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An Updated Typology of Written Corrective Feedback: Resolving Terminology Issues

Una tipología actualizada de realimentación correctiva escrita: Resolución de problemas de terminología

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ABSTRACT:

The extensive amount of literature on written corrective feedback has dispelled many doubts that question its effectiveness. However, despite this valid contribution, there is still controversy about pedagogical recommendations found in such literature, particularly, after conducting a systematic bibliographic review. The results reveal an overall lacks consistency, to the extent that a detailed classification based on both scope and type is not feasible. The objective of this article, thus, is to address previously gleaned issues by elucidating the two most problematic variables found in such literature in order propose an updated typology of written CF.

KEYWORDS: Second Language Teaching, Corrective Feedback Research, Terminology Problems, Typology Proposal.

RESUMEN:

La vasta literatura sobre la realimentación correctiva escrita ha logrado aclarar cualquier duda sobre la supuesta ineffectividad de la corrección de errores escritos. Sin embargo, a pesar de esta valiosa contribución, el escenario no queda claro cuando se trata de la aplicación de consejos pedagógicos que surgen de la investigación. Específicamente, a partir de un análisis sistemático previo, una mirada cercana a la literatura sobre la realimentación correctiva escrita revela que ésta carece de consistencia al punto que una clasificación detallada tanto por alcance como por tipo no es factible. Por esta razón, para abordar dichos problemas, el presente artículo tiene dos objetivos: dilucidar las dos variables más problemáticas en la literatura y proponer una tipología actualizada de la retroalimentación correctiva escrita.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Enseñanza de segunda lengua, Investigación en realimentación correctiva, Problemas de terminología, Propuesta de tipología.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are many hurdles inherent to contexts of teaching a second language (L2). Yet, the existing gap between research and practice is likely to pose a challenge to L2 teachers in their quest to help their students improve their writing skills. Still, what potential areas of agreement regarding L2 writing and feedback practices could there be between L2 practitioners and researchers? For one, they would probably agree that just as other components (e.g., syntactic complexity and lexical richness), accuracy—be it grammatical or non-grammatical—is important to appraise text quality (e.g., Hyland, 2003). In fact, for some L2 teachers and learners in certain contexts, the stigma borne from inaccurate texts (cf. Ferris, 2006) may become a serious matter that must be addressed.

It also seems reasonable to believe that L2 (composition) teachers and researchers would agree that errors stopped being equivalent to sins. Unlike early views (e.g., Brooks, 1964), today errors are construed as a rich source of information on L2 learners' developing interlanguage. Furthermore, few would argue that a useful pedagogical intervention in the L2 class is written corrective feedback (CF). Written CF has been defined

as “feedback on forms with a view to advancing the language learning of the writer and thus contributing to text quality” (Murphy & de Larios, 2010, p. viii). As such, it remains a ubiquitous practice (Ferris, 2010) that could be effective to edit texts (e.g., Truscott & Hsu, 2008), develop learners’ interlanguage (e.g., Bonilla, Van Steendam, Speelman & Buyse, 2018), and foster L2 acquisition processes (e.g., Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010).

Nevertheless, in the application of pedagogical advice emerging from written CF research, the scenario may be at odds. As Evans, James and Strong-Krause (2011) argue, “many practitioners who use WCF [i.e., written CF] continue to struggle with the inconsistencies in the research” (p. 230). In this respect, a systematic literature review in Bonilla (2020) revealed that the written CF research base falls so short of consistency that problems with key definitions made it impossible to attain any conclusion on the number of written CF studies by both scope and type. To illustrate, Bonilla identified 11 sources of variation which may both hinder comparability across studies and cloud L2 teachers’ and researcher’s understanding of the empirical evidence. Still, with 9 of those variables (e.g., feedback medium, feedback source, and feedback purpose), there was no impediment to quantify to what extent each one has been addressed to this day. However, the remaining sources of variation (i.e., feedback scope and feedback type) were impossible to classify due to terminology issues.

For this reason, the purpose of the article is twofold: to elucidate the two main problematic variables in the literature (Section 3) and to advance a typology of written CF (Section 4). The following research question guided the present literature analysis: What do the terminology issues regarding feedback scope and type consist of?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Search protocol

Because the present article extends previous work (cf. Bonilla, 2020), an effort was made to include the same publications to guarantee consistency in the analysis and reliability in the results. For this reason, the retrieval of information was carried out with a manual and online search through the combination of key words such as error, correction, written, writing, feedback, grammatical, grammar, and accuracy. The search yielded a total of 146 publications.

