



To correct or not to correct? That is an excellent question

The Grammar Error Correction Debate

Lindsey Hill
Nicole Ludmer
Jacklyn Ryan

To correct or not to correct? That is an excellent question

- ▶ Error Correction Meta-analyses:
 - ▶ Truscott (1996) & Ferris (2003)
- ▶ Of those we focus on the following:
 - ▶ Lalande (1982)
 - ▶ Robb et al. (1986)
 - ▶ Kepner (1991)
- ▶ We consider:
 - ▶ Research design
 - ▶ Findings
 - ▶ Analysis
- ▶ Our Conclusion:
 - ▶ 3 Guiding Principles for increased engagement in error corrective feedback



Main claims from Truscott (1996)

Studies on L2 writing error correction (such as Lalande 1982, Robb et al. 1986, Kepner 1991) are evidence of the ineffectiveness of CF

- Studies that claim to support the effectiveness of CF are weak
- General problems with approaches to error correction

Numerous studies show that corrective feedback does not work in L1 writing

Error corrective feedback on L2 writing can be harmful

▶ **The bottom line**
Ferris (2003):

Emphasizes importance of teacher feedback

Studies show corrective feedback works

Points out faults in research by Lalande, Robb, Kepner

Not enough evidence in the current research

Key point: follow-up

Lalande (1982): Are you sure that's a control group?

Participants:

- 60 university students - Pennsylvania State University (1979)

Pedagogical context:

- Intermediate level German classes (fourth quarter)
- Four instructors

Duration:

- 11 class periods (a quarter)/
- Samples collected

Four groups

- Two experimental groups, two "control" groups
- "control" groups still received error correction



KEEP

CALM

AND

LEARN

GERMAN

Lalande (1982): Research Design Methods

Experimental Groups	"Control" Groups	All Four Groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Indirect (error correction code)<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interpret codes, correct mistakes, and rewrite• Lexical errors - detailed explanation by the teacher• Encouraged to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• use grammar review texts• Use peer & teacher assistance• Students monitored errors with Error Awareness Sheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Traditional error correction<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Direct and comprehensive• Incorporate all corrections in rewrites• No error awareness sheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Five in class essays<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 250-word short story summaries• Pre-test and post-test<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not returned to students• 3 in-class rewrite/error correction activities<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 50 mins each• Essays 2,3,4<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 45 mins• Marked and graded by teachers• All read the same short stories

Robb et al. (1986): Research Design

Participants:

- 134 Japanese students

Pedagogical context:

- College freshman at a Japanese university
- Four sections of English composition
- Two instructors for the four sections were rotated to offset variability in teaching style

Duration:

- 23 class meetings over the course of an academic year
- Samples collected at five points throughout the year

Four groups:

- Each group was given the same weekly writing assignments
- Each group received a different type of corrective feedback

Kepner (1991): Research Design

Participants:

- 60 American students

Pedagogical context:

- Freshman and sophomores at Wheaton College

Duration:

- 16 classes over an academic semester

Four groups:

- Students divided into two groups: high or low verbal abilities
- Further divided into randomly assigned different feedback-type groups

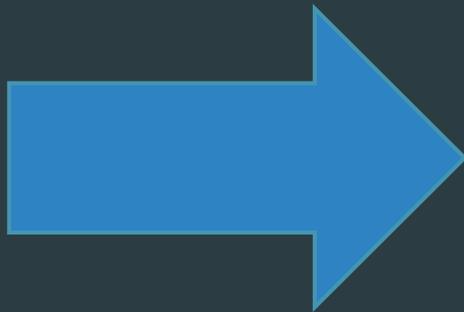
Kepner (1991): Research Design

- ▶ Bimonthly journal collection
- ▶ Researcher provided written feedback
- ▶ Journal 6 was used for study
- ▶ Looked at:
 - ▶ Higher level propositions
 - ▶ Surface-level errors

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
15 students	15 students	15 students	15 students
High Verbal Ability	High Verbal Ability	Low Verbal Ability	Low Verbal Ability
Error Correction Feedback	Message-Related Feedback	Error Correction Feedback	Message-Related Feedback



What do you think?



What are some strengths from the research designs mentioned?

What are some weaknesses from the research designs mentioned?

What do you think will be the expected outcome of the research designs?

Summary of Research Design

	Lalande (1982)	Robb et al. (1986)	Kepner (1991)
Participants	60	134	60
Contexts	American University Intermediate German class (fourth quarter)	College freshmen, Japanese university	Undergraduate Spanish class, American university
Duration	11 classes	23 classes	16 weeks
Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 experimental • 2 "control" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 groups • Different CF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 groups • Different CF
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 essays total • Direct & Comprehensive feedback • Indirect - Error Code/Error Awareness sheet • In-class rewrites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 essays • 2 teachers • Independent graders • Some CF for each group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 journal essays • 2 teachers • 1 researcher

Lalande (1982) Findings:

"Control" groups worsened

Experimental groups improved

Error correction is useful using the appropriate systems

Combination of error awareness and problem-solving techniques has significant beneficial effects

Systematic scoring should be the rule and not the exception

Teachers should have a total correction of written errors policy

Errors should be corrected, and grammatical/structural errors must be indicated by nature and location

Students should correct their own grammatical and orthographic errors



Robb et al. (1986) Findings:

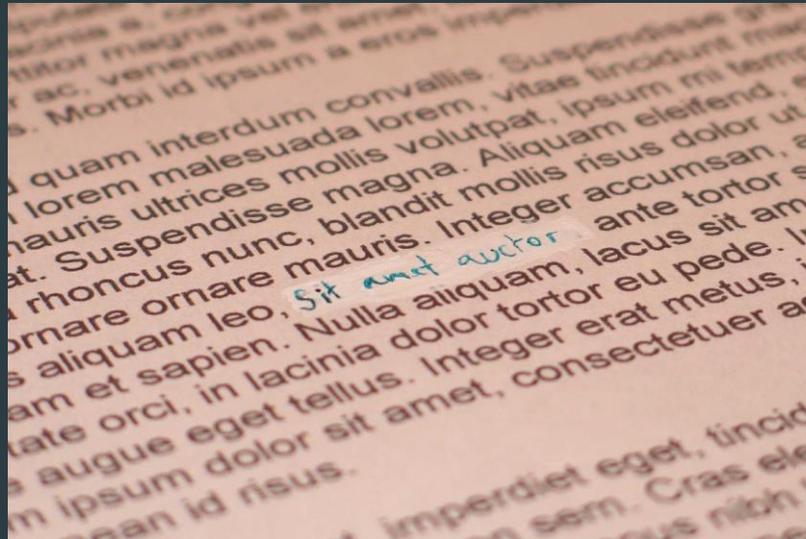
- Accuracy:
 - Measured by ratios of error-free T-units to total T-units
 - All groups improved gradually and at roughly the same rate
- Fluency:
 - ▶ Measured by differences in total words and total clauses among drafts
 - ▶ Little difference over time
- Complexity:
 - ▶ Measured by ratio of additional clauses to total words
 - ▶ Results were statistically insignificant (with one exception)

Kepner (1991) Findings:

Students that did better	Students that did not do better
Consistent message-related feedback provided best improvement to writing proficiency	Error-correction feedback + explicit rule reminder did not help with writing proficiency
Message-related feedback provided more higher-level propositions	Students with error-correction feedback did not do better than students with message-related feedback on post-test
Higher-verbal ability students produced more higher-level propositions regardless of feedback type	No difference between error count of high-verbal or low-verbal ability groups that received error-correction feedback

Kepner (1991) Take Away:

- Teachers need to recognize verbal-ability differences and to guide students appropriately



[This Photo](#) by Unknown author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#).

Summary of Consistencies

Design

- ▶ All FL courses at universities
- ▶ Study duration was under one year
- ▶ No control groups (see differences)
- ▶ Four groups in each study
- ▶ At least two instructors
- ▶ At least two types of CF

Findings

- ▶ Not necessarily consistent, but overall there were no significant results:
 1. Weak or insignificant improvement
 2. Some groups worsened

Guiding Principles



As teachers we must be researchers ourselves



We must become more aware of our own impact on the reception and implementation of error corrective feedback



We must create an environment that cultivates student engagement

Guiding Principle 1: Research



Current studies lack sufficient or consistent evidence

No true control group, no true comparison
Insufficient duration of studies



Question of Acquisition

Sequence of acquisition - existence is known
but operation and manner little is known

Morpheme studies Brown (1973), Dulay &
Burt (1974), Larsen-Freedman (1975)

Difficult to implement

Possible that syntactical, morphological, and
phonological aspects acquired differently



Teachers must ask the questions

Constant research
Constant observation

Guiding Principle 2: Awareness



Teacher biases

Implement procedures for reducing or eliminating biases
Moderate expectations



Teacher burnout

Everything that affects student performance can also affect teacher performance



Aim for consistency

Must always be aware of ourselves and our performance

Guiding Principle 3: Environment



Guiding students to become autonomous learners

Students that logged and corrected own errors were more successful



Personal messages with feedback

Better understanding and a closer relationship with each individual student



Peer review and engagement

Students that received peer interaction and feedback were more successful
Students are different and have different skill sets

This is still an excellent question.

- Until there is enough evidence
- Ferris (2003) & Bitchener & Knoch (2009)

Does not mean that we can't use it to our advantage

- Guiding principles a way to implement the research in a meaningful and useful way despite lack of evidence

What we have seen is that some form of error corrective feedback works to some capacity

- Must continuously explore our options and consider our students when doing so

To correct or not to correct?

Special Thanks

- ▶ Sheryl Slocum
- ▶ WITESOL committee
- ▶ University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee
- ▶ Julie Lachat

Questions?

Works Cited

- Bitchener, John & Ute Knoch. "The relative effectiveness of different types of direct written corrective feedback." *System: An International Journal of Educational Technology and Applied Linguistics*, vol. 37, 2009, pp. 322-329.
- Ferris, Dana. *Response to Student Writing: Implications for Second Language Students*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003.
- Ferris, D. R. *Teaching L2 Composition*. [VitalSource].
Retrieved from <https://bookshelf.vitalsource.com/#/books/9781136696640/>
- Kepner, Christine Goring. "An Experiment in the Relationship of Types of Written Feedback to the Development of Second-Language Writing Skills." *Modern Language Journal*, vol. 75, no. 3, 1991, pp. 305-313.
- Larsen Freeman, D.E. "The Acquisition of Grammatical Morphemes by Adult ESL Students." *TESOL Quarterly*, vo. 9, No. 4, 1975, pp. 409-419.
- Lalande, John F. "Reducing Composition Errors: An Experiment." *The Modern Language Journal*, vol. 66, no. 2, 1982, pp. 140-149.
- Robb, Thomas, and Others. "Salience of Feedback on Error and Its Effect on EFL Writing Quality." *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1986, pp. 83-95.
- Truscott, John. "The Case Against Grammar Correction in L2 Writing Classes." *Language Learning*, vol. 46, no. 2, 1996, pp. 327-369.