

Emotional scaffolding through editing conferences

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Keywords

motivation, teacher immediacy, autonomy, reciprocal teaching, error correction

The error correction debate in second language (L2) writing should include the aspect of the emotional learning of the L2 student. The debate has been focused on the cognitive processing of language rather than on the emotional needs of the student. Interviews in this study with graduate students who faced extensive error corrections revealed that teacher immediacy motivated them in a challenging task and that their situational interest led to self-directed L2 study beyond the frame of the task. Suggestions for the teacher come from the pedagogy of emotional scaffolding, which is intended to positively influence learner affect toward learning.

本研究では英文論文執筆時のエラー修正を、第二言語学習者の情意的学習の視点から調査した。広範囲に及ぶ多量のエラー修正を行った大学院生にインタビューを行い、その結果、学習者が知覚する教師への親近感が学習意欲に影響を与え、状況的興味がタスク完了という目的を超えた自律英語学習へ発展したことが明らかになった。情意的支援を教育現場に積極的に取り入れることで、英語学習者のポジティブな情意を増加させ、効果的な学習が可能になると主張する。

IN A recent meta-analysis of error correction studies, Truscott (2007) concluded this practice has little positive effect on cognitive learning. This aspect centers the ongoing controversy about whether error correction is beneficial for learning (Casanave, 2004), with little investigation about its effect on affective development. In this study I interviewed learners who had faced extensive error corrections, asking about the affective influence it had on their learning.

Error correction and demotivation

The practice of error correction, Truscott (1996) warned, negatively influences student affect and motivation toward both completing written assignments and further learning the second language (L2). A main reason is that students view rewriting as punishment (Radecki & Swales, 1988) and marked errors appear as criticism without room for negotiation. They come across as authoritarian, impersonal, dry—there is no human face to show compassion. Truscott (1996) argued that the practice causes stress, fear of making mistakes, loss of enjoyment and confidence, and avoidance of the learning activity and ultimately the subject as a whole.

Negative experiences can negatively influence student affect in the short-term, and in the long-term negatively influence student *self-efficacy* and task value (Boekaerts, 2007). Self-efficacy is the belief in one's own abilities in relation to a skill or subject and it is socially influenced. It directs the choice of task and contributes to persistence in the activity (Bandura, 1997). Numerous studies have shown that negative emotions are linked with poor cognitive processing and decreased on-task motivation, while positive emotions are related with processing of detailed information and increased on-task motivation (Boekaerts, 1993; Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008). In short, affect can direct cognition and motivation.

The teacher's sensitivity to student emotions and positive emotional learning experiences provide students with "powerful rationales for engaging in . . . learning opportunities" (Meyer & Turner, 2007, p. 243). *Emotional learning* or *affective learning*, is "concerned with the student's attitudes, beliefs, and values that relate to the knowledge and psychomotor skills the student acquires" (McCroskey, 2002, p. 5). People learn better when they feel good about the learning. The practice of *emotional scaffolding* is about "tailoring of pedagogical representations to influence students' **emotional response to some specific aspect** of the subject matter being taught" (Rosiek, 2003, p. 339) and is beneficial when the content knowledge appears so distant or dissimilar from student knowledge and experience as to become a formidable learning goal. Emotional scaffolding positively influences the emotional response of students to an **idea before expanding or transferring** that idea with the target content knowledge (Rosiek, 2003). Taking care of emotional states in the classroom promotes learning.

Recently the motivational practices of teachers have been shown to have a positive relationship on student motivation (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). This indicates the nature of classroom motivation is socially co-constructed between teacher and student, **with teacher behavior in particular** influencing student motivation. Verbal and non-verbal behaviors that make teachers likeable or approachable are termed *teacher immediacy*. When perceived positively, teacher immediacy is a motivator, and when perceived negatively it is a demotivator, with respective positive or negative influence on learning outcomes (Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Potee, 2002).

Teacher immediacy can help build good interpersonal relationships with students and prevent demotivation (Wubbles & Brekelmans, 1998). Individualized face-to-face error-correction conferences bring students and teacher together physically and emotionally through social interaction. Students would feel safe to negotiate for clarification to learn better about grammar and revision strategies, and teachers can make better judgments about student needs (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). In addition to instructional intervention, teachers can provide the humanistic, motivational feedback that promotes student self-efficacy and sustains their motivation in the process of rewriting. However, I have not found studies on the effects of error-correction conferences on learning as most studies focus on the effects of written correction. With this study I discovered that what

motivated the participants suggested pedagogical implications with error-correction conferencing.

Participants and context

The participants were two graduate students majoring in a field of the physical sciences, successfully finishing their last year in their Masters program. I had been teaching them for three consecutive summers in weeklong intensive seminars sponsored by their college laboratory. Writer A was less proficient in English than Writer B, especially regarding oral communication abilities.

This study concerns their individual efforts to write research papers for publication. Each student was the primary researcher and author of their respective paper. Upon relative completion of their first drafts, I met separately with each one in a series of editing conferences, in between which the students would make revisions. For each session I would read the paper in front of them, asking for clarification before I wrote suggestions or corrections directly on the paper.