2.2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria included those studies that explored the feedback effect in the short and long-term and that used grammatical accuracy alone or in combination with other surface or textual-level issues as an outcome measure. Also, because the present analysis does not aim to discuss methodological shortcomings, studies that lacked a control group were not excluded from the analysis. On the other hand, publications of a descriptive nature, on peer feedback, or on oral CF were discarded. Against this background, 76 publications were eligible.

3. RESULTS

A critical analysis of the literature reveals that for feedback scope, the terminology inconsistencies lie in the selective/comprehensive dichotomy whereas in feedback type, the discrepancies occur in two main dichotomous distinctions: direct/indirect and explicit/implicit (see Figure 1). This section thoroughly reports what the issues consist of.

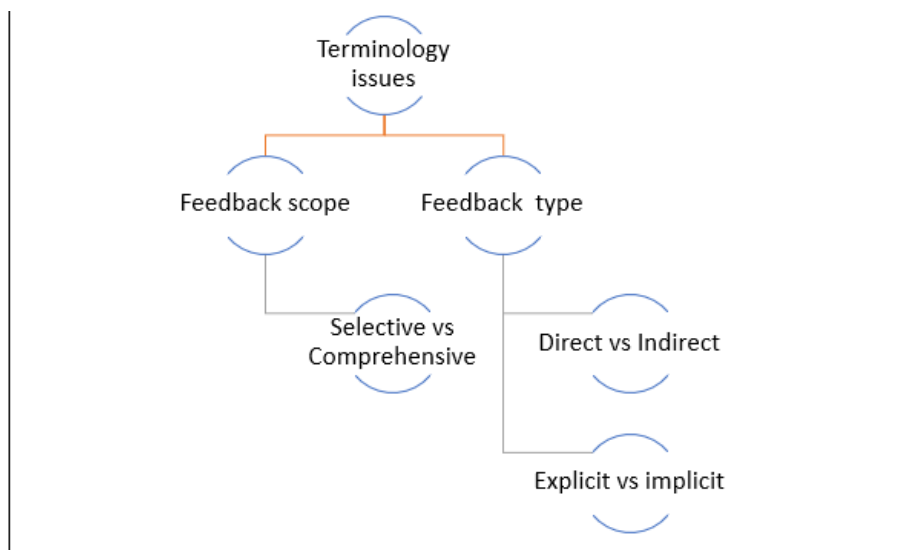


FIGURE 1.
Summary of inconsistencies by feedback scope and type
Source: Elaborated by author

3.1. Feedback scope

Feedback scope refers to the number of targeted features in the feedback. It has to do with “the number and type of errors that are addressed—either a comprehensive approach or a focus on a limited range of error categories” (Brown, 2012, p. 863). Hence, selective CF (also known as focused CF) has been typically referred to in the literature as the type of feedback that treats “a single or a limited number” of linguistic categories (Stefanou & Révész, 2015, p. 264), usually one or two. Conversely, comprehensive CF (also labeled as unfocused CF) has been then traditionally understood as feedback that corrects “all (or at least a range of) the errors” (Ellis, Sheen, Murakami & Takashima, 2008, p. 356). Nonetheless, drawing the line between a limited number and a range of features leaves much left to interpretation. To illustrate, if the differential effects between selective CF and comprehensive CF were to be compared, it would be reasonable to expect a baseline for a comparison that has a gap (in number of error categories) wide enough to do so. Interestingly, in two of the commonly cited studies that have addressed such a differential effect, learners in the focused group corrected one error type whereas in the unfocused one, learners corrected four (e.g., Ellis et al., 2008) or five (e.g., Sheen, Wright & Moldawa, 2009) error types, which understandably to this day some could still not consider unfocused enough for a comparison of that sort. In this respect, the researchers themselves, as was the case of Ellis et al. (2008), acknowledged that comparing the differential effect of focused and less focused CF was a better categorization than that of focused and unfocused CF. Recently, in a meta-analysis of written CF studies, Liu and Brown, (2015) shed some light on this issue by classifying studies into highly selective (1 error type), mid-selective (2-5 error types), and comprehensive CF (> 5 error types). Gleaned from the literature, below is a report of the alleged merits of each approach.

3.1.1 Merits of a High-Mid Selective Approach

The main arguments in favor of a (mid)selective approach are based on learners’ attentional capacity and processing ability (cf. Sheen et al., 2009). That is why drawing on studies on oral CF (e.g., Lyster, 2004), a number of researchers have (pre)selected a narrow number of linguistic features (e.g., Shintani & Ellis, 2013).

