Language Day Conference 2021
Formative Meaningful (Grammar) Feedback Strategies in English and Foreign Language Writing

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Feedback has been hotly debated over the past 25 years.

Extensive research reveals that feedback can have an important influence on students' learning and achievement (e.g. Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

However, there is a commonly experienced dilemma: the teaching staff provides feedback, but students do not engage with it (e.g. Henderson et al., 2019).

What can we do?

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Formative Meaningful (Grammar) Feedback
Strategies in English and Foreign Language Writing

Meaningful Grammar Feedback in English Writing Teacher Education
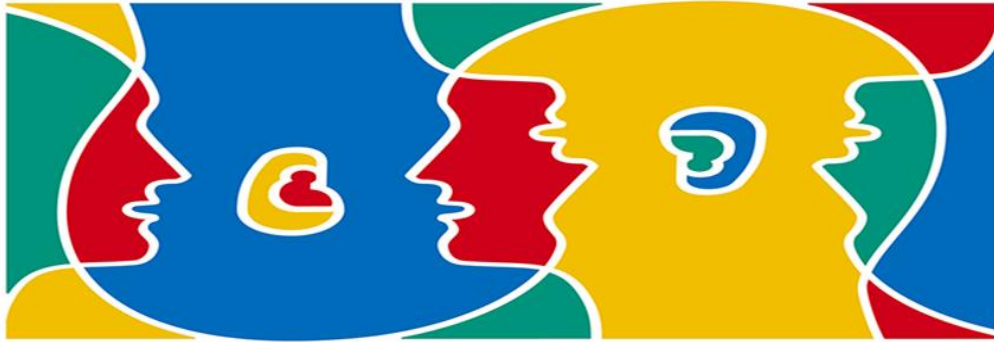
Researching Perspectives on Feedback-as-an-artefact, Feedback Reception, and Feedback Provision

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Terminology

Assessment

Positive feedback

Oral feedback

Feedback

Negative feedback, i.e. corrective feedback (CF) or error treatment (ET)

Written feedback

Rationale
Why should we conduct research on grammar feedback in writing education?

- Students' level of grammatical (pedagogical) content knowledge is low (e.g. Alderson & Hudson, 2013; Burgess et al., 2000; Harper & Rennie, 2009; Hislam & Cajkler, 2006; Kolln & Hancock, 2005).

- Students struggle with grammar in writing (e.g. Bonnet, 2004; Drew, 1998; Lehmann, 1999; Lund, 2014; Rødnes, Hellekjær & Vold, 2014).