The year prior to writing these papers as primary authors, they spent time as secondary co-authors of other papers when they were junior members of the research team. They watched the primary authors, senior team members, revise papers in English with me. When Writers A and B became senior members and primary authors the following year, they brought the new junior members to the editing conferences. This practice describes a mentoring process or *legitimate peripheral participation* in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Method

The participants were given copies of all the drafts it took to complete their respective papers; eight drafts for Writer A that had spanned almost twelve contact hours in editing conferences, with an additional three hours separately with his co-author in conference when he was absent; five drafts for Writer B that had spanned just under nine contact hours in editing conferences. With all the drafts of their papers in front of them, they were asked to directly mark, with color-coded post-its, **the written revision suggestions according** to these survey questions:

What was . . .

- effective or ineffective for rewriting?
- effective or ineffective for learning English?
- encouraging or discouraging?

They were then asked to analyze their own marks to find patterns according to this same format and write further specific comments. I then interviewed them while taking notes to enrich their descriptions and for clarification. They checked my notes and gave further comments. The entire process took over an hour for Writer A and over two hours for Writer B. Comparisons of their statements with observations from my teacher journal entries were incorporated to support the findings.

Results

The salient feature for both participants was the positive influence the editing sessions had on motivation for learning English beyond these conferences. Additionally, they stressed that emotional

support from the teacher gave them confidence that helped sustain the motivation to complete the task.

Situational interest led to motivation beyond the task

Both participants saw editing conferences as a chance to practice oral communication. When I came across unclear concepts, they would explain their intended meaning to me. Successful communication brought profound positive emotional response. Particularly for Writer B, my point of comprehension gave him a boost in self-confidence with his communication skills. He described a positive affective cycle where the more he successfully communicated, the greater his desire to communicate. This is suggestive of a path analysis that shows successful past performance

Table 1. Self-reported attributions of motivation and demotivation in editing conferences

| Participant | Attribution |
|-------------|--|
| Writer A | Motivators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raised interest in grammar because corrections and explanations were about his own writing, triggering further self-study on grammar forms • Raised interest to seek active ways to learn grammar, expressions, and writing style • Raised interest in collocations and constraints on word usage • A sense of achievement for being able to express himself in English • A sense of progress for better understanding of rhetorical organization • Teacher immediacy and teacher's enthusiasm |
| Writer A | Demotivators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (None) |
| Writer B | Motivators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher immediacy (teacher likability, approachability) • Encouragement to articulate in English • A sense of achievement every time his verbal expressions were understood by the teacher • Increased interest in learning English as listening to the native speaker teacher helped him (1) recognize and produce correct pronunciation, (2) recognize connected speech patterns, (3) break the linguistic threshold, (4) learn generative knowledge of words, (5) build receptive and productive vocabulary • Recognizing improvement of his speaking ability raised his interest to seek new ways of practicing English productively • A sense of progress for better understanding of rhetorical organization |
| Writer B | Demotivators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of self-efficacy (belief in own skills), the year that he was an apprentice, when watching others working on a paper during editing conferences |

leading to the self-efficacy that leads to successful future performance (Bandura, 1997, p. 122). He stressed that being involved in conversations about improving his paper was motivational for his self-directed English learning outside of the conferences. Similarly, Writer A claimed his deeper understanding of grammatical rules within his own paper was inspirational. It motivated him to further study grammar forms that were beyond the frame of the task. For both participants, despite their differences in English proficiency, their situational interest led to increased motivation for self-directed study.

Teacher immediacy helped with a challenging task

Writer B reported one demotivating situation—when he was an apprentice the year before, watching his senior team members revising their papers with me. At that time, he did not think it was possible to write or communicate his ideas in English, and thus he felt demotivated with the task of writing a paper which loomed a year ahead. However, this feeling of urgency led him to self-directed learning prior to writing his paper. He read English study guides and science papers in English to build top-down processing skills. He believed this improved his English abilities enough to successfully complete his paper later. But he attributed his positive interpersonal relations with me as the motivator that triggered his self-directed learning. We had spent three summers in intensive English seminars together and had frequent personal contact on campus. Without knowing me personally, he claims, he would not have had the positive affect for English to study further, nor the expectancy of success for the task.

Neither participant claimed they were discouraged by the error corrections or any of my feedback for revisions. However, they had faced various challenges in organizing and expressing their ideas in writing. What encouraged them in the revision process was my “friendly approach,” “enthusiasm,” “patience,” and “careful instruction.” Writer B emphasized that his motivation came from his positive “emotion” for the teacher. He insisted that this helped reinforce his self-belief and sustain his motivation to complete the paper.

Emotional scaffolding

Besides teacher immediacy, emotional scaffolding helped meet the challenges of the task. Emotional

scaffolding is a technique of altering the representation of the learning to make it emotionally accessible (Rosiek, 2003). Representations of the learning that were altered through the editing conferences were medium, purpose, and roles.