They have agreed that attention to a limited number of features is a more manageable load for learners to process (Sheen, 2007), is likely to afford greater noticing and understanding of the corrections (Shintani & Aubrey, 2016), provides a systematic way of hypothesis testing (Sheen et al., 2009), and “is considered preferable in restructuring learners’ knowledge as they receive correction on the same error” (Shintani & Aubrey, 2016, p. 301).

This evidence emerges from the growing body of literature that has looked into the error responsiveness of a narrow number of linguistic features, namely one (e.g., Bitchener, 2008), two (e.g., Ahmadi, Maftoon & Mehrdad, 2012), three (e.g., Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005), or five (e.g., Asassfeh, 2013). Other studies that include in their design a comparison between highly selective CF and mid selective CF have also contributed to the research base of selective CF (e.g., Farrokhi & Sattarpour, 2012). Ellis et al. (2008) and Sheen et al. (2009) have typically been included in discussions of studies that examine the differential effect of Selective CF and Comprehensive CF (e.g., Van Beuningen, De Jong & Kuiken, 2012), but if Liu and Brown’s (2015) classification are to be followed, such studies shed light on the differential effect of a highly selective to a mid-selective approach to errors instead.

3.1.2 Merits of a Comprehensive Approach

The literature on written CF has been more positive about selective CF than about comprehensive CF. After all, the evidence so far has repeatedly shown the language learning potential of written CF when learners’ attention is targeted to a few (pre)selected linguistic categories contrary to the evidence in favor of comprehensive CF, which is not so extensive from pretest-delayed posttest design studies. For this reason, although the need for comprehensive CF in certain contexts has been acknowledged (e.g., Ferris, 2010), its advantages have at times been regarded with skepticism. Like selective CF, the likely effects of comprehensive CF are thought to be influenced by learners’ attentional capacity and processing ability. As Bitchener (2012b) points out, it is reasonable to believe that comprehensive CF may not be as effective as selective CF based on models focusing on the role of attention on SLA (e.g., Robinson, 2005). Indeed, such a view can be seen in the way that comprehensive CF has been portrayed in the literature over the years. To illustrate, a broad approach to learners’ written errors “runs the risk of providing CF in a confusing, inconsistent and unsystematic way and overburdening learners” (Sheen et al., 2009, p. 567); it actually equals to swamping learners with corrections (Sheen et al., 2009). From this perspective, comprehensive CF cannot be conducive to L2 learning. As Ellis et al. (2008) put it, “[a] mass of corrections directed at a diverse set of linguistic phenomena ... is hardly likely to foster the noticing and cognizing that may be needed for CF to work for acquisition” (p. 368). In addition, the affective effect that comprehensive CF may have on L2 teachers and learners has not gone unnoticed. For example, part of Truscott’s (1996) case against grammatical corrections in general included criticism to comprehensive CF in particular. In this highly contested article (see Chandler, 2003; also, Ferris, 1999 for a rebuttal), the author favors selective CF because such practice would make “classes more pleasant (or at least less unpleasant) both for students, who would not have to confront so many criticisms, and for teachers, who would not be so overwhelmed with unpleasant work” (Truscott, 1996, p. 352). In fact, the author goes as far as to say that comprehensive CF is overburdening for teachers and distracting for learners. Later (cf. Truscott, 2001), he confirms his stance on comprehensive CF by referring to it as an “extremely unpleasant”, “time-consuming”, and “discouraging” “sea of red ink” that does not work (p. 93). Even so, not only does criticism of comprehensive CF come from studies that did not include such a feedback scope in their design (e.g., Sheen et al., 2009), but also research in general has shown that simultaneous attention to multiple errors may not hinder processes that are relevant for L2 acquisition or learners’ accuracy (e.g., Bonilla, Van Steendam & Buyse, 2017).

3.2 Feedback Type

Feedback type refers to the specific strategies used to address learners' written errors. In this respect, when attempting to classify such strategies, the task is close to impossible due to overlapping and clarity issues. These difficulties can be gleaned from the two main dichotomies present in the research base: direct and indirect CF as well as explicit and implicit (cf. Figure 1).

