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## LANGUAGING AND WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN L2 WRITING

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### Abstract:

The aim of this article is to introduce the application of languaging as the mediational tool to enhance the written corrective feedback's effectiveness in L2 writing. Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) shows L2 learners their grammatical and ungrammatical errors in writing. It is a form of feedback that is commonly applied pedagogically in writing class. With WCF, L2 learners can improve their ability to write without errors. Nevertheless, providing WCF alone without engaging L2 learners will make the L2 learners become passive learners. They merely copy their teachers' WCF where they can neither identify nor correct their errors. Therefore, it is recommended that L2 learners are given the opportunity to engage (to notice and understand) with the WCF. Languaging creates the opportunity for L2 learners to engage with the teachers' WCF. Languaging is a process where L2 learners make meaning, shape knowledge and experience through language. L2 learners use language (languaging) to solve difficult task like L2 writing. When L2 learners languaging the teachers' WCF, they should be able to improve their writing skills. This paper has pedagogical implications in L2 writing.

### Keywords:

Languaging, Written Corrective Feedback, L2 Learners, L2 Writing

## Introduction

Many L2 learners apply similar errors in their L2 writing despite getting Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) from their teachers. Their ineffective use of writing strategies and low English proficiency are among the cause for these writing errors (Hyland, 1998). It is found that Malaysian ESL learners' writings contain with many errors, especially grammatical errors. Although these L2 learners have been taught the English language from primary school level to secondary school level (some even take the English language proficiency courses in university), they still make errors in their L2 writings (Jalaluddin, Awal & Bakar, 2008). For example, Gedion et al. (2016) found that L2 syntactic errors were commonly occurred in Malaysian L2 learners' writings. They observed that verbs, sentence fragments and punctuations are among the errors that were frequently occurred in the L2 learners' writings. Wan Ibrahim and Othman (2021) also found that L2 learners have problems to putting ideas into a correct sentence. The L2 learners were found to translate the ideas from their first language (L1) to L2, without realizing the errors they made. In addition, L2 learners were also found to have problems with grammatical items like tenses and the difference between singular and plural nouns (Abdullah, 2021; Mehat & Ismail, 2021; Singh et al., 2017). Thus, to improve L2 learners' mastery in grammar, teachers provide corrective feedback in the classroom (Ene & Kosobucki, 2016; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Ferris & Robert, 2001, Gower et al., 1995). Nevertheless, L2 learners' writings still contain errors despite getting the WCF. In relation to this, this paper discusses the implementation of languaging in the provision and processing of teachers' WCF.

## Written Corrective Feedback in L2 Writing

Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) is a type of written feedback that teachers can apply in class as it is a common pedagogical practice in the L2 writing class (e.g., Swain, 1995; Schmidt, 1990). It has facilitative effects on L2 learners' writing performance (Razali & Jupri, 2014; Ferris, 2010) and L2 learners' learning ability (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). The role of WCF in writing has recently become a matter of interest among Second Language Acquisition (SLA) scholars (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012) because of its importance in the development of L2 acquisition theories and L2 pedagogy (Sheen & Ellis, 2010). Studies on WCF have shown that L2 learners' writing accuracy improved when they are given WCF to the errors found in their written works (e.g., Forrester, 2014; Kassim & Ng, 2014; Jerry et al., 2013). They are aware of the corrections because all WCF is necessarily explicit (Sheen, 2010). However, for the L2 learners to benefit the WCF provided by their teachers, they must attend to it, either rewriting the checked writing text based on the WCF provided (revision text) or studying the WCF or getting the corrected writing text of the checked writing text from their teachers without writing the revision text (Ellis, 2009).