- Students' feedback uptake might be too low (e.g. Mackey, Gass & McDonough, 2000; Yoshida, 2010).
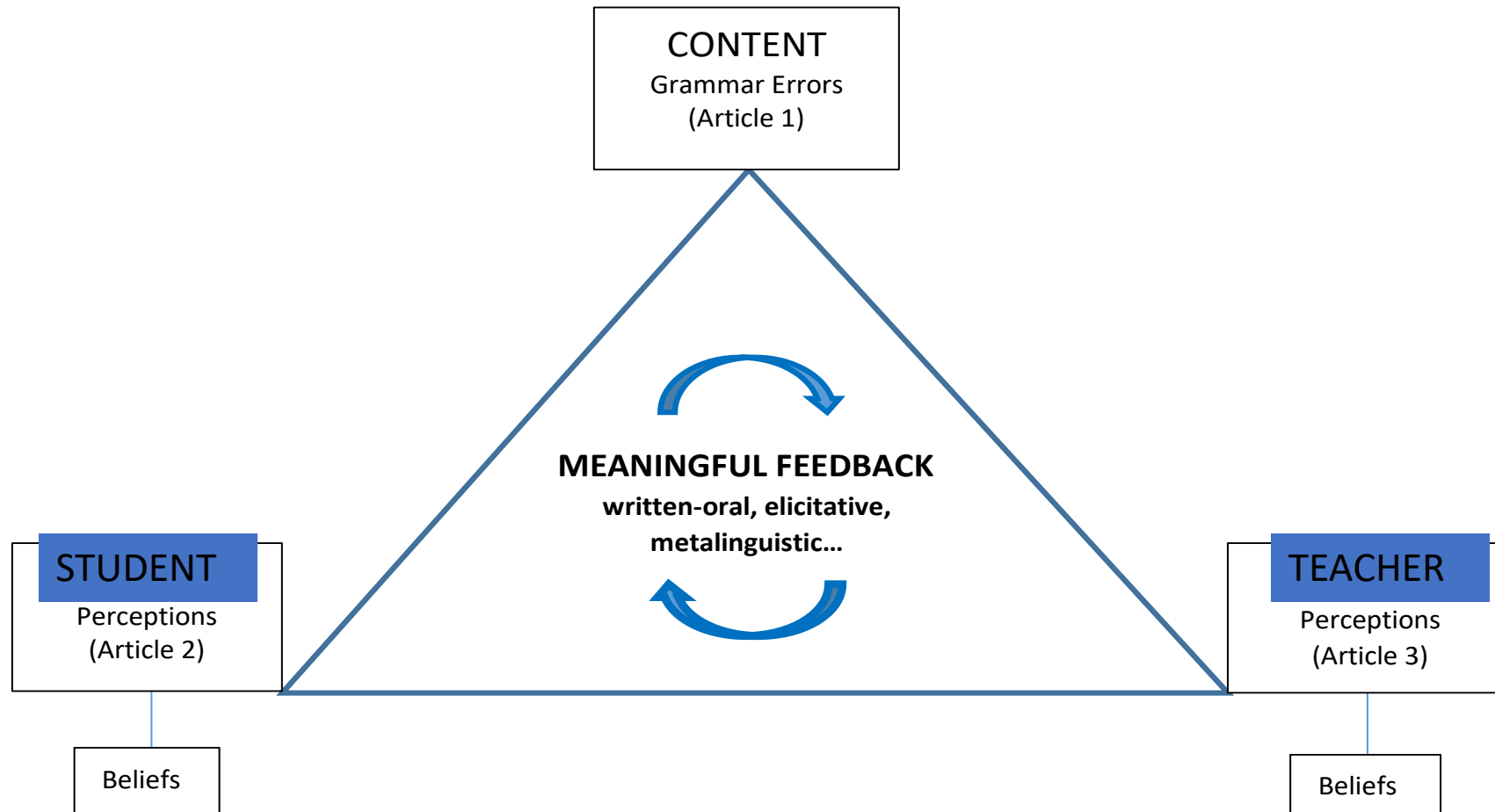
Figure 1. *Meaningful Feedback and the Didactic Triangel (adapted from Kansaanen, 1999)*

Methods
Data collections

Study/Article 1: Feedback-as-an-artefact perspective (Cabot & Kaldestad, 2019):

Single-case study, written and oral (conference) feedback on 18 essays

Study 2/Article 2: Student perspective (Cabot, 2019):

Interview study (2 pilot, 10 semi-structured and 4 member check interviews (i.e. stimulated recall interviews), written and oral (conference) feedback (essay 1), learner uptake (essay 2) and reflections on future writing used as prompts.

Study 3/Article 3: Teacher perspective (Cabot, 2020):

Interview study (1 pilot, 12 in-depth interviews, 4 member check interviews)

Common Unit of Analysis

- Ferris's (2011, 2014) best-practice recommendations, Ellis's (2009b) and Lyster and Ranta's (1997) taxonomies on feedback types and modes

- These recommendations and taxonomies can be used for all foreign languages, not only EFL/ESL.

Feedbacktyper		Beskrivelse	Grammatiske eksempler
Direkte feedback (Ellis, 2009)		Læreren gir rett svar til studenten.	Du må skrive *mice*, ikke *mouses*.
Indirekte feedback (Ellis, 2009)		Læreren gir ikke det rette svar, men bare påpeker feilen (f. eks., typografisk).	Vi sier ikke *mouses* på engelsk.
Metaspråklig feedback (Ellis, 2009)		Læreren bruker metaspråk for å beskrive feilene.	*Influence* er et substantiv. *Influential* er et adjektiv.
Stimulerende feedback (Elicitations) (Lyster & Ranta, 1997)	Utfyllinger (Elicit completion moves).	Strategisk pause for å gi studenten muligheten til å selv skyte inn rett svar.	*Carefully* er ikke et adjektiv. Men det er et _____?
	Spørsmål (Elicitative questions).	Stille et spørsmål for å få fram kunnskap.	Hvordan bøyer vi *present continuous* på English?
	Reformuleringer (Reformulation requests).	Oppfordre studenten til å reformulere for å øke forståeligheten.	Kan du si dette på en annen måte?