3.2.1 Direct or Indirect CF

In the literature, most agreement can be seen in the typical definition of direct CF and indirect CF. Direct CF consists of providing the correct target language forms (Stefanou & Rêvesz, 2015), whereas indirect CF is commonly understood as corrections that let learners diagnose and correct the errors themselves (Van Beuningen, 2010). However, problems arise when classifying feedback strategies into one or the other. As a result, the research base on written CF is inconsistent to the extent that the direct/indirect dichotomy includes feedback strategies that have been labeled as metalinguistic CF as well (i.e., codes and rules/explanation) (see Bitchener & Storch, 2016).

On the one hand, rules (or explanation) have been construed as a type of direct CF. In their definition of direct CF, Bitchener and Knoch (2008) explain that direct CF entails explicit provision of the correct target language form either above or near the linguistic error. However, they add that other forms of direct CF are also written (and oral metalinguistic) explanations: the former as grammar rules or examples at the bottom of the text with reference back to where the error is and the later as teacher-student conferencing either one on one or with a small group. In like manner, Frear and Chiu (2015) offer a distinction that also includes metalinguistic CF, yet their definition groups feedback strategies differently and does not include one-on-one-conferencing. Instead, Frear and Chiu (2015) indicate that there are two types of direct CF: the one that crosses out an error and provides the correct form or the one that provides a metalinguistic rule along with the provision of the correct target language form.

On the other hand, codes have at different points been considered a type of indirect CF. To illustrate, Bitchener (2008), and Bitchener and Knoch (2008) explain that indirect CF could be administered in four different ways: "underlining or circling the error; recording in the margin the number of errors in a given line; or using a code to show where the error has occurred and what type of error it is" (Bitchener, 2008, p. 105). Similarly, Guénette (2007) lists six types of indirect CF, which include errors coded, errors circled, errors underlined, errors underlined and coded, errors underlined plus a description of error, and errors counted in the margin but neither marked nor coded. Then, Bitchener and Ferris (2012) changed the definition of indirect CF in a way that neither codes nor rules could be construed as indirect CF. The authors wrote that indirect CF is "that which indicates an error has been made but it does not provide a correction or explicit meta-linguistic information" (p. 65). Conversely, to Guénette (2012), indirect CF could entail, among other things, "identifying the category of error with a code, or giving an explanation" (p. 118). The picture does not get any clearer as time passes by. Codes were considered a type of indirect CF prior to Bitchener and Ferris's (2012) definition (e.g., Sheen, 2010), and they remain as that to this day (e.g., Frear & Chiu, 2015).

Given the lack of agreement as to what exactly constitutes direct and indirect CF, the usefulness of such a distinction needs to be addressed specially when discussing the advantages of either feedback type. In other words, if the dichotomy is to be applied strictly, because direct CF is that which supplies the correct form (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012), direct corrections and reformulations are direct CF strategies. In addition, if indirect CF withholds the correct forms and allows learners to work out the corrections themselves (Ferris, Liu, Sinha & Senna, 2013), then metalinguistic codes, metalinguistic rules, underlining (circling), concordance files, marginal check marks, and models are indirect CF strategies. Thus far, the distinction

could be valid, but it is worthy of note that of all the available written CF strategies, some have received more empirical attention than others (cf. Bonilla, 2020). Therefore, the umbrella direct/indirect distinction could become problematic when conclusions about the advantages (or lack thereof) of either type include by default strategies whose effect still remain unclear. To illustrate, drawing on Lalande (1982), it has been recurrently stated that indirect CF affords opportunities for guided learning and problem solving (e.g., Ashwell, 2000). Interestingly, Lalande (1982) attributed such benefits specifically to “interpreting the codes, correcting their mistakes and then rewriting the entire essay in correct form” (p. 143) and informing the learners “of the location and nature of mistakes” (p. 147), not to indirect CF in its broadest sense. Strictly speaking, the author was referring to a strategy of a metalinguistic CF type because that is the only one that informs learners of the nature of their errors—either by codes or by rules (reminders or explanation) (see Ellis et.al. 2008). Thus, if conclusions are based on a particular feedback strategy (e.g., codes), is it safe to assign its merits to an entire feedback type (e.g., indirect) risking including strategies that have been under-researched (e.g., models or check marks) and may not necessarily share those attributions? Further, if written CF with codes has proven superior to direct corrections (e.g., Lalande, 1982), to avoid overgeneralizations and for the sake of clarity, it seems more reasonable to point to an advantage of metalinguistic CF over direct CF rather than to an advantage of indirect CF over direct CF.