## Written Corrective Feedback and Writing Accuracy

Since Truscott's (1996) opposition to the application of WCF on L2 learners' linguistic errors, the topic on the effects of WCF on L2 learners' writing accuracy continues to be a debatable issue among researchers of SLA and Second Language Writing (SLW). According to researchers like Bitchener and Knoch (2008), Chandler (2003), Ferris (2002), and Sheen (2007), to name a few, WCF enhances L2 learners' grammatical accuracy. For low proficiency L2 learners, writing an error-free essay is difficult, which is why they need teachers to help them to improve their writing performance. Hence, WCF is one of the essential pedagogical strategies in any English writing course (Farrokhi & Sattarpour, 2012). Evidence shows that WCF improves L2 learners' writing accuracy of the revision texts (e.g., Ashwell, 2000;

Fathman & Walley, 1990; Ferris, 1999, 2006). A study on the long-term effectiveness of WCF on the improvement of L2 learners' writing accuracy of new texts also shows the positive effects of WCF on the L2 learners' writing accuracy of new written texts (e.g., Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008, 2010; Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen, 2007; Sheen et al., 2009). The development of L2 learners' writing accuracy can be measured in multiple writings (revision and new written texts) because any changes in learners' L2 forms in the writings can be identified (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Sachs & Polio, 2007). Therefore, the application of WCF on the written texts of the L2 learners is essential because learners' writing accuracy can be measured based on the improvement or changes of the L2 forms in the multiple pieces of writing that is the revision texts and the new written text.

### **L2 Learners Understanding of Written Corrective Feedback**

Studies on how L2 learners process and understand the linguistic information delivered in WCF is still limited, although there are many studies were conducted on the role of WCF in L2 development (Kim, 2013). Some scholars have suggested that studying how L2 learners process and use WCF could provide insights into how and when L2 learners benefit from it (Kim, 2013; Storch, 2010; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010; van Beuningen, 2010). According to Long (1996), WCF prompts L2 learners to notice their linguistic problems. Noticing is defined as the intake of both meaning and grammatical forms of a language because L2 learners pay attention to the input where 'input' refers to input, which becomes part of the process learning (Batstone, 1996). For L2 learners to improve their L2 development, they need to notice the linguistic information in the input (Schmidt, 1995). In addition to noticing, Schmidt (1990, 2001, 2010) claims that learners need to become aware at the level of noticing and understanding for any prompts (e.g., CF) given to them can be internalized. Although L2 learners' awareness at the level of understanding is not necessary for L2 learning to occur, SLA researchers have studied the positive relationship between the level of awareness and L2 learning (e.g., Leow, 1997, 2001; Rosa & Leow, 2004). These studies have shown that L2 learners' awareness of the L2 linguistic features has increased the amount of intake by these learners, promoting the acquisition of L2 linguistic or grammatical features instantly or in subsequent input.

Nevertheless, the noticing of WCF does not guarantee learners' accurate interpretation of teachers' intent. This is because the studies on WCF often found that learners misinterpret teachers' WCF (e.g., Egi, 2007; Kim & Han, 2007; Mackey et al., 2000). For example, Han's (2002) study revealed that despite a teacher's consistent WCF, a L2 learner still repeated the same error persistently. This is due to the learner's misinterpretation of the teacher's WCF. The learner was also found to notice the WCF. Still, she misinterpreted the teacher's WCF because of her L1 interference. Han's study shows that a learner may notice WCF, but that does not necessarily mean that he or she understands the WCF provided by his or her teacher. Thus, the effectiveness of a teacher's WCF depends on learners' noticing and understanding of the WCF (Carrol, 2000). In conclusion, learners' understanding of teachers' WCF is essential for their L2 learning and development. As revealed in the studies (e.g., Egi, 2007; Kim & Han, 2007; Mackey et al., 2000; Han, 2002; Qi & Lapkin, 2001; Sachs & Polio, 2007; Ramalingam, 2013), learners' noticing and understanding of the teacher's CF affect the development of their L2 learning positively.

### **Languaging as the Mediational Tool in the Provision and Processing of WCF**

Despite WCF's positive effects on L2 learning (see Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Ferris, 2010; Razali & Jupri, 2014; Forrester, 2014; Jerry et al., 2013; Kassim & Ng, 2014), the opposing

researchers led by Truscott (1996) have adamantly rejected the application of WCF in class because it only promotes 'pseudo-learning' that results in superficial and shallow knowledge. Therefore, it is crucial to design or apply efficient methods or strategies to encourage L2 learners to have more significant engagement with the given WCF. In relation to this, Moradian et al. (2017) and Suzuki (2009a, 2009b, 2012) have proposed languaging application as the mediational tool in the provision and processing of WCF.