Tabell 1. Forskjellige typer av grammatikkfeedback (Cabot & Kaldestad, 2019, s. 6-7)

Source: Cabot, 2020, p. 123.

Elicitative versus Non-Elicitative Feedback

Elicitative	Reformulation requests	Asking the student to reformulate to improve comprehensibility (e.g. Lyster & Ranta, 1997).	Can you say this another way?
	Elicitative questions	Asking a question to elicit knowledge (e.g. Lyster & Ranta, 1997).	How do we form the present continuous in English?
	Elicit completion moves	Strategic pausing to allow students to 'fill in the blank' (e.g. Lyster & Ranta, 1997).	No, not that. It's a…?

In line with Eckstein's (2013) study, elicitative CF might be more beneficial for highly proficient language users. However, students with lower proficiency levels need less elicitative CF, which implies more explicit CF.

EFL Lecturers' Self-reported Frequencies of Feedback Types Based on Ferris's (2014) Recommendations

	Global feedback	Focused feedback	Oral feedback	Indirect feedback	Metalinguistic feedback	Elicitative feedback
High use	1	4	2	8	8	2
Medium use	5	2	6	4	4	2
Low use	6	6	4	0	0	8

(Cabot, 2020)

Note. The interviewees' self-perceived estimates were based on dichotomies. For example, high use of global feedback indicates low use of local feedback and vice versa. Medium use indicates that the informant reported providing approximately equal amounts of both feedback types.

Table 2
Student Teachers' Characteristics of Preferred Feedback

Student (n=10	Cognitive Push	Complementarity	Iterativity	Real-world Writing	Understand-ability
Brad	5	2	4	0	4
Dennis	0	3	1	2	2
Eva	3	4	3	3	3
Faith	3	4	2	3	3
Grace	5	2	4	4	5
John	5	3	0	2	5
Pauline	5	2	2	2	7
Roger	4	3	2	2	6
Ruth	1	3	3	2	3
Tom	2	3	5	0	4
X̄	2.9	2.9	2.6	2	4.2

Note. The numbers relate to coding occurrences in NVivo.

Source: Cabot, M. (2019). Unpacking meaningful grammar feedback: An analysis of EFL students' feedback preferences and learning moments. *Journal of Linguistics and Language Teaching, 10*(2), 133–155.

Use of Elicitations
Cognitive Pushes in OCF

The oral feedback forced me somehow to think when the instructor raised his voice to repeat the wrong relative pronoun '*who' in the sentence 'he doesn't really regret it because he needs it more than *who he stole from'. I guessed 'whom', which was right. I could then discuss with him the difference between these two relative pronouns.

Faith

(Cabot, 2019)

Feedback on Global versus Local Issues

Feedback strategy	Description	Examples
Global	Correcting grammar above the sentence level (e. g. Ferris, 2011).	You change tense! You must stick to either the present or the past tense.
Local	Correcting grammar under the sentence level (e.g. Ferris, 2011).	• Missing apostrophes (e.g. "the *sister behaviour" instead of "the sister's behaviour") • Concord errors (e.g. "Constantia *develop" instead of "Constantia develops")

Research appears to agree on the benefits of global CF and questions the overuse of local CF (e.g. Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Montgomery & Baker, 2007). More-proficient language users seem to value global CF more than less-proficient users (e.g. Eckstein, 2013).

Focused versus Unfocused Feedback

Focused	Correcting one to two error categories, mostly in end and marginal comments (e.g. Ferris, 2014).	'concord' 'run-on sentence'
Mid-focused	Correcting three to five error categories, mostly in end and marginal comments (e.g. Liu & Brown, 2015; Pashazadeh).	'concord' 'run-on sentence' 'tense shift'
Unfocused	Correcting more than five error categories, mostly in marginal and in-text comments (e.g. Ellis, 2009b).	'concord' 'run-on sentence' 'tense shift' 'incomplete sentence' 'word classes' 'apostrophes'

Generally, focused or mid-focused feedback is preferable, according to best-practice recommendations (e.g. Ferris, 2014). However, didactic reasons can legitimise the use of unfocused CF when students have few feedback-receiving opportunities (Cabot 2020).

