

A Text-Oriented Procedure for Corrective Feedback in an Arab EFL/EAL Writing Class*

Omar Atari

King Saud University

Abstract: *This paper proposes an EFL corrective feedback procedure at the intermediate level that is based on both (1) findings of empirical research on Arab EFL writers' compositions (Atari, 1985; Atari & Triki, 2000; Kharma, 1986; Kaplan, 1966; Mukattash, 1986; etc.) and (2) a unified theory of EFL writing pedagogy integrating both product and process at all language levels: cf. Connor (1987). The proposed procedure consists of four recursive cycles of revising processes as part of the "overarching" composing process. (Witte, 1985). These are: 1. Awareness-raising; 2. Peer evaluation of students' individual drafts; 3. Students' reformulations of their own first drafts; and 4. A contrastive analysis exercise whereby students compare and contrast their modified drafts with a model offered by their instructor.*

1. Introduction

Corrective feedback continues to be a controversial issue in EFL writing teaching. This is because current classroom procedures neglect one or two of its constituent components. At one level, for instance, corrective feedback procedures dwell on surface errors in the mechanics and grammar while grossly neglecting text-level issues. Consequently, EFL student writers have been misled to focus almost exclusively on the word and sentence levels rather than on the level of the text as a whole. The majority of EFL students feel that their only sense of security comes from what they have learned about grammar and that grammar is the only tool they can use in writing English essays (Leki, 1996; Silva, 1992 as cited in Lee, 2000: 32). At another level, teachers sometimes approach students' compositions as final drafts to be evaluated and corrected rather than texts developed over time which should be analyzed in terms of the writer's intention, the reader's expectations, the topic and purpose of writing. It appears that even authors (for example, Flower, L., 1985; Hartfiel, U. F. et al, 1985, as cited in Shih, 1986) who produce process-oriented textbooks separate writing activities into discrete linear units while thinking that their approach is process-centered. By and large, corrective feedback procedures have lacked a solid theory of EFL as well as

sufficient empirical research evidence. On this matter Horner (1988: 217) contends that there is "a regrettable lack of advice available, based on sound theory and/or thorough research."

2. A Text-Oriented Model

Based on previous research carried out by the present writer on EFL/EAL* teachers' perceptions of writing quality assessment as well as EFL/EAL student writers' inappropriate use of oral style features in formal expository prose (Atari, 1985, 1998; Atari & Triki 2000), we believe that students should be taught alternative strategies to improve their writing. A pedagogical focus on text-level issues such as coherence, textual structuring, and recognition of the distinctive features of written language versus those of spoken language¹ can shift students' attention from sentence-level grammar to the discourse features which are crucial to creating meaning in texts (Lee, 2002: 32). Indeed, teaching students to use these textual features or strategies in their writing ought to be a significant aspect of EFL/EAL writing instruction.

This paper calls for a more systematic and encompassing approach to corrective feedback in EFL/EAL writing classes by taking into account the following five factors/parameters:

1. **The learner's linguistic and cognitive development;** for example, the types of knowledge and skills the adult learner brings to the writing task. This involves his/her interlanguage and the possible employment of the oral/spoken mode features in written language (see Appendix for examples) due to inadequate knowledge of the differences between oral and written communication. This is a potential source of difficulty in EFL/EAL writing. In addition, EFL/EAL student writers do not necessarily have a conceptual framework of the process of writing.
2. **A view of error treatment** which focuses on text-level or meaning level issues first and then on the correctness/accuracy level problems. On this matter Burt (1975) states that by limiting correction to communicative errors we increase our students' motivation and self-confidence toward learning the target language.
3. **A view of an integrated theory of EFL writing** that includes both process and product at all language levels (cf. Connor, 1987) whereby product is utilized to describe processes of writing. In other words, corrective feedback provides input about L2 writing to the learner. This input will be modified and made more "comprehensible" through interaction coordinated by the teacher and peers so that students acquire the necessary revision skills.
4. **The contextual constraints**, namely the classroom environment and

the learner-teacher relationship. The mode of presenting the feedback procedure should be learner-centered and the teacher's intervention indirect. Hence, activities like peer evaluation and small group discussion guided by the teacher are to be encouraged.

