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# Comprehensive or Selective Feedback, that is the Question

A Literature Review Focusing on Writing Strategies in an  
EFL/ESL Classroom



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## Abstract

This literature review illustrates what research indicate is more preferable, comprehensive or selective written feedback in English classrooms. This is not an easy question to answer because there are some researchers who claim that even written feedback is not beneficial to EFL and ESL learners. Truscott's (1996) claim that grammatical correction should be avoided started a debate amongst researchers and the research has thereafter mainly been focusing on falsifying this claim. There are no definite answers to which feedback is better but there is evidence which shows that selective written feedback has been more effective to learners than comprehensive. However, this is only when looking at one specific grammatical feature, definitive articles. However, there has been a positive development in focused meta-linguistic feedback research which will be acknowledged. This literature review will not give any general guidelines to teachers but will try to show them the direction research are heading and which fields that are not fully investigated.

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# 1 Introduction

Feedback in the field of writing is divided into two subfields – content and form. The term form refers to grammar, or the linguistics of writing. The term content refers to the structure and organization of a text. A lot of research in the field of form feedback was triggered by Truscott's article "the case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes," which was published in 1996 and this article probably helped the increase of interest in the field. He was one of the first to oppose the established conception that feedback was helpful for the students. His article caused a debate whether and how to give non-native learners feedback on their written grammatical errors. Truscott's article is often mentioned within the field of feedback (e.g. Bates, 2011; Ashwell, 2000; Bitchener, Young, and Cameron, 2005; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, and Takashima, 2008; Lee, 2003 and Ferris, 1999) since his article has spawned a great chain reaction from the other researchers. Error correction in writing has been a subject of lively debate. Attitudes towards error correction have developed from strict avoidance in the 1960s "to a more critical view of the need and value of error correction" (Lee, 1997, p. 465). Truscott (2004) claimed that feedback on form is unnecessary and could be hurtful to EFL and ESL learners because the students may avoid using grammar constructions which they are expecting to be corrected on.

Ashwell (2000) investigated whether there were differences between students who were given feedback on content, form, both content and form or no feedback on their writing assignments. He concluded that the control group which was not given any feedback on neither content nor form did increase their results simply by redrafting. He continued by stating that the net gains for the two groups which were given content or form feedback "were no better than when no feedback was received." (p. 238). In his research he also found that there were larger gains between the first to second drafts than to the final draft and all four test groups had this in common. He pointed out that "[t]hese results would at least initially suggest that gains in content quality were less sensitive than gains in formal accuracy to the type or amount of feedback given at each stage or to whether feedback was given or not." (p. 238). Group three which was the group who did get feedback on both content and form on all three drafts were considered to "be superior to the other patterns and better than not giving any feedback. This group made the biggest overall gains in both formal accuracy and content quality." (p. 238). Ashwell constructed two follow-up tests after the main research and from the results of the second test the evidence was clear that the three patterns of form and content did not help the students to gain in content quality. He also concluded that "feedback

produced no better results than giving no feedback at all, a finding that at first sight looks rather alarming.” (p. 239).

However, Ellis et al. (2008) gave Ashwell’s investigation some critique on the fact that he “did not examine the effect of CF [Corrective Feedback] on *new* pieces of writing; that is, they only demonstrated that CF assists learners to achieve greater grammatical accuracy in a second draft of the written composition that had been corrected.” (p. 354).

Two research areas which are illustrated in the review are direct and indirect feedback. These two kinds of feedback are often compared against each other and some researchers claim that direct feedback is the most beneficial for the learners (Bitchener et al., 2005; Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen, 2007). Rouhi and Samiei (2010) investigated if indirect feedback was helpful for the students in writing and their conclusion was that it was not. However, Ghandi and Maghsoudi (2014) came to the conclusion that indirect feedback was more helpful than direct feedback in rectifying students’ spelling errors.