3.2.2 *Explicit or Implicit CF*

The last dichotomy differentiates between explicit and implicit CF. Different researchers make reference to direct corrections being explicit (e.g., Bitchener et al., 2005). They are construed as such because they give learners the correct target language forms. Conversely, when CF strategies withhold the correct forms and learners are left to work the correction themselves, CF has been considered implicit (e.g., Ahmadi et al., 2012). Nevertheless, a question worth pondering upon comes to mind. When receiving written CF, is there ever a moment when learners are not aware that their attention is drawn to what is not acceptable in the target language? In other words, is there ever a moment when learners do not know that the feedback they get is in response to their L2 written errors? If so, the explicit/implicit distinction such as that of oral CF studies[1] (e.g., Nassaji, 2007) also applies to written CF. If not, such a categorization needs to be revisited—and even avoided in future written CF studies. To illustrate, in oral production learners can know that they are being corrected when teachers repeat the utterance and substitute the deviant structure with the correct one or when teachers have learners repeat the erroneous utterance and correct it (see Ellis, 2010). In fact, Sheen (2004) defines explicit oral CF as that which “provides learners with a correct form with a clear indication of what is being corrected” (p. 278). Unlike the previous examples, learners may not be aware that the information in teachers’ recasts, for instance, is meant to correct them, in which case the correction is implicit (see Gass & Mackey, 2006).

Nonetheless, in written CF the situation is different. As some researchers have pointed out (e.g., Frear & Chiu, 2015), written CF is always explicit. Arguably, whether student writers are given the correct target language form or they have to correct it themselves, they “will know immediately that whatever marks or words they see written on their text constitute corrections” (Ellis, 2010, p. 338), and this awareness of being corrected will take place regardless of whether they understand or interpret the feedback correctly. Along these lines, Polio (2012) explains that “something is explicit if either a rule is given or if the learner has been directed to pay attention to a specific form” (p. 376). This means that what were once labeled as implicit feedback types because learners were left to make the corrections themselves are better referred to as explicit irrespective of their kind. It is worth noting, though, that being aware that one is being corrected does not equate to engaging in the same cognitive effort when attending to the feedback. The depth of processing, a variable that is thought to mediate the feedback effect (Bitchener, 2008), varies among written CF strategies. It cannot be said, for instance, that processing written CF provided with either check marks in the margin

(e.g., Lee, 1997), underlining (e.g., Truscott & Hsu, 2008), codes above an error (e.g., Sampson, 2012), or an inserted hyperlink with corpus information (e.g., Gaskell & Cobb, 2004) puts the same strain on learners' cognitive and attentional capacity.

As a result, despite being explicit by nature, the extent to which the corrective information is salient in all feedback types differs, which is why researchers point at the degree of feedback explicitness as a variable to consider how effective written CF is (e.g., Santos, López-Serrano & Manchón, 2010). Polio (2012) even warns, “[t]his is not to say that SLA theory predicts that all forms of explicit correction would be equally effective, but ... they are considered together” (p. 376). As can be seen, when it comes to feedback type and their corresponding strategies, the state of the field is in much need of further clarity before consistent answers can be obtained.

4. DISCUSSION

Part of moving the field forward is finding ways to tackle the issues in key terminology and definitions that a critical analysis of two feedback variables has revealed so far. For example, not only is there an overlap of what exactly constitutes direct CF and indirect CF, but also an incongruity in the implicit/explicit distinction exists. A lack of consistency apropos of the labeling of metalinguistic CF with codes or rules (explanation) is also evident since they have been considered part of direct CF (e.g., Bitchener, 2008) and metalinguistic CF (e.g., Frear & Chiu, 2015), whereas codes have been regarded as indirect CF (e.g., Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010) and metalinguistic CF (e.g., Diab, 2015). In fact, when referring to metalinguistic codes, Bitchener and Knoch (2010) refer to an issue previously identified in the direct/indirect dichotomy. The authors warn against metalinguistic codes in the indirect CF category: “we consider the inclusion of coded CF in the indirect category to be problematic” (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010, p. 210). With this general backdrop in mind, a schematization of written CF types is called for (see Figure 2).