5. A commitment to awareness-raising as a strategy in error treatment. This can be achieved by confronting the learner with the mismatch between his flawed performance and a correct model (Johnson, 1988). This suggests that students compare and contrast their reformulated text (the developed version of their first drafts or sequences of it) with the teacher's reformulations of that same draft. It should be noted, however, that awareness of an error does not guarantee its prompt eradication (Tahiririan, 1986; Mukattash, 1986). The learner's awareness simply assists him/her in making the input comprehensible enough to be accommodated into his/her interlanguage (Krashen, 1985).

In brief, the view of EFL/EAL writing corrective feedback adopted in this paper is one that involves students in the exploration of a complex chain of revision processes, namely evaluating, reviewing, hypothesizing, reformulating, inferring, generalizing and testing hypotheses as subprocesses of the superordinate composing process (Witte, 1985; Sommers, 1979). To achieve this, the mode of interaction during feedback involving student, teacher and data (first drafts) has to be flexible enough to allow for all students' unique and varied styles of learning. With these parameters in mind as theoretical and pedagogical guidelines and on the basis of empirical research findings (Atari, 1985; Atari & Triki, 2000; Kharmah, 1986; Kaplan, 1966; Ostler, 1981 among others) which will be presented briefly later, the author suggests the following corrective feedback model in an Arab EFL/EAL learners' writing class at the intermediate university level. The proposed model consists of four recursive cycles. Below is a brief description of these four cycles.

1. Cycle (1): Awareness-raising, whereby the entire class led by the teacher using an overhead projector discusses one sample of students' first drafts in order to bring to the students an awareness of their use of inappropriate discursal features/strategies in their formal EFL/EAL compositions. These problematic textual features include: the use of oral style strategies in written texts, illogical sequencing of ideas, and lack of connectivity in the underlying content evidenced by the mere "stringing together" of ideas. Moreover, the concurrent discussion should assist the students in developing a conceptual framework of writing as a process involving the writer, the reader, the topic, and the purpose.

2. Cycle (2): Peer Evaluation of students' individual drafts, whereby the class is divided into sets or pairs of students who are

instructed to exchange their first drafts. Then they check each others' drafts and make comments in the light of the insights they would have gained from the teacher-led awareness-raising session. As some students may not be proficient enough to make their comments in English, they should be allowed to do so in Arabic. Meanwhile the instructor will be moving around to respond to some students' enquiries for clarification.

3. Cycle (3): Students' reformulations of their own first drafts, whereby each member of each pair gets back his/her draft and tries to reformulate it based on insights gained from peers and the awareness-raising session.

4. Cycle (4): A contrastive analysis exercise, whereby students compare and contrast their second (modified) drafts with a model offered by their instructor. He/she provides his/her own reformulations of the first draft of two to three students, thus enabling all students to see the mismatch between their second drafts and the instructor's examples/models. Finally, the instructor collects the students' final drafts to be corrected and returned to them.

3. Presentation of the Model

Each of the four cycles referred to above involves two elements: (i) the contextual variables (i.e. the instructor, the students and the sample first draft) and, (ii) the subprocesses of the overarching revision process. Within each cycle, one contextual variable (the learner, the teacher, the data) will be the overriding factor: cf. (i) In cycle (1), the teacher guides and stimulates group discussion; (ii) In cycle (2), the students lead the discussion and revision of the first drafts; (iii) In cycle (3), the teacher coordinates the activity of the students' reformulations of their first drafts. This cycle provides the students with an opportunity to reformulate their own drafts; and (iv) In cycle (4), the teacher provides his own model of the first drafts of two to three students referred to in the awareness-raising session. The students then compare and contrast the teacher's model with their own.