The main focus of this literature review is whether comprehensive or selective feedback is the most beneficial for students’ learning and most of the researchers came to the conclusion that selective feedback has more evidence of being useful for students (Bitchener et al., 2005; Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen, 2007; Ferris, 2002; Ebadi, 2014). However, most of these researchers concluded that selective feedback is effective in specific grammatical areas, definite articles and indefinite articles, and there were no convincing results in other areas.

This literature review will have its starting point with the conception that feedback in general will be fruitful and helpful for learners, however, research which will be contradictory will of course be acknowledged as well. The main purpose is to gather the research on whether selective or comprehensive is more productive for non-native learners. From the already shown research one can see that research in the field has moved on to look at different ways of studying the effects of feedback e.g. focus on feedback on content versus form; long-term or short-term effects; revision or new pieces of writing and comprehensive versus selective feedback.

## 1.1 Definitions

Teachers’ writing practice has gone through some changes the past twenty years. The previous practice was summative feedback and it has now developed to formative feedback which use summative feedback as a supplement thanks to insights gained from research studies (Hyland and Hyland, 2006). Formative feedback focuses on the student’s future

writing development and summative feedback evaluates the writing as a product. Summative feedback is still practiced amongst teachers but they use formative feedback to help students to develop their future writing. Summative assessment's main characteristics are the following, the assessment does not necessarily have to be prepared and carried out by the class teacher, it does not have to be necessarily relate immediately to what has been taught, "the judgment about a learner's performance is likely to feed into record-keeping and be used for administrative purposes, e.g. checking standards and targets, is frequently externally imposed, e.g. by and institution or ministry of education" (Hedge, 2000, p. 377). Formative assessment's main characteristics differentiate to summative, the assessment is prepared and carried out by the class teacher as a routine part of teaching and learning, it "is specifically related to what has been taught. i.e. content is in harmony with what has been taught, the information from the assessment is used diagnostically; it is focused on the individual learner's specific strengths and weaknesses, needs, etc" (Hedge, 2000, p. 377). English as a Second Language, ESL and English as a Foreign Language, EFL are two types of learning-groups which differ from each other. ESL learner do not have English as their native language but they are learning English in a country where English is an official language, India for example. EFL learners do not have English as their native language and English is not an official language in their country, Sweden for example. This literature review will look examples from both ESL and EFL studies.

The term corrective feedback (CF) refers to any type of feedback a learner may receive from a teacher or educator when the student has made a mistake or error in their writing (Russel and Spada, 2006).

Direct, or explicit, feedback in writing refers to a teacher who detects an error and writes the correct form beside the error. Indirect feedback refers to a teacher who instead indicates to the student that one or several errors have been made and gives the grammatical rules for the error, the student will thereby find the error themselves and correct them (Bitchener et al. 2005).

Metalinguistic feedback refers to a teacher who does not simply write the correct target form instead the teacher provides "some kind of metalinguistic clue as to the nature of the error that has been committed and the correction needed" (Ellis et al. 2008, p. 356). Metalinguistic feedback helps the learner to understand the nature of the error which has been committed and usually gives some examples of the correct version.

Comprehensive- (also referred to as unfocused and extensive) and selective (or focused) feedback both refer to teachers who give feedback on student's writing.

Comprehensive feedback is what most ESL and EFL teachers practice and it refers to a teacher who corrects all the errors in a learner's written work (Ellis et al. 2008). Selective feedback refers to a teacher who selects specific errors to be corrected and ignores other errors. Selective feedback can be specified to one error type (e.g. errors in the use of the past simple) or "target more than one error type but will still restrict correction to a limited number of pre-selected types (e.g. simple past tense; articles; prepositions)" (Ellis et al. 2008, p. 356). Researchers refer to these two terms inconsistently but this literature review will use the terms comprehensive- and selective feedback throughout the literature review.