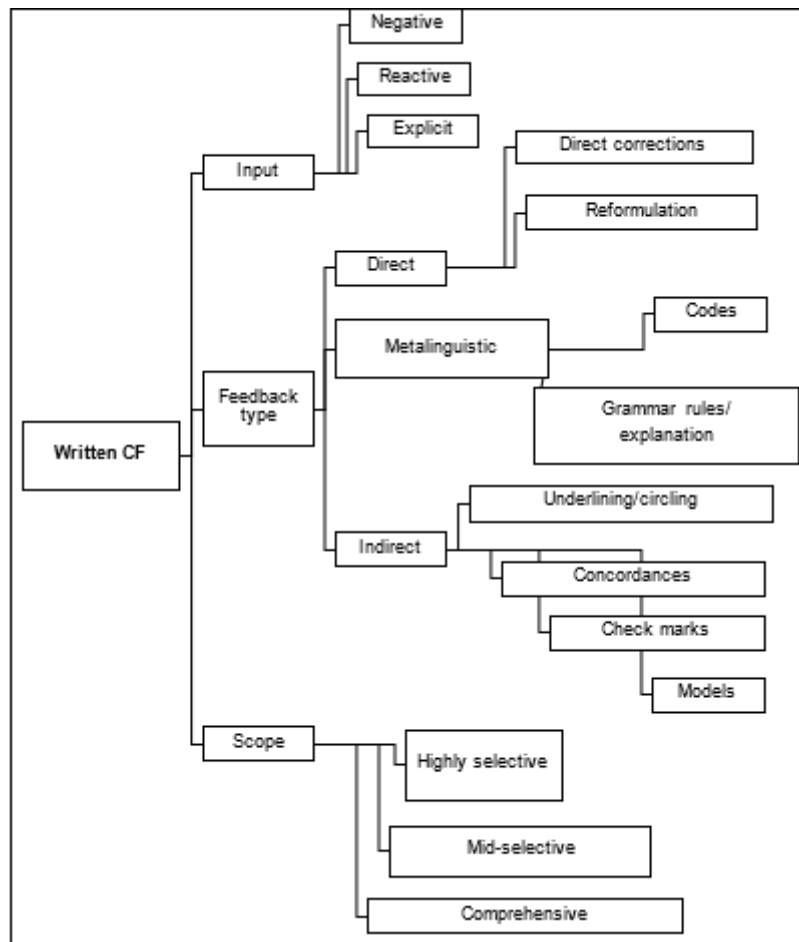


FIGURE 2.
Schematization of written CF

Source: Elaborated by researcher inspired in Gass and Mackey's schematization of oral CF (2006, p. 11).

To this end, Gass and Mackey's (2006) typology of types of input and feedback—originally inspired in oral CF—was adapted to written CF. In adapting such an overview, the following theoretical considerations were borne in mind: (1) Input is paramount for L2 learning (Bitchener & Storch, 2016). It “refers to language that is available to the learner through any medium” (Gass & Mackey, 2006, p. 5). As such, it can be positive (i.e., information about what is acceptable in the language) or negative (i.e., information about what is not acceptable in the language) (Bitchener, 2012a). (2) Written CF is a type of negative evidence (Bitchener & Storch, 2016). Negative evidence can be defined as “information that a particular utterance is deviant vis-à-vis target language norms” (Gass & Mackey, 2006, p. 7). (3) Written CF is reactive. Gass and Mackey (2006) explain that feedback is reactive when it “occurs as a reaction to some linguistic problem” (p. 7). Thus, as far as written CF is concerned, it is “a reactive focus-on-form methodology with the specific value of inducing learner attention to form in the context of performing a task in a personalized, individualized manner” (Van Beuningen, 2010, p. 5). (4) Written CF is explicit. The “continuum between explicit and implicit” feedback that Gass and Mackey (2006, p. 7) refer to when discussing oral CF becomes—when applied to written CF—a continuum between highly explicit and less explicit feedback instead. As it has been previously pointed out in the literature, irrespective of the written CF strategies employed and their understanding of them, L2 learners know they are being corrected (Polio, 2012), so the implicit/explicit dichotomy of oral CF does not apply to written CF. Bitchener (2012a) asserts, “feedback in the written context is always explicit (even when provided as indirect feedback, e.g., underlining or circling errors)” (p. 351). (5) Notwithstanding this umbrella term (i.e., explicit), the feedback focus is determined by the number of targeted error categories

whereas the feedback type (along with the strategies that belong to each type) is contingent upon the type of corrective information given to learners. Thus, in line with Liu and Brown (2015), written CF can be either highly selective, mid selective, and comprehensive, and in accordance with Ellis's (2009b) typology, learners' written errors can be treated with strategies that belong to either a direct, indirect, or metalinguistic CF type. In this respect, Ellis's typology is the only one for written CF, yet it has not been updated to this day. The following is then an attempt to revisit such a typology and provide, in turn, a much-needed guide to classify written CF studies by feedback type and their respective strategies.