The subprocesses of revision are not tampered with as we do not know which overrides which, because every student has his/her own unique way of evaluating, reviewing, hypothesizing, reformulating, etc... So, we only vary the impact of the main constituent variables (teacher's role, student's role, data role) to create an overall atmosphere of interaction among these three variables to enable each student writer to explore heuristic devices of meaning of linguistic and of rhetorical aspects of L2 writing.

In what follows we shall discuss how the various stages of the proposed model can be implemented in a real classroom situation.

3.1. Cycle 1: Awareness-raising

1. The what and the why: This cycle is meant to raise students' awareness of some important text-level issues in EFL/EAL writing. The text-level issues² that have been found to be problematic in Arab EFL/(EAL) students' compositions are: the over-use of coordinators and parallel structures, lack of connectivity inter-sententially, the "stringing" together of ideas without explicit connectors, unawareness of the purpose of writing, the reader-writer relationship, and the macrostructure of texts. Excerpts from Arab EFL/ EAL student writers' compositions exhibiting these textual features are given in the Appendix below.

As it is pedagogically and practically impossible to address all of these issues in one classroom session or a typical 50-minute class, it is recommended that the concerned EFL/EAL instructor deal with one or two features in every session. By way of illustration we will highlight two textual issues in this paper, namely: (1) inappropriate use of oral style strategies exemplified by the over-use of coordinated structures, as well as "stringing together" of ideas/propositions without connective devices, and (2) lack of student writers' awareness of a conceptual framework of writing involving the purpose of writing, the role of the targeted reader(s), and the writer-reader relationship.

Our students do not necessarily know the difference between the oral and the literate style strategies of text development (Tannen, 1980, 1982). Their first drafts of expository prose are usually dominated by the oral mode of development, which is inappropriate in exposition. According to Green and Morgan (1981: 177), "an awareness of the differences between oral and written communication affects the ability to write well and the ability to make accurate assessments of writing ability."

Similarly, our students do not possess an awareness of the overall conceptual framework of the writing process.

Research evidence supports the assumption that students (especially EFL/EAL learners) need training in revising their first drafts or sequences of drafts as a prerequisite to developing effective revision strategies, (Chandrasegaran, 1986). Without such training, EFL/EAL learners especially tend to dwell on surface errors at the level of the mechanics and grammar, thus neglecting text-level problems (Sommers, 1982; Zamel, 1981, 1985; Santos, 1988).

2. Method of presentation: Based on an excerpt (i.e. such as the one below) exhibiting the use of inappropriate features in formal EFL/EAL

expository prose, the teacher leads the discussion using an overhead projector. The discussion goes along the following lines:

Excerpt:

I was astonished and a little bit frightened, and when I saw my mother and father a little bit confused, I tried to be courageous, and I went out to see what was happening. (Kaplan, 1966)

Discussion:

- Can you suggest a better organization/order of the ideas contained in these sentences?
- What is the grammatical structure of these sentences?
- Do you think these sentences convey ideas of different or equal importance and statuses?
- How can we show the meaning and relationships of these sentences?
- Do we need to use different connectors such as "however" or "although"?
- Do you think that changing one structure to a subordinate clause or a participial clause/phrase would show differentiation in the meaning input of the sentences?
- What about the descriptive terms "astonished", "a little bit frightened" in the first sentence? Do we have to use both? Would just one be enough?

If the students cannot explore all of these features of parallelism and repetition on their own, the teacher may interject with comments along the following lines:

Comments:

- These features are oral style strategies (Tannen, 1980, 1982); they are typical of the spoken language.
- They are inappropriate in formal academic writing, where writers show differentiation of ideas by varying the structure of the sentences and the clauses they use.
- Our text here shows the reverse. It conveys four pieces of information that are equally important to each other. This makes it difficult for the reader to ascertain the main idea from the supporting ideas. One can do this in spoken language, e.g. in a conversation because the reader/listener is in the writer's/speaker's presence and he/she can tell which sentence conveys the prominent idea and which ones convey the subordinate ideas irrespective of the syntactic structure used, by utilizing the context, paralinguistic cues and the background information.