Perceptions of Learning Moments
Sustainability with focused CF

Roger: In the second essay, I tried to avoid these incomplete sentences. I tried to make these sentences more complete, for example, by checking whether they had a subject and a verbal. I think that the focused end comments have helped me to reduce the numbers of mistakes in the second essay. And it will help me in the future. It is like a tool kit.

(Cabot, 2019)

Perceptions of Learning Moments
Sustainability with unfocused CF

Interviewer: But do you see any advantage of providing grammar feedback when we teachers comment on a text?

Ruth: Yes, undoubtedly. Especially when we went mistake by mistake through all comments during the writing conference. This was very useful. I think this was one of the reasons for having almost no mistakes in the second essay. This is what we will have to do as teachers. We will have to be able to provide good explanations on every single error, even spontaneously. He trained us very well in providing good feedback comments to future students.

(Cabot, 2019)

Direct versus Indirect Feedback

Direct	The lecturer provides the student with the correct form (e.g. Ellis, 2009b).	You have to write "mice", not "mouses".
Indirect	The lecturer provides no correction but points at or indicates (e.g. typographically) the error.	We do not say "mouses" in English.

Ferris (2014) recommends indirect feedback. However, the use of direct WCF aligns with Van Beuningen et al.'s (2012, 2008) and Bitchener and Knoch's (2010) recommendations. Their research indicates that direct CF is a better option because it has a significant long-term effect and is more effective for grammar items.

Characteristics of Preferred Feedback

Direct feedback of OCF compensating for indirect feedback in WCF

Interviewer: Was there anything that you did not understand in the written but understood first after the oral feedback?

Eva: There were these double-waved underlinings, for example, under the word 'becoming' here in the sentence, 'Malachy's storytelling inspired Frank to write stories himself, and to *becoming an author'.

 Indirect feedback is not a good choice here in my opinion. In this case, it was absolutely essential for me to have oral conferencing because the teacher provided the correct form and explained in more details why it was not possible to use the –ing form in this sentence. (Cabot & Kaldestad, 2019)

Metalinguistic Feedback
(e.g. Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen, 2007; Shintani & Ellis, 2013)

Metalinguistic Feedback	Feedback contains metalanguage regarding errors (e.g. Ellis, 2009b).	"Influence" is a noun. "Influential" is an adjective.

Example from a teacher-student writing conference

Run-on sentences must be avoided. This sentence *here can stand on its own. It is a fully acceptable* main sentence *with a* subject *and a* finite verb*. You have to use a* full stop *after the sentence, and you cannot 'run on' like in oral speech. You cannot use a* comma *here. Or you opt for a* conjunction*, such as 'because'.*

Source: Cabot & Kaldestad, 2019, p. 11

Perceptions of Learning Moments
Concreteness

Faith

I was very embarrassed when I discovered that I wrote 'i' with small letters until now, at university college. I read in the margin, 'Remember to write "I" with a capital letter'. Why on earth did nobody tell me that before? Finally, I think I wrote 'I' correctly in the second essay. It is very important that feedback is concrete and that we do not only underline mistakes.

(Cabot, 2019)

Marking Codes (e.g. Different Colours, Abbreviations)

- Marking codes may trigger more focused (e.g. metalinguistic) end comments and make it easier for instructors to distinguish accidental mistakes from systemic errors (Cabot, 2020).

- Such correction codes (Hyland, 2019; Jarausch & Tufts 1988; Norrish 1983; Rivers & Temperley, 1978) may encourage students to hunt for and identify problems.

However,

- error codes seem to help little to achieve greater accuracy in student texts over time (Ellis 2009).

- teachers might be well advised to be careful and avoid vague terms such as 'incomplete sentence', which could be replaced by elicitative questions such as 'Where is your verb?'.

