in new pieces of writing. It found that the combination of implicit written feedback and one-to-one conference feedback enabled the second or foreign language learner with significantly greater accuracy in new pieces of writing. This finding adds to a growing body of research that has investigated the effect of different feedback strategies on accuracy performance. For instance, it has already been noted that indirect feedback is more effective than direct feedback in helping learners improve the accuracy of their writing. As little to no research has specifically investigated the effect of different corrective feedback options on improved accuracy, the findings of the present study are noteworthy.

Consequently, it suggests that classroom foreign language writing teachers provide their learners with both oral feedback as well as written feedback on the linguistic errors on a regular basis. So that learners buy into this learning process, we would suggest that teachers discuss with their learners which linguistic errors should be focused on. However, due to the time constraints, it is difficult to give that kind of feedback for every single item. Because current research indicates that indirect feedback options have a greater effect than direct feedback on accuracy performance, future research would do well to compare the effects of both direct oral and written feedback with various indirect options to see if the same differential effects are observed between the different error categories. It is suggested that there is a need for research to examine the effects of corrective feedback more longitudinally. Investigations over several semesters would be ideal.

Finally, it is believed that the findings of this study have demonstrated that foreign language writers can improve the accuracy of their use of rule-governed linguistic features if they are regularly exposed to oral and written corrective feedback. As it can be used in learning a language as a foreign language, it is hoped that it can be applied in teaching writing skills in all the specializations at YUFL. Further research would need to be undertaken to see if this finding also applies to all the writers at other proficiency levels and whether it is also true for other linguistic forms where rules of usage are more complex and more idiosyncratic than they are.

Due to the time constraints, the researcher has focused only on the performance of English foreign language learners: English and Russian specialization students who are represented for the foreign language learners at Yangon University of Foreign Languages. There are still more ideas to be studied in their specialized languages for future researchers.

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Appendix A

Correction codes

Code	Meaning	Example
^	Insert here	I went ^ my grandparents' house last weekend.
—	Delete	I went to the my grandparents' house last weekend.
~	Connect	I went to my grandparents' house last weekend.
/	Separate	I went to my grandparents' / house last weekend.
Sp	Spelling	I went to my grendparents' (Sp) house last weekend.
∩	Transpose	I went to my house grandparents' last weekend.
<u>underline</u>	Capital letter/ Lowercase	I went to my <u>Grandparents'</u> house last weekend.
V	Wrong verb form	I go(V) to my grandparents' house last weekend.
frag	Incomplete sentence; fragment	last weekend I went to. (frag)
<u>Ww</u>	Wrong word	I went to my grandparents' house previous (Ww) weekend.
<u>Wf</u>	Wrong form	I went to mine (Wf) grandparents' house last weekend.
Prep	Wrong preposition	I went on (Prep) my grandparents' house last weekend.

Sample of Indirect or implicit corrective feedback

I stole ^(Art) some flowers in ^(Art) garden. Then I escaped
with ^(Ww) having ^(Art) flowers. When I am going through ^(Prep)
bridge over the river, ^(Pron) sister found me in the river.

Last Sunday night I watched 'Superman'
on the ^(Art) television and then I had dinner
with my parents. When we were having
our dinner, my brother-in-law was ^(V) arrived.

Sample of direct or explicit corrective feedback

Last Sunday, I had ^(a) very rough day.
I got up early and go shopping.
As soon as I stepped ^{out} ~~on~~ of the door,
it ^{began} to rain. So I had to go back
to ^{the} apartment and get my umbrella.

Last ^{weekend} ~~weekend~~, I hiked the highest mountain
in Chin state. It was one of the hardest
things I have ^{ever} done in ^{my} whole life.

Sample of Identifying errors

When I visited my sister last weekend, she seems a bit depressed. I talked her doctor and asked advices. She will have to remain in the hospital for few days.

Last weekend I have won some tickets of our local basketball teams game. So I took four of the close friends.