It should be pointed out here that the teacher can take some "impromptu" suggestions from the students while leading the discussion. He/she should, however, give a few minutes for the whole class to write down their own reformulations of that excerpt. The targeted reformulation of the preceding excerpt may look like the following:

- *"Seeing my mother and father looking slightly confused, I was frightened. However, I tried to be courageous and went out to see what was happening."*

Yet, as it is highly likely that the students will not be able to come up with such a reformulated excerpt, their instructor will have to supplement the awareness-raising session with one or two exercises such as the following:

Exercise: Re-write the following paragraph by using only two sentences. You must not use 'and', 'so', 'but' or 'then':

- It was a very hot day. We had walked for a long time along the dusty road. We left the road. We went along a little path. The path ran alongside a brook. The brook was shaded by trees."

The instructor can show the students how to utilize the use of participial clauses, the appositive and prepositional phrases in their writing to come up with the following:

"Having walked along the dusty road on a very hot day, we left the road to go on a little path alongside a brook shaded by trees."

Another example of supplementary exercises is the following:

Exercise: Combine the following sentences into one sentence. Pay special attention to the temporal sequence of events:

"He was walking down the street. The weather was nice. It was sunny. He was humming a tune. The tune was lively."

The students will most probably come up with a sentence (1). The teacher, on the other hand, will guide the students to come up with the sentence in (2):

(1) *"When he was walking down the street and the weather was nice and sunny, he was humming a tune which was lively."*

(2) *"Walking down the street on a nice and sunny day, he was humming a lively tune."*

A potential criticism of this presentation is that it is product-based. However, there is nothing wrong with that as long as it serves to make the description of writing processes feasible. Connor (1987: 978) points out that:

although product research has been harshly condemned by some composition theorists, descriptions of writing processes have been largely achieved by analyzing sequences of different kinds of products.....the role of product is becoming recognized not only in writing research but also in the teaching of writing, in which experts are calling for renewed interest in student texts and revisions.

EFL student writers need to develop a conceptual framework of what writing entails, namely a sense of the targeted audience/readers, the topic, the register associated with it, and the text-type they are developing; in other words, we cannot expect an EFL/EAL learner to be familiar with the various text-types, genres and their respective registers. Therefore, at university he/she should be sensitized to the differences between a personal letter, a business letter, a lecture, an essay and a written speech.

At university, the student writer gets conditioned to only one type of audience/reader, the teacher. The student writer tends to make assumptions in his/her attempt at written communication. The result is a text that is lacking in a great number of specific details necessary in formal academic writing.

On the basis of the following excerpts exhibiting the student writers' lack of knowledge of a conceptual framework of writing, the instructor leads the discussion along these lines:

Excerpts:

(1): "In the fifties women were under husbands' or fathers' authority. I also think that the best place for them is the home..." (Kharma, 1986)

(2): "In this essay I am going to discuss Shakespeare's plays. He wrote some of the best ballads in English. These were of various types..." (Kharma, 1986)

Discussion:

- What is missing in the text you have just read?
- Is the proposition of sentence (X) connected logically with those of preceding and following sentences? How?
- Is any part of the text ambiguous? Do you feel like adding something to it?
- Are there any missing details that should be added?
- Which proposition, in this excerpt or sequence of the text, is the superordinate one? Which ones are subordinate to it?

Using the first excerpt from the Kharma (1986), the instructor may lead the discussion to guide students to see the mismatch between Excerpt (1) and, for example:

"In the fifties women were under their husband's or father's authority AND I also believe in this."

The instructor should give students the chance to see this on their own. He should ask students to attempt a remedy of this flawed performance in the text. It is recommended that insights from discourse theory and pragmatics be interjected to students along the following lines:

Discussion:

- If you were to write an essay keep in mind that: "you are trying to communicate a message to the reader for the purpose of influencing him/her and/or for the purpose of informing him/her of something that is important to both of you. Thus, you have to be persuasive.
- To do that, you should be sensitive to the reader's expectations; i.e. you should not assume that the reader shares the background information you have about the topic you are discussing, and that he/she will figure out your intentions.
- You should articulate the relationship between one proposition and the others by providing the necessary linking devices, by accounting for all necessary details so that the reader will be guided while reading your essay to what you had intended to say."