Names	Code 1 Essay 1→Essay 2	Code 2 Essay 1→Essay 2	Code 3 Essay 1→Essay 2
Brad	Word classes 4→0	Incomplete sentences 1→2	Unclear sentences 1→1
Dennis	Tense shift problems 2→3	Unclear sentences 5→6	Concord errors 4→3
John	Run-on sentences 2→3	Unclear sentences 4→5	Concord errors 3→4
Roger	Run-on sentences 1→0	Incomplete sentences 2→0	Concord errors 3→0
Tom	Incomplete sentences 7→1	Unclear sentences 2→0	Word classes 2→0
Eva	Run-on sentences 5→1	Incomplete sentences 2→1	Word classes 1→1
Faith	Run-on sentences 3→4	Incomplete sentences 4→0	Concord errors 6→0
Grace	Incomplete sentences 7→3	Unclear sentences 4→3	Run-on sentences 1→0
Pauline	Incomplete sentences 1→0	Unclear sentences 2→1	Concord errors 1→0
Ruth	Concord errors 5→5	Prepositions 4→0	Apostrophes 2→0

Table 4 *Learner Uptake Between Essay 1 and 2*

■ Negative uptake; ■ No uptake; ■ Positive uptake

Source:Cabot, M. (2019). Unpacking meaningful grammar feedback: An analysis of EFL students' feedback preferences and learning moments. *Journal of Linguistics and Language Teaching, 10*(2), 133–155.

Perceptions of Learning Moments
Afforded by awareness

Interviewer: Do you actually remember that you checked your text on incomplete sentences before submitting?

Grace: Yes, indeed. I actually took away several sentences, because I now finally saw the errors. The interesting fact is this awareness while writing, the fact that you pay more attention to it.

Interviewer: How would you describe this moment when you revised your text and actually used the feedback?

Grace: I finally understood what an incomplete sentence is. It was like shouting 'Eureka, finally I understand it'. My learning somehow jumped …

(Cabot, 2019)

Oral versus Written Feedback

Feedback strategy	Description	Examples
Oral	The lecturer provides oral feedback during writing conferences, i.e. individual teacher-student conferences (e. g. Ferris, 2014).	What is your subject? Is it in the plural or singular?
Written	The lecturer provides either computer-typed or hand-written corrective feedback in end and/or marginal and/or in-text comments (e. g. Ellis, 2009b).	This is a very good essay. As to the language, I have a few comments: - Avoid incomplete sentences - Avoid heavy/unclear sentences - Be aware of concord

Oral conferencing must be used extensively and consistently (Lee, 2013). Such writing conferences can be conducted digitally (e.g. on Skype or Zoom) and do not need to be time-consuming. Bitchener et al.'s (2005) conferences lasted only five minutes. Some teachers basically dislike and avoid teacher-student conferences because they believe that these increase student anxiety (e.g. Yeh, 2016), although Ferris (2014) indicates that many respondents express great enthusiasm for writing conferences.

Cabot & Kaldestad, 2019, p. 12

Feedback Types	Indirect	Direct	Metalin-guistic	Elici-tations
WCF	44% (median)	42.5% (median)	12% (median)	2.5% (median)
OCF	0% (median)	53.5% (median)	41.5 (median)	4.5%

⬛ = lower frequency, ⬛ = higher frequency WCF and OCF compared

Figure 2. The Single-Case Study's Comparison of Feedback Types in Written vs Oral Modes

Swain's Output Hypothesis
Complementarity between WCF and subsequent OCF

- Interviewer: Is there something that you did not understand in the written feedback but that became much more understandable in the conversation you had with the instructor?

- Grace: Yes, for example, the feedback 'incomplete sentence'. You see that the sentence is completely wrong when we talked together. And I get the opportunity to reformulate the sentences and to check my suggested corrections with the teacher. We talked a lot about 'incomplete sentences' and 'missing verbals'. I understand now that this is very common in oral but not in written speech.

Noticing-the-gap function

Testing/hypothesis

Metalinguistic phase

(Cabot, 2019)

Written Corrective Feedback: an Example

DCF *the*

The book is also about Coming of age. We follow Frank from his early years till he is 19

and finally on his way to America. Frank is really confused about the fact that the church

wants them to be saints and die for their beliefs. But their father wants them to die for

MCF ICF ICF ICF MCF

this sounds unclear to me

Ireland. He want's to know who wants them to stay alive, and live life to its fullest? *why question mark*

MCF

run-on sentences

The title: *Angela's Ashes:* First of all ashes is something dead and lifeless, nothing can

ICF

ICF ICF ECF

grown from ashes, ashes is what is left after something has burnt up and is gone. Ashes are *who/which is vacant*

ICF

mentioned a few times; when Angela looks into the fireplace all vacant and hopeless, and

ICF MCF

also her cigarette which she smokes when she is stressed and don't know what to do. *concord*

DCF = Direct corrective feedback
ICF = Indirect corrective feedback
MCF = Metalinguistic corrective feedback
ECF = Elicitative corrective feedback

Reasons for and Reasons Against Using the Different Feedback Types and Modes?