Swain and colleagues (see Knouzi et al., 2010; Swain, 2006a; Swain et al., 2009) has developed and applied the term 'languaging' as a framework for studying L2 development in instructional settings. Languaging refers to an activity or a 'process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language' (Swain, 2006a, p. 98). Swain (2006a, 2011) refers languaging as a source of L2 learning. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Mind (STM) has introduced this concept of languaging that emphasizes the importance of language in mediating the cognitive process (Swain & Watanabe, 2013). Languaging occurs when L2 learners speak or write in L2 setting to solve problems related to language use like tenses or word choice using language (Vygotsky, 1978, 1987). The concept of languaging has been studied by SLA scholars using terms like *metatalk* (Storch, 2008; Swain, 1998), *verbalization*, *collaborative dialogue* (Swain & Lapkin, 1998), and *private speech* (Ohta, 2000). It is a concept that is comprehensive covering not only oral (oral languaging) but also writing (written languaging) (Suzuki, 2012). There are two modalities of languaging studies in SLA, namely oral languaging and written languaging. Collaborative dialogue, immediate report, think-aloud protocol, stimulated recall activity and private speech are among the examples of oral languaging; whilst structured diaries, learning protocols, metalinguistic journals, portfolios, private writing are among the examples of written languaging.

Languaging is a crucial mediational tool for the provision and processing of WCF (Bitchener & Storch, 2016). With languaging, learners can explain and describe more of their thoughts in oral or writing. Nevertheless, they can express their ideas more explicitly and detailed than oral languaging because in written languaging, the reader is physically absent (Suzuki, 2012, p.1113), and this requires them to provide more and detailed information in writing for readers to understand later. In written languaging, learners' inner dialogue with the self (self-explanation) is manifested through writing (DiCamilla & Lantolf, 1994; Lee, 2008a; Roebuck, 2000). For example, learners write down their ideas or comments in diaries, journals, blogs, and notes as they listen to a lecture or read an article or a book. These ideas or comments are transformed into written data that can be reflected and deliberated critically (Suzuki, 2012).

Languaging also develops and transforms thoughts or ideas into an output that can be further reflected (Swain et al., 2009). Studies have shown that languaging has a facilitative role in L2 learning development. For instance, Swain and her fellow researchers (2009) studied the process and product of languaging in the learning of the grammatical concept of voice (active, passive, and middle) in French found that languaging plays a significant role in the internalization process of L2 (i.e., French) grammatical concept. Suzuki (2009a) found that written languaging of the students' drafts' corrective feedback affects the subsequent writing's accuracy, namely the lexis-based and grammar-based written languaging, significantly. Also, Knouzi et al.'s study (2010) on the languaging behavior of two university students of different proficiency levels (low and high proficiency levels), who learn French as an L2, discovered that high proficiency level student used languaging as a self-scaffolding tool to solve cognitive problems, mediate mental processes, and construct meaning in general. This finding suggests

that teachers should increase students' awareness of languaging as a useful tool to solve language problems, especially students of low proficiency. They also proposed that teachers should use languaging to access students' inner thoughts. This will allow them to intervene and assist students in dynamic assessment as the students language their inner thoughts in self-directed talk.

L2 learners' writing accuracy will improve if they are given WCF and are asked to produce written languaging (a type of languaging) for the given WCF (Suzuki, 2009a, 2009b, 2012; Moradian et al., 2017). This is because L2 learners are aware of the errors they made through WCF and reflect the errors through written languaging. Suzuki (2012) proposed that written languaging provides the platform for L2 learners to think and to reason thoroughly the errors they do in their writing and that written languaging influences learners to do the task efficiently and heightens their attention to achieve their self-regulatory abilities. In his study on written languaging's effect in response to indirect WCF on enhancing learners' grammatical accuracy over revision, tasks show that written languaging generated by WCF affects learners' grammatical accuracy significantly (Suzuki, 2009a, 2009b). He obtained a similar result when exploring written languaging's effectiveness in response to WCF on L2 Japanese students' writing accuracy over revision tasks (Suzuki, 2012). Later, Moradian et al. (2017) conducted a similar study on two groups of low-intermediate Iranian EFL students, and the study reveals that written languaging enhances the efficiency of WCF, resulting in significant effects on the students' grammatical accuracy.