By now it should have become clear that the main function of this awareness-raising cycle of feedback is to train students to pay attention to discourse errors and to prepare them for the next step of revising and reformulating their own unique texts. We are in full agreement with some researchers' remarks on the inadequacy of learners' revising of their written products if they have received no proper guidance or training from the teacher. Chandrasegaran (1986: 29) reports: "It has been observed that students tend to dwell at the level of word or phrase and make changes or corrections mainly in syntactic form or lexical choice, neglecting text-level problems of interpretability, coherence and cohesion" (Sommers, 1978; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1977; Stallard, 1974).

3.2. Cycle 2: Peer Evaluation

1. The what and the why: The development of revision strategies requires the writer to be detached from his/her own written product to be able to see where, in the text, he/she failed to be explicit; hence, the exercise in peer revision. On this matter Chandrasegaran (1986: 30) states: "Revision requires a writer to read his text through the eyes of one who did not write and who, therefore, does not have sufficient knowledge of the writer's thoughts to be able to supply missing information or make intended inferences to bridge the gaps where the writer failed to be explicit."

The peer's evaluations of each other's texts and the comments they write or discuss orally with each other function as a stimuli to the reformulation of the student's own texts. Thus, this stage of revising is like the dialogue journal that has been proven valid in enhancing students' fluency by eliminating classroom traditional constraints (Ross & Robb, 1988). The students are now ready to rewrite as if they were clarifying ambiguities to their readers, the peers.

2. Method of presentation: The method of presentation at this cycle consists of three procedures as follows:

- Teacher divides class into small groups of 2-3 students and asks them to exchange their first drafts.
- Students read each others' drafts silently and then discuss orally their comments, criticism, enquiries, etc.
- Teacher moves around to answer questions and makes sure that peer evaluation is taking place.

3.3. Cycle 3: Students' Reformulations

1. The what and the why: It is important to give the student writers the opportunity to rewrite their own first drafts. They should be taught how to avoid the over-use of coordinate structures, and encouraged to replace them with subordinate structures through the use of various mechanisms such as participial phrases/clauses, appositive phrases/clauses, infinitive phrases/clauses, finite clauses, etc. In addition, they should be encouraged to provide the necessary details to account for the relationships among their propositions, to use lexicalized items rather than fuzzy vague phrases, such as "these guys" and "a sort of", etc.

2. Method of presentation: At this stage, the teacher moves around the classroom to attend to his/her students' enquiries. He/she can provide them with a few lexical items, subordinators or linking devices. It is essential, however, that he/she should push the students to provide specific details for the targeted reader.

3.4. Cycle 4: Contrastive Analysis

1. The what and the why: At this stage students are confronted with the mismatch between their performance in both the first drafts and second (modified) drafts and the teacher's model. This, according to Johnson (1988), is an efficient technique to achieve awareness-raising of flawed performance. Students are shown the correct model after they have had an opportunity to produce and revise their work; that is, after they have received feedback from both teacher and peers. This feedback has the effect of making L2 input more comprehensible, thus enabling the students to accommodate it to their interlanguage and, finally, to apply it. In other words, it can be assumed that the first two cycles helped students to transform input into intake, which then becomes their output in this last cycle (Krashen, 1985).

This exercise lends itself well to all writers' varied needs at all levels of language and writing including both levels of accuracy/fluency and communicative efficiency.

Once students realize how well they have done in their reformulations, they will be highly motivated, a prerequisite for all processes of learning, (Horner, 1988; Hendrickson, 1978).

2. Method of presentation: It should be too presumptuous to expect student writers to come up with all the most appropriate structures and to employ promptly all necessary strategies of effective written communication. Hence, the instructor will provide them with 2-3 models exemplifying all the appropriate textual features mentioned earlier as well as the necessary writing components. Students will need more and more

exposure to the targeted text structures. The teacher's modified reformulations of two or three students' drafts will provide the opportunity to confront the students with the mismatch between their second drafts (i.e. the modified first drafts) and the teacher's.