(CF=Corrective Feedback)

	Oral CF	Focused CF	Global CF	Indirect CF	Metalinguistic CF	Elicitative CF
Reasons for						
Reasons against						

	Global CF	Focused CF	Oral CF	Indirect CF	Meta-linguistic CF	Elicitative CF
Reasons for	Tom: 'It helps students think more about coherence, cohesion.'	Dennis: 'Focused feedback is more learner friendly.'	Meg: 'Their facial expressions reveal whether they understood the feedback.'	Ruth: 'It stimulates students to use their grammar books and dictio-naries.'	Grace: 'It gives them an opportunity to see the connection between declarative and pro-cedural know-ledge.'	Pauline: 'They learn more when we ask, "Where is your subject", instead of writing "concord" in the margin.'
Reasons against	Viviane: 'They want us to point at all errors, They want to be able to write an error-free text.'	Eva: 'They want unfocused feedback when they have few opportu-nities to receive feedback.'	Faith: 'It is too time-consuming and often increases student anxiety.'	Brad: 'They won't be able to find the correct answers, for example the correct word order.'	Nancy: 'I try to avoid difficult terms such as "ante-cedent". Meta-language is often too difficult and does not really help them.'	Ken: 'Questions can be linked to "testing the students".'

Source: Cabot, 2020

Table 3. Individual reasons for and against six CF strategies

Research Review (Cabot, 2021)

Combining written/oral feedback sequences has a significant effect on student writing (e.g. Bitchener et al., 2005).

Research agrees on the benefits of

elicitation-based,

global and

metalinguistic feedback

(e.g. Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Shintani & Ellis, 2013).

EIGHT "Best Practices" Suggestions from Response Literature (Ferris, 2014)

1. Teacher feedback (whether written or oral) should focus on a range of issues, including content, organization, language, mechanics, and style, and the focus of response should depend upon individual students' needs at that point in time.	Adapted feedback
2. Feedback should be provided on multiple drafts of student papers, not only final graded drafts.	Formative feedback
3. Students should receive feedback from multiple sources (e.g., instructor and peers) so that they can benefit from reactions from different readers.	Multiple source feedback
4. One-to-one writing conferences may be more effective than written teacher commentary.	Oral feedback
5. Teachers should give clear and text-specific feedback that includes both encouragement and constructive criticism and that avoids appropriation (taking over) the student's text. Where possible, questions are preferable to imperatives, as they are less directive and promote student autonomy.	Elicitative feedback

EIGHT "Best Practices" Suggestions from Response Literature (Ferris, 2014)

6. If feedback on errors is provided, indirect error feedback (in which the error is indicated but not corrected) is more beneficial to long-term student development than direct correction (in which the teacher or peer provides the correct form to the writer).
7. For peer response activities to be successful, the teacher should (a) model the process for students before beginning (i.e., provide training); (b) structure peer response tasks carefully; (c) form peer review groups thoughtfully; and (d) include accountability/reflection mechanisms so that students take the process seriously.
8. To alleviate problems that some students might have with teacher-student writing conferences, teachers should (a) discuss goals and format of conferences with students ahead of time; (b) suggest that the student take notes or record the conference for later review; (c) consider holding conferences with students in pairs or small groups to minimize discomfort any students might feel with one-to-one meetings with the instructor and to maximize instructor time (particularly with small groups of students struggling with similar writing issues).
Sources: Ferris, 2002, 2003; Ferris & xxxx, 2005; Goldstein, 2005; Hairston, 1986; Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Lee, 2008, 2009b; Liu & Hansen, 2002; see also Straub, 2006; Straub & Lunsford, 1995.