## 2 Literature Review

Bitchener et al. (2005) focused on selective feedback with 53 post-intermediate (migrant) students at a New Zealand university. The question they wanted answered was whether corrective feedback on linguistic errors determines accuracy performance in new pieces of writing. They divided the 53 students into three groups, the different groups were given: feedback with a sit-down with a teacher for revision and time for clarification, direct written feedback with explicit corrections above the underlined errors and the last group did not get any feedback at all. The study focused only on writing and the participants were asked to write four short essays which would contain approximately 250 words in every essay during a 12 week period.

The results of the study revealed that students who received feedback and time with a teacher made the greatest improvement overall. The group which only received written feedback had only slight better result than the group which did not get any feedback. Bitchener et al. did also look at different grammatical errors such as the past simple tense, prepositions and the definite article. The three groups did not make any significant improvements with the past simple tense nor prepositions. However the test group, which received feedback with a sit-down with a teacher, improved much more than the other two test groups in enhancing their usage of definite articles. The group which only received direct written feedback improved as well when compared to the group which did not get any feedback.

Bitchener et al. discussed Truscott's (1996) claim "that the provision of corrective feedback on L2 writing is ineffective" (p.201). They replied to Truscott that a

*"measurement of the effect of particular types of feedback on a single grouping of several error categories is not helpful. The results of our*

*investigation into the effects of different types of feedback on individual linguistic features suggests that this type of examination is more fruitful because it acknowledges the fact that different linguistic categories represent separate domains of knowledge and that they are acquired through different stages and processes”*

(p. 201).

Bitchener et al. thereby say that when looking at grammatical error feedback researchers cannot make a general conclusion when looking at different grammatical error areas because when EFL learners are learning they learn different areas at different stages.

Bitchener et al. claims that the reason behind the different results between the three grammatical error areas (prepositions, the past simple tense and the definite article) exists because the past simple tense and the definite article are more “treatable” than prepositions. They strengthen their claim by citing Ferris (1999) and illustrating that “prepositions are more idiosyncratic” (p. 201) than the past simple tense and the definite article. They go on by stating that the simple tense and the definite article can more easily be explained and understood by grammatical rules and clarification by a teacher. They suggest that this is the reason for the lack of improvement the students had with the prepositions considering that the two test groups which received feedback did not enhance their preposition usage more than the students which did not received any feedback. Bitchener (2008) developed his earlier study from 2005 to investigate more thoroughly selective direct feedback. In this study the focus was only on the students’ use of articles. The students which were in the study were divided into groups of four. The first group received direct feedback with written and oral meta-linguistic explanations. The second group was given the same feedback as the first group but without oral explanation and the third group received only direct feedback. The fourth group was not given any feedback and this group was therefore the control group. Bitchener’s study revealed a significant improvement amongst all feedback groups, compared to the control group. The level of performance was retained two months later this give, the indication that direct feedback improves students’ long-term language acquisition as well as short-term.

A recent study made by Rouhi and Samiei (2010) investigated if focused and unfocused indirect corrective feedback affect accuracy in EFL writing differently. They came to the conclusion that their focused grammatical area – simple past tense (regular and irregular) – was not improved by using focused or unfocused indirect corrective feedback

compared to the control group which did not receive any feedback. Important to note is the fact that they only investigated indirect CF and not direct CF, however, the fact that the control group performed equally to the two test groups baffled Rouhi and Samiei. They therefore came to agree with Truscott's (2007) claim that unfocused feedback could be damaging to students because of the time the teacher spend lesson time on CF instead using the time on grammar instructions or exemplification of the targeted grammatical feature.