Structured diaries, learning protocols, metalinguistic journals, portfolios, and private writing are among the examples of languaging (written languaging). For example, Simard (2004) and Simard et al. (2007) had studied the effects of metalinguistic reflection using journals on L2 learners' learning. They studied the use of journals as a tool to promote L2 learners' reflection on L2. Simard (2004) studied Grade Six ESL learners, where they were grouped into three different groups, namely the Enriched, Regular, and Control groups. The study's findings show that the Enriched Group students wrote comments about their L2's reflection in their journal more explicitly than the other two groups. However, all three groups were able to notice and report L2-related-matters in their journals. Simard et al. (2007) investigated the relationship between the metalinguistic reflection (shown in the journals) and the actual ESL learning (vocabulary and grammar test) of French-speaking elementary school students. In the study, the metalinguistic reflection was operationalized as the verbalized rules and generalizations about L2 learning that the students noted in a journal-writing task. The students' L2 learning development was measured based on the journal's grammatical accuracy and the receptive and productive vocabulary used in the journal-writing task. The students of this study were asked to keep a metalinguistic journal each week for three months. The study showed that the students' L2 learning had improved significantly.

Mackey (2006) used learning protocol to show evidence for noticing of corrective feedback. The learning protocol was also regarded as a data collection tool. Mackey (2006) had asked the participants of her study to fill out the learning protocol during class time, to elicit the participants' noticing of linguistic features during classroom interaction, and this was done by measuring the students' noticing of corrective feedback on their errors. Learning protocols and metalinguistic journals used in Mackey's (2006), Suzuki and Itagaki's (2007), Simard's (2004), and Simard et al.'s (2007) studies were applied as data collection tools for eliciting noticing or metalinguistic reflection. These data collection tools can also be considered a medium for L2

learning due to students' learning opportunities to reflect on the aspects of an L2.

Learners' portfolios are another form of languaging that many SLA researchers used for L2 teaching and assessment (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000). For instance, Antoneck et al. (1997) studied learners' portfolios' facilitative role in learning, where they discussed learners' portfolios' role as a mediating tool for thinking and development from the sociocultural psychology perspective. The study involved two student-teachers who took a teaching seminar course at the time of the study. These student-teachers were asked to keep portfolios over ten weeks. The portfolios were used to document how they developed themselves as educators, and not on how the student-teachers' linguistic features improved. The result indicated that their portfolios mediated the student-teachers' self-development.

DiCamilla and Lantolf (1994) investigated private writing (a form of languaging) of university-level novice English writers and compared it with the expert writers' drafts. They claimed that private writing's linguistic features showed the writers' mental functioning during the writing process. The private writing (serves as a tool) reflected the writers' inner dialogue as they attempt to regulate themselves in the writing tasks and find a solution to problems encountered during the writing process (DiCamilla & Lantolf, 1994; Vygotsky, 1986). Roebuck (2000) did a similar study but in the context of L2 learning. In the study, Roebuck (2000) investigated how private writing occurred when L2 learners were required to recall texts they had read. Lee (2008) also found that the learners applied private writing (the written manifestation of inner dialogue and gestures to mediate their cognitive activities), namely the exam preparation. He studied the behaviors of L2 learners studying for an examination in a solitary setting. All these findings illustrate the importance of providing the opportunity for L2 learners to language about the L2 linguistic knowledge to enhance their L2 learning and development.