Indirect feedback

Well thought-out peer feedback guidelines

Well thought-out oral feedback guidelines

Meaningful Feedback = Fine-Tuning Feedback? (Reference to Language Register)

Interviewer: Is there something that you did not understand in the written feedback, but that became much more understandable in the conversation you had with the instructor?

Grace: Yes, for example the feedback 'incomplete sentence'. You see that the sentence is completely wrong when we talked together. And I get the opportunity to reformulate the sentences and to check my suggested corrections with the teacher. We talked a lot about 'incomplete sentences' and 'missing verbals'. I understand now that this is very common in oral, but not in written speech.

'A process whereby the provider of corrective feedback tunes in to the true causal factors of an error and successfully brings the learner's attention to the learning problem' (Han 2001, 584)

At least possible reasons

(Cabot, 2019)

Meaningful Feedback = Fine-Tuning Feedback?
(Reference to Low-Inflectional languages)

Here, the teacher underlined my sentence 'Everybody have'. We have talked a lot about concord problems and the fact that we have to be even more careful in English because Norwegian does not have many verb endings. It is easy for my foreign boyfriend to learn *jeg har, du har, han har...* (...) I understood at once what was wrong in this sentence. When you can easily guess the correction, indirect feedback might be a good choice. It gives you the opportunity to correct it yourself and to reflect about it. (..)

Ruth

(Cabot, 2019)

At least possible reasons…

'A process whereby the provider of corrective feedback tunes in to the true causal factors of an error and successfully brings the learner's attention to the learning problem'
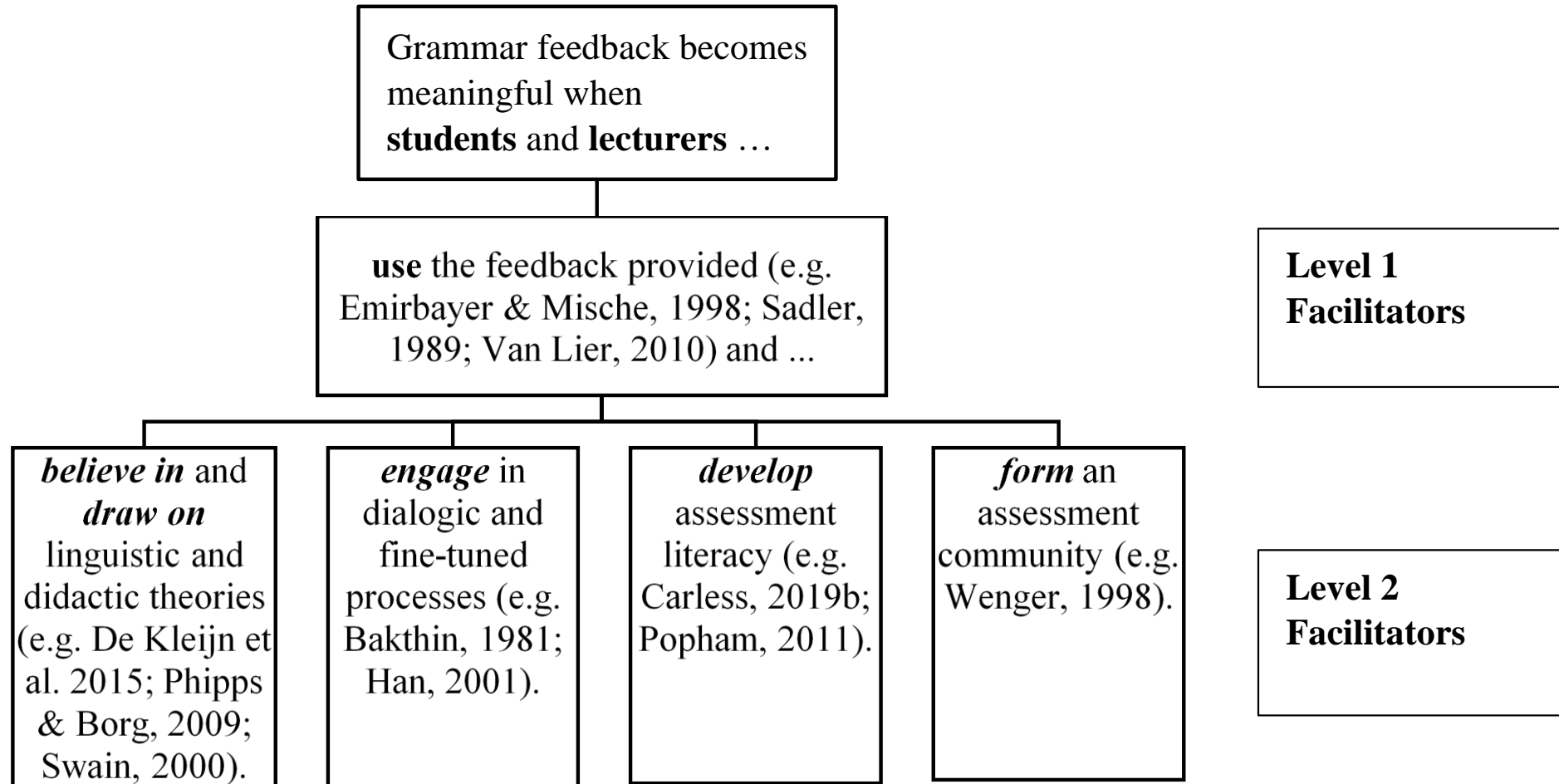
Less Meaningful Feedback?