4.1 Direct CF

Direct CF could be defined as that which provides learners with overt corrections of their written inaccuracies. Bearing this definition in mind, two written CF strategies could be included in the direct CF category: direct corrections (which indeed have been recurrently identified as a direct CF type) and reformulations (which have been discussed in isolation without references to any feedback type). The former consists of overt in-text corrections which signal the error. In other words, the error is flagged by either crossing out what is wrong and/or inserting what is right. On the other hand, the latter is a "rather special form of direct CF [in which] a native-speaker version of the learner's whole text is given to the learner" (Ellis, 2010, p. 339). When using either direct CF strategy, L2 teachers act as providers (i.e., correctors) because they give learners the correct target language forms. Still, these techniques differ in the way teachers go about such provision and, therefore, in the depth of processing involved on the part of the learner. For example, a cognitive comparison occurs "when the learner compares his or her original output with the teacher's output and then realizes that his or her interlanguage differs from the target language" (Nassaji, 2007, p. 514). Thus, direct corrections allow learners to immediately compare the target language form with their ill-formed structure; this implies that learners engage in minimal processing (Ellis, 2010). Conversely, with reformulations learners cannot promptly do so because errors are neither directly pointed out nor corrected in isolation (Hanaoka & Izumi, 2012). Instead, with the help of a native-like reformulated text, learners must determine where in their texts the deviant structure is and what exactly is being corrected. Only then can they engage in the same cognitive comparison as those who receive direct corrections. That is why reformulations are said to involve deeper processing (e.g., Martínez & de Larios, 2010). On the merits of a reformulated text, Qi and Lapkin (2001) state that it enables learners to address and appropriate it to their "own needs and interests and to the context they themselves provided for a particular writing task" (p. 282), that it is a rich source of L2 if provided by a competent target language writer, that it allows teachers to tailor learners' needs and balance the focus (meaning and/or grammar), and that it affords opportunities for noticing. However, it has also been stated that its implementation in L2 writing classes may be unrealistic and that it equates to putting the reformulator's "words into students' mouths (or pens or word processors)" at the expense of expressing their own voice (Ferris, 2010, p. 190). On the other hand, with direct corrections learners engage in minimal processing (Martínez & de Larios, 2010), yet their advantages lie in their usefulness to help learners (1) produce the correct target language form, especially when they lack sufficient linguistic resources to self-correct (such as low level learners) (Guénette, 2012), (2) make an immediate cognitive comparison of their erroneous forms and the correct ones (Shintani & Ellis, 2013), (3) lessen confusion as a result of, for example, codes interpretation or difficulty to remember them (Ferris & Roberts, 2001), and (4) facilitate corrections of complex forms (Bitchener, 2008).

4.2 Metalinguistic and Indirect CF

Two more types of feedback are indirect and metalinguistic CF. One aspect in common between them (and which makes them different from direct CF) is that the role of the feedback source is that of an initiator. Unlike the feedback source in direct CF, who is a corrector that takes complete control, the feedback source in indirect CF and metalinguistic CF withholds the correct language forms and places the onus of self-correction to a greater or lesser degree on the learner (Ellis, 2009a). Nevertheless, the type of corrective information given to the learner is the key characteristic that sets indirect CF and metalinguistic CF apart.

On the one hand, when employing metalinguistic CF, learners make their own corrections after an elicitation—with metalinguistic cues—of their background linguistic knowledge. This type of written CF gives learners information about the nature of their errors (Ellis et al., 2008) allowing them to draw on their previous metalinguistic knowledge after provision of metalinguistic codes (e.g., Diab, 2015) or metalinguistic rules/explanation (e.g., Shintani & Ellis, 2013). On their characteristics and potential (dis)advantages, Ellis (2009b) points out that written CF with codes is more common, that providing CF with rules is more time consuming than with codes, and that metalinguistic knowledge of rules may need to be more extensive to be able to explain a rule clearly and accurately than to insert a code.