### **Sociocultural Theory for Written Corrective Feedback and Languaging**

Sociocultural Theory (SCT) was originated from Vygotsky's research group project on a socio-historical approach to human thinking in the 1920s and 1930s (Negueruela-Azarola & Garcia, 2016). Driven by psychologists' interest at that time to develop clear and straightforward explanations on human behavior, Vygotsky has developed a resourceful theory that can be applied in the psychology of art, language, and thought, as well as in learning and development. However, the theory was only given attention in the late 1950s and early 1960s. From then onwards, the theory becomes more popular and has evolved significantly. The theory has been brought to the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) by researchers like Lantolf and Thorne (2006) and Swain (Swain). The theory has also been suggested by Ellis (2010) as the best theory to discuss WCF as a socio-cognitive phenomenon.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that SCT is a psychological theory explaining the development of human cognitive ability and higher mental function. SCT provide an alternative view on how cognitive development (L2 development) works. However, SCT is different from other psychological theories of cognitive development because it suggests that cognitive functions come first in social interaction between a novice (L2 learner) and an expert (L2 teacher), and later, they are transformed or internalized into a specific resource for L2 learners to use in future (Bitchener & Storch, 2016).

When discussing L2 development, SCT focuses on the form of assistance that experts offer to novices during an interaction. From the perspective of SCT, learners' L2 development occurs

because they can collaborate or interact with speakers of L2 or target language (TL), who are experts in the community or more knowledgeable than they are (teachers or adults or advanced learners). Also, the theory highlights the importance of mediational tools in interaction (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). The mediational tools can be in physical form like a computer or symbolic form like language. WCF is considered a form of assistance in SCT (Bitchener & Storch, 2016). It is essential to take into consideration on how written CF is delivered and how learners engage with the written CF provided when discussing written CF in L2 development.

According to SCT, a novice will get appropriate assistance from an expert if they collaborate. However, not all assistance forms are useful and supportive of L2 development (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). It is assumed that excessive assistance will result in L2 development inhibition (Bitchener & Storch, 2016). Thus, it is essential to provide an 'appropriate' amount of assistance that is just enough for learners to perform beyond their current capabilities. To do this, teachers need to know learners' actual level of development and their potential level. The difference between these two levels is known as a ZPD in SCT.

It is recommended that L2 teachers should applied the concept of co-constructing activity (WCF and languaging) to aid learners' development of new capabilities in the English language. There are three critical features for the ZPD to be effective: *graduated assistance*, *contingent*, and *dialogic* (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). *Graduated assistance* refers to the minimal level of assistance provided by teachers (the expert) to novices (learners) that is necessary for task completion. WCF can be considered as a *graduated assistance* that teachers provide to correct the errors found in the writing tasks. It is considered detrimental to development if a learner gets too much assistance or insufficient assistance during a task. During an activity (e.g., the writing tasks), *graduated assistance* (WCF) is negotiated during the interaction between teachers (as the experts) and learners (as the novice), to aid and to motivate learners to function at their potential level of ability. In other words, teachers should aid learners throughout the task performance. However, the aim is not merely helping the learner to complete the task, but also to encourage them to take greater responsibility for the task given. At this stage, learners are still *contingent* or dependent on teachers' assistance. Nevertheless, this assistance should eventually lead to self-regulated performance (the learners are no longer make the same errors in their writing tasks), where learners do not rely on teachers' support to complete a task.

In addition, L2 learners play an active role in their learning from the SCT point of view. When they respond to the assistance provided, teachers can assume that the learners can take advantage of the assistance offered, and they can identify learners' level of L2 development. This whole process is based on *dialogic* (Wells, 1999). According to Wells (2007), the use of 'sign' with self and others (semiotic mediation) governs all human language learning and reasoning. The *dialogic* process is continuously adjusted following learners' evolving needs. Teacher guidance and learner participation are both essential for practical assistance within the ZPD. This finely tuned dynamic assistance is called *scaffolding*. In language learning, *scaffolding* enables learners to perform tasks beyond their current capacity. The *scaffolding* will eventually 'disappear' when learners can internalize the co-constructed knowledge during the interaction with teachers, and when they are finally able to perform the task independently. Thus, this *scaffolding* can be referred to as a *collaborative dialogic activity*, which is co-constructed by teachers (experts) and learners (novices) (Bitchener & Storch, 2016). The *collaborative dialogic activity* in this study refers to the teachers' WCF and the

students' languaging of the WCF.