Table 7

Agreements and Disagreements of the Studies' Findings in Relation to Feedback Modes and Types

Feedback modes and types	Study 1 (Cabot & Kaldestad, 2019) **Grammar-feedback-as-an-artefact perspective**	Study 2 (Cabot, 2019) **Grammar-feedback-receiver perspective**	Study 3 (Cabot, in press) **Grammar-feedback-provider perspective**
Oral vs. written	Complementarity (extrinsic)	Students appreciate oral CF	Lecturers appreciate written CF
Focused vs. unfocused	Complementarity (extrinsic and intrinsic)	Students appreciate unfocused CF	Lecturers appreciate unfocused CF
Direct vs. indirect	WCF: More indirect than direct CF OCF: Almost no indirect CF	Students appreciate direct CF	Lecturers appreciate indirect CF
Metalinguistic vs. non-metalinguistic	OCF: 41.55% metalinguistic CF WCF: 12% metalinguistic CF	Students appreciate metalinguistic CF	Lecturers appreciate metalinguistic CF
Elicitative vs. non-elicitative	WCF: 2.5% elicitations OCF: 4.5% elicitations	Students appreciate elicitations	Lecturers appreciate non-elicitative feedback
Global vs. local	Predominance of local CF[1]	Students appreciate local CF[2]	Lecturers appreciate local CF

Note. ▨ = *conflicting views;* ▧ = *concurrent views*

Figure 2. *Facilitators of Meaningful Grammar Feedback in EFL Teacher Education*

Grammar feedback becomes meaningful when **students** and **lecturers** …		

use the feedback provided (e.g. Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Sadler, 1989; Van Lier, 2010) and …

Level 1 Facilitators

| *believe in* and *draw on* linguistic and didactic theories (e.g. De Kleijn et al. 2015; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Swain, 2000). | *engage* in dialogic and fine-tuned processes (e.g. Bakthin, 1981; Han, 2001). | *develop* assessment literacy (e.g. Carless, 2019b; Popham, 2011). | *form* an assessment community (e.g. Wenger, 1998). |

Level 2 Facilitators

Source: Cabot, 2021, p. 57

A key to unlocking the potential of meaningful feedback:
Meaningful feedback = dialogical feedback?

Focused CF

Oral CF

Global CF

Direct CF

Metalinguistic CF

Elicitative CF

Unfocused CF

Written CF

Local CF

Indirect CF

Non-metalinguistic CF

Non-elicitative CF

Varied feedback?
Feedback adaptivity?
(De Kleijn et al., 2015)

Concluding Remarks

L'erreur agite; la vérité repose.

==(The error stirs; the truth stands still.)==

Joseph Joubert

Nul doute: l'erreur est la règle: la vérité est l'accident de l'erreur.

==(No doubt: error is the rule: truth is the accident of error.)==

Georges Duhamel

Merci pour votre attention!

Thank you for your attention!

Vielen Dank für Ihre Aufmerksamkeit!

Благодарю за ваше внимание

Vi ringrazio per l'attenzione!

Main References

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