An Examination of ESL Teachers’ Treatment of Written Errors

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An examination of ESL teachers’
treatment of written errors

This thesis is submitted to Bond University in fulfilment of the requirement for the
degree of Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics by Research.

This thesis represents my own work and contains no material which has been previously
submitted for a degree or diploma at Bond University or any other institutions, except
where due acknowledgement is made.

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Abstract

While various studies have investigated the effectiveness of certain types of error treatment methods, there has been little linguistic research conducted to examine how actual language teachers have been dealing with L2 learners’ written errors. The current research was designed to investigate the types of written errors ESL teachers corrected and the types of error treatment methods they used to correct those errors in the context of Bond University on the Gold Coast. Moreover, it was intended to highlight the relationship between the literature and actual practice in terms of error treatment of written work.

In this study, sixty-six students’ written texts corrected by nine different teachers were collected and examined. The teachers’ treatment of the learner errors found in each sample were identified and classified according to their features. The findings from both quantitative and qualitative data on the patterns of error treatment were analysed, and following this, various comparisons were made.

The results of the study indicated that despite the current trend of language teaching, error treatment was frequently provided by the teachers in the ESL classrooms. Moreover, the teachers constantly corrected the deviations of local aspects of the language, which did not seriously influence the intelligibility.

In addition, the results of the study also demonstrated that the teachers used both explicit types and implicit types of correction methods in a hybrid manner, and they altered their mode of correction depending on the types of errors. They tended to provide explicit correction for wrong vocabulary and sentence construction errors whereas other surface features, such as grammatical and mechanical errors were generally highlighted with implicit correction, especially with correction codes.

The findings of this study suggest that increasing the use of less-time consuming error treatment methods for rule-governed lexical errors and educating learners to be able to carry out self-correction could reduce the teachers’ burden of written error treatment. Moreover, constant information exchange would allow the teachers to revise, refine and change their ways to deal with errors. Until clear effectiveness of certain patterns of error treatment is proven by further studies, these suggestions could be made in order to maximise the benefits of the teachers’ treatment of written errors.
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Abbreviations

ESL: English as a Second Language
SLA: Second Language Acquisition
L2: Second Language
EA: Error Analysis
ET: Error Treatment
LE: Learner Errors
BUELI: Bond University English Language Institute
GE: General English
AE: Academic English
EAP: English for Academic Purposes
CFC: Cambridge First Certificate preparation
AWS: Academic Writing Skills
WWPS: Academic Writing Workshop for Postgraduate Students
Pre-IM: Pre-intermediate
IM: Intermediate
Upper-IM: Upper-intermediate
AD: Advanced
EXC: Explicit Correction
IMC: Implicit Correction
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