From the SCT perspective, no single or pre-determined type of WCF is best for learning. For WCF is to be effective, it needs to be aligned with the learners' ZPD by taking into consideration the learners' current and potential level of performance (WCF as the assistance). In addition, SCT perceives the ability to use newly gained knowledge in new contexts as a sign of development, but it is not the only sign of development. According to Bitchener & Storch (2016, p. 74), development refers to "the frequency and quality of the assistance required and learners' responsiveness to the assistance given". Learners' ability to self-correct and even question or reject the feedback given by others shows a progressive movement from other regulation to self-regulation (Villamil & Guerrero, 2006). This change can be observed in one pedagogical event like a teacher-student conference, or more realistically over time (e.g., successive drafts or different assignments). Development involves progress and some regression in the kind of assistance needed (Lantolf & Aljaafreh, 1995), which is why development is dynamic. Thus, a written CF study should be conducted over time to see this development.

SCT also highlights the role of mediation in language learning. Mediation refers to a "process which connects the social and the individual" (Swain et al., 2011, p. 51). It can be achieved via physical or via symbolic tools. Physical or material tools like computers, enable actions to take place, whereas symbolic tools like language, enable action, and shape the action. Language is considered the primary, though not the exclusive mediational tool or the symbolic tool (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), that mediates the interaction between humans. It enables novices and experts to communicate and organize their actions (Wells, 1999). Language facilitates the formation of ideas. It enables high-level cognitive processes, including self-regulation. Recent studies have demonstrated that language enables learners to engage in self-scaffolding, in verbal strategies (self-directed questions or self-explanation) to resolve language or text related problems (Knouzi et al., 2010; Negueruela, 2008; Suzuki, 2012; Swain et al., 2011; Watanabe, 2014). Swain (2006a) proposed the term 'languaging' to describe how language operates to mediate the thinking processes between individuals (collaborative talk) and within the individual (private speech). Languaging refers to a "process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language" (Swain, 2006a, p. 98). Languaging can be in the form of speaking or writing. It enables learners to think through solutions to problems they encounter during a task. It can also transform thoughts into mediational tools for further contemplation. With languaging, learners can better understand the complex phenomenon (Swain et al., 2011). A few studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between the quantity of languaging and language learning gains (e.g., Knouzi, et al., 2010; Suzuki, 2012; Swain, 2006a, 2011).

In summary, SCT justifies for L2 development as a form of assistance offered by experts (teachers) to novices (learners) in interaction, i.e., WCF. It also justifies the use of mediational tools, be it physical or symbolic tools, in the provision and processing of WCF, i.e., languaging. For this theory, language acts as the symbolic tool that mediates thinking that enables learners to be deliberate or languaging about the WCF provided and ultimately internalize, self-regulate and transform the new knowledge into a resource that can be used in the future. SCT also views L2 development with the provision of WCF as improved accuracy in the subsequent text and increases self-regulation when learners can correct their errors, although they are only provided with implicit WCF (the error was located, not identified, and explained). Thus, SCT would be



the most appropriate theoretical framework to explain the importance of languaging as a mediational tool in the provision and processing of WCF.

### Conclusion

Although the implementation of teachers' WCF receives mixed responses among the SLA and the SLW researchers, it is worth to consider its positive role in L2 writing, and the ways to enhance its effectiveness. As proposed in this paper, languaging is discussed as a mediational tool to enhance the effectiveness of teachers' WCF. It started with the explanation on the WCF's facilitative role in L2 writing, especially in L2 writing accuracy, and on L2 learners understanding of teachers' WCF. This is followed with the discussion on languaging as the mediational tool in the provision and processing of WCF. The researcher also provides a theory to support the implementation of languaging in the provision and processing of teacher's WCF, namely SCT. It is hoped that this proposition will be applied in the pedagogical teaching of writing development in Malaysia, especially on the application of the mediational tool (languaging) in the provision and processing of WCF and the complementary pedagogy strategy to WCF.

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