4. Conclusion

The proposed procedure/model draws attention to the pressing need to strike a balance in EFL/EAL writing corrective feedback practices between the accuracy level of writing represented by the correctness of language forms and the communicative efficiency at the text-level issues. It further highlights the premise that writing is not a solitary act as it involves teachers, peers and the targeted readers. Hence, it invites EFL writing instructors to focus on helping students make revisions in their drafts from the beginning to the final editing.

Notes

* EAL (i.e. English for Arab Learners) has just been recently introduced by Mukattash (2003). It is being juxtaposed with EFL wherever the latter refers to the Arab educational context. The students, whose work forms the data-base for the suggested EFL corrective feedback procedure, are 2nd and 3rd year English language majors at an Arab university who were enrolled in EFL courses at a university in USA.

1. For a good treatment of the oral mode features versus the written mode features see Chafe, W. (1982), "Integration and Involvement in Speaking, Writing, and Literature." In D. Tannen (ed.) *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy*, pp: 35-53. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

2. The other problematic issues in Arab EFL students' compositions such as tenses, run-on sentences, no paragraphing, wrong word usage, are usually given enough attention by most EFL writing instructors.

3. The teacher does not have to include all four cycles in every feedback activity in every 50-minute class. Depending on his students' level and the type of text they are producing at a certain stage of writing practice, he/she can decide whether to incorporate the four cycles or two or just one. Furthermore, he/she can begin with the third cycle and then go on to the second and the first since each cycle involves the students in the same processes of revising but with a different focus on one aspect of composing each time.

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Appendix: Samples of Inappropriate Discourse Features of Arab Learners' Written Texts

Recent research on Arab EFL writing at the university level has found the following discourse features to be inappropriate in English expository prose (Kaplan, 1966; Ostler, 1981; Atari, 1985; and Kharma, 1986).

1. Experts from Kaplan(1966) on parallelism:

"I was very astonished and a little bit frightened, and when I saw my mother and father a little bit confused, I tried to be courageous, and I went out to see what was happening."

2. Use of parallelism (excerpts from Ostler's paper presented at TESOL Convention, 1981, in San-Francisco):

"We have a lot of revenues each year from oil exports that come to us from selling this material. We can solve the second problem by seeking further resources that we have in my country not to depend on one source."

3. Over-use of "and" as a co-ordinating element as well as filler, from Kharma (1986):

"The wedding is preceded by the proposal. And this was done in the past by a go-between to talk to both families. And after agreement is reached, they fix a day for the engagement. In the traditional society, it used t take place in the mosque. And the service was performed by the "mulla" before two witnesses. And then all the requirements of the marriage were prepared."

4. Incoherence due to the absence of linking devices and co-ordination at the expense of subordination, from Kharma (1986):

"In the fifties women were under husbands' or fathers' authority. (Topic sentences of a paragraph; the next sentence was :) I also think that the best place for them is the home..."

"In this essay I am going to discus Shakespeare's plays. He wrote some of the best ballads in English. These were a various types...etc."

- And from Atari (1985):

"There were some boys who escaped from the war, they used to have meetings, the one who wants to speak must have the conch, this symbolized that the boys have a sort of democracy between them, and sort of respect to the person who is speaking."

5. The use of narration with tense shifts from past to present, from Atari (1984):

"When Piggy went to get his glasses from Jack he took the conch with him to clear that he has the right, but here was the end of the conch which represented the rules, and it was the end of Piggy."

6. The use of suprasentential sentence or a global statement in the opening section which has to do with the topic sentence, from Atari (1984):

"Life without rules is nonsense; human being can't live without rules because it arrange their relation between each other and with animals. If there are rules, or the rules are broken by each one, the evil will increase and the destruction will be the end."

This text was the opening section of an essay produced by a student who was instructed to write a critical essay on the three main characters in *Lord of the Flies* by W. Golding.