Medium of the personal touch

The immediate benefit that editing conferences have over written error corrections is personalized feedback. Written feedback is faceless. It cannot adapt to the psychological needs of the receiver. Even positive messages can be perceived as insensitive when left without elaboration. In contrast, with face-to-face conferences the teacher can adjust delivery of error correction, sense the psychological state of the learner, and respond with motivational feedback (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008). By actively engaging with the teacher, students can get rich feedback on specific points of concern and get help to write what they want to express.

Purpose as a social gathering

We met on hot mornings in the laboratory and worked about two to three hours per session. It was demanding work and we shared a pot of coffee to keep ourselves refreshed. One day as we set our schedules for the next editing session, I used the term *Coffee Club*. The term stuck and we used it constantly thereafter to maintain positive emotions for our editing sessions.

Physical proximity also helped. Traditionally the teacher is seen as disseminating knowledge as the student listens. However, instead of facing each other across the table as superior instructing an inferior, we sat side-by-side, working as project team members. Additionally, this workspace allowed us to interact through writing and drawing on computer and paper. As partners we approached the task together.

Role of student as teacher

When I encountered something unclear, I did not assume certain language or rhetorical forms should supersede what they had written. I used a method called *reciprocal teaching*, when student and teacher alternate roles as the teacher (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008). This method allowed the students to fulfill the three basic innate psychological needs—competence, autonomy, and relatedness—which increase motivation when those needs are satisfied (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Instead of telling, I asked and listened to them describe their intended meanings, and compared that with the

written work. This gave them opportunities to display their competence in their subject area. Instead of providing an answer, I offered examples and choices. This allowed them to exercise autonomy. Furthermore, my partnership and sincere interest in their work gave them relatedness, the sense of positive interdependency. Indeed, they spoke with unabashed passion and excitement when describing their experiments. Reciprocal teaching made us all enthusiastic learners.

Conclusions

The editing conferences described in this study offered personalized instruction with emotional scaffolding and **reciprocal teaching**. This approach increased self-efficacy and motivation, and promoted student agency. Individualized editing conferences may not be practical for teachers with large class sizes, however, conferencing with groups on collaborative papers is feasible and still offers personalized interaction. Even personalized verbal comments or questions when returning papers can positively influence student emotions toward learning, as both participants claimed that conversing about their papers was motivational for further self-directed study. Such exchanges prompt meaningful interaction in the L2.

Sustained effort in learning English comes through the connection between student interest and language education (Falout, Murphey, Elwood, & Hood, 2008). Writer A and Writer B were engaged with learning the L2 because their papers were centered on their own interests, a point that bound together the interest, relevance, and expectation of success with English. These factors contributed to their motivation for autonomous L2 study (Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998). As they persisted in the rewriting process, they recognized the development of their cognitive and emotional learning, leading to increased self-efficacy. Following completion of the papers, Writer B presented his research findings in English to an international audience, and both writers passed their graduate defence. They spent a week vacationing in Europe before returning to Japan to start careers which require their scientific knowledge and English language skills. Writer B entered the research division of a blue chip company where he will continue writing and presenting in English. Both writers will always carry these successes to bolster self-beliefs when meeting challenges and continuing to learn in the future.

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Joseph Falout researches learner demotivation.

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THIS MONTH Dale Brown provides an activity which helps students build vocabulary knowledge and helps teachers learn how much their students understand vocabulary. Then Sonoko Tsuchiya gives us an activity which focuses on form and helps promote a balance between fluency and accuracy. Paul Howl gives us a cloze exercise activity for students' reading comprehension and Paul Wicking spices up a postcard writing activity with some great ideas!

Using a modified version of the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale to aid vocabulary development

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Quick Guide

Key words: Pre-teaching vocabulary, demonstrating progress, vocabulary depth

Learner English level: Beginner to advanced

Learner maturity level: High school and above

Preparation time: 10 minutes

Activity time: 15 minutes in one session, 10 minutes in another

Materials: Handout of the modified Vocabulary Knowledge Scale

The Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) is a 5-point self-report scale developed by Wesche & Paribakht (1996) that allows students to indicate how well they know items of vocabulary. It measures small gains in knowledge in order to compare the effectiveness of different vocabulary instruction techniques. The VKS utilizes the idea of vocabulary depth, the idea that there are many different aspects to knowing a word and that vocabulary acquisition means gradually building up more extensive knowledge of items. The VKS thus allows students to indicate partial knowledge of items, which allows a finer measurement of vocabulary gains.

The following activity uses a simplified version of the VKS to pre-teach vocabulary when starting a textbook unit and shows students their ongoing progress. The activity works best with units that take three or four class sessions.

Preparation

Enter 10–20 words from a forthcoming unit into the simplified VKS, as in the example overleaf (see Appendix for a blank printable copy).

Procedure

Step 1: Give each student a copy of the VKS handout. Read over the key and make sure students understand the four choices.

Step 2: Ask students to mark the appropriate column for each word. Do not allow them to use dictionaries.

Step 3: While students are working, write the following on the board:

- A → Make a sentence using the word.
- B → Explain what the word means.

Step 4: Referring to your instructions, have students work together and go through the words they marked as either A or B.