On the other hand, no indirect CF strategy tells learners about the nature of their errors. With indirect CF strategies, L2 learners make their own corrections after an indication—not involving metalinguistic cues—that an error exists. In this type of CF, learners are not required to draw on their previous metalinguistic knowledge. Therefore, by revisiting Ellis's (2009b) typology, with varying degrees of explicitness the following written CF strategies may belong to indirect CF: (1) underlining or circling errors (e.g., Truscott & Hsu, 2008), (2) placing check marks or numbers in the margin next to the line where the error occurs (e.g., Lee, 1997), (3) inserting a link that refers learners to a concordance file with correct usage information (e.g., Gaskell & Cobb, 2004), and (4) modeling (e.g., Yang & Zhang, 2010). As far as the advantages of indirect CF strategies, are concerned, it is assumed that the more the onus of correction is placed on the learner, the more learners engage in deeper processing (Ellis, 2009b), yet the research evidence is too limited to reach firm conclusions. In fact, potential disadvantages could originate from imposing a cognitive effort that learners may not be linguistically ready for (e.g., locating an error or comparing texts). For instance, regarding indirect CF, Guénette (2012) believes that indirect CF strategies are useful to “push the learners to question their hypotheses about the language, but they may also lead to frustration” (p. 121).

At this point, two aspects of the proposed indirect CF categorization and which differ from Ellis's (2009b) typology are worth noting. One is the elimination of the label *electronic* to refer to the use of concordance files. The rationale for its avoidance is the confusion that may arise from that term due to the advancement in technology generally and the different meanings the word *electronic* denotes specifically. For example, what Ellis (2009b) presents as a feedback strategy is—for others—a medium, which allows to generate “automated feedback provided by a computer” (Ware & Warschauer, 2006, p. 105) or to mediate it “offered through electronic means such as e-mail or the Comment function in Microsoft word” (Goldstein, 2006, p. 186). The other aspect is the inclusion of both concordance files and models as indirect CF strategies. Inserting concordance files next to where the errors occur was originally labeled as *electronic* and included as a separate CF strategy in Ellis's (2009b) typology. It did not belong to any feedback type, but in the proposed schematization it is recognized that its implementation entails initiating corrections without metalinguistic cues and giving learners the opportunity to correct the ill-formedness in their written output.

Models do the same, but less explicitly. These were not included in Ellis's (2009b) typology at all. Similar to a reformulated text, modeling entails comparing an “ideal version with their own” (Murphy & de Larios, 2010, p. xi). However, they differ in the type and the origin of such text. Specifically, reformulations are direct, react to learners' unique composition, and use that composition to produce a native-like version. As Cohen (1982) explains, the original meaning is preserved as much as possible (cf. Storch & Wigglesworth,

2010). As a result, it is highly unlikely that learners will work with the same text: a reformulated version originates from each individual's composition and tackles each individual's linguistic problems. Conversely, a model is indirect and gives learners a writing piece that could be expected of them. It is created by "bearing in mind learners' age, proficiency level, etc., as well as the content and the genre of the composition, but not the texts previously produced by the students" (Martínez & de Larios, 2010, p. 147). With models all learners work with the same generic text, which is unlikely to address in detail learners' individual linguistic needs. In this respect, it is "the most indirect and least explicit form of feedback" (Murphy & de Larios, 2010, p. xi). Besides, should its implementation occur before the writing act, modeling is no longer a reactive written CF strategy but a pre-emptive one (see Martínez & de Larios, 2010 for a discussion of models before writing). Considering the aforementioned discussion, the task that was close to impossible in the past is feasible now: classifying written CF studies by the feedback scope and the feedback strategies that they employ.

5. CONCLUSION

The practice of error has been heavily contested throughout the years (e.g., Truscott, 2001). However, such criticism only prompted L2 (acquisition and writing) researchers to conduct more research on written CF and L2 composition teachers to continue embracing a practice that has been ubiquitous to this day. Not surprisingly then, empirical interest in written CF, which dates as far back as the late 1960's (e.g., Stiff, 1967), has rendered an extensive body of research which has come a long way: studies from an L2 writing perspective have demonstrated its potential as a revision tool (e.g., Truscott & Hsu, 2008), and those from an L2 acquisition perspective have proved that it does assist in L2 learning/development (e.g., Bonilla et al., 2018).

Throughout the years, researchers have stated their concern about the lack of practical answers for L2 practitioners (e.g., Ferris, 2010). This article addresses an aspect that may not only hinder its application but also prevent L2 (writing) teachers and written CF researchers from fully understanding research findings, namely, a lack of consistency in key terminology. Therefore, the two most prevalent and contended variables are addressed and a proposal for this typology drawn from such an analysis. Overall, by critically discussing the discrepancies in terms of feedback scope as well as feedback type and by advancing an up-to-date schematization of written CF, it is hoped that L2 teachers and researchers alike can widen their current understanding of the written CF literature and advance in turn the error correction practice.

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