Another study made by Ellis et al (2008) set-out to provide evidence that CF is effective in an EFL context. Their study "compared the effects of focused and unfocused written CF on the accuracy with which Japanese university students used the English indefinite and definite articles to denote first and anaphoric reference in written narratives." (p. 353). They came to the conclusion that comprehensive and selective CF directed at using the indefinite and definite articles were no statistically differences between the two groups in either writing tests or the error correction test. However, they stated that there was some evidence that suggested that selective CF would be more effective in the long run compared to the comprehensive group considering that the comprehensive group did not show any improvement with their usage of indefinite and definite articles in the post-tests but the selective group did. Ellis et al. concluded with the statement "all we can say is that CF can assist learners to develop greater control over grammatical features which are amenable to rules of thumb" (p. 368). This suggests that "simple" or more easily treatable grammatical areas are improved with the usage of CF as opposed to the more complex grammatical areas. Furthermore, Ellis et al. (2008) claimed that a few other recent studies indicated that written CF is effective when English articles are investigated, and this in turn strengthens the case for teachers providing written CF. Ferris (2006) (as cited in Hyland and Hyland, 2006) showed that students "made statistically significant reductions in their total number of errors over a semester in five major grammar categories with a particular reduction in verb and lexical errors" (Hyland and Hyland, 2006, p. 85). Sheen (2007) found clear evidence that direct correction and especially direct metalinguistic correction had positive effects on the learning of English articles. Sheen's research also came to the conclusion that direct correction with metalinguistic comments outperformed direct correction without metalinguistic comments. Ghandi and Maghsoudi (2014) investigated amongst 56 high school sophomores if direct or indirect feedback was more beneficial for the students' spelling errors. Their conclusion was that indirect feedback helped the students more than direct feedback. This study was conducted in Iran and Ghandi and Maghsoudi stated that students benefit more from

correcting their own spelling errors because “they become aware of their recurring errors” (p. 59).

Bitchener et al.’s study found that the students’ performances were not in “a linear and upward pattern of improvement from one time to another.” (p. 201). The students would make correct grammatical usage in one draft and make mistakes in the same linguistic area in the next draft. This was something Bitchener et al. were prepared to find because of the earlier research in this field, see Ellis, (1994).

However, Truscott (2007) gave Bitchener et al.’s article some critique on the fact that the group that did not get any feedback had 192 fewer hours of instruction overall than the oral-written correction group. The three test groups were not comparable because of the difference in teacher instruction time. This critique does not dismiss Bitchener et al.’s findings, however, this is something one should have in mind when reviewing his study.

Truscott (2004) made an important point that EFL/ESL learners may avoid grammar constructions which are expected to be error corrected, this is a type of avoidance strategy and this could in some occasions affect the learner’s acquisition negatively. He suggests that when students are being corrected on their errors students will be given additional work and this leads to an additional incentive for avoidance. Ellis et al. (2008) took notice of this behavior and therefore examined the number of obligatory occasions the use of articles were being used in their study, and there was not a decrease instead there was an increase, they therefore reached the conclusion that both comprehensive (unfocused) and selective (focused) feedback were positive for the learners’ acquisition because of the two groups increased correct use of articles.

There are several findings which point to the belief that selective feedback is more effective towards grammar acquisition and long-term learning (Lee, 2003; Ellis et al., 2008; and Bitchener et al., 2005). Ellis et al. concluded in their study that

*“[t]here are solid theoretical reasons for believing that focused CF will be more effective than unfocused CF. Learners are more likely to attend to corrections directed at a single (or a limited number of) error type(s) and more likely to develop a clearer understanding of the nature of the error and the correction needed.”*

(p. 356).

Local English syllabus and error correction literature are still recommending teachers to mark errors comprehensively despite of Ellis et al.'s claim and teachers tend to treat error feedback as a task with little long-term significance (Lee, 2003). Lee also claims that even though teachers "are spending a massive amount of time marking student writing, teachers themselves are not totally convinced that their effort pays off in terms of student improvement" (p. 216). This is something which is quite unsettling considering the teachers themselves are not "totally convinced" in their practice and the result of this insecurity is probably not going to be beneficial for the students. If a teacher does not believe fully in their practice the students will probably notice this and take less notice of the feedback. A survey was constructed to see if teachers were focusing on direct or indirect feedback and Lee concluded that teachers were more focused on the direct feedback and not the long-term benefits which can come from indirect feedback. Lee did follow-up interviews after her survey with 19 teachers and amongst these were twelve practicing comprehensive marking but they stated that they would prefer selective marking. In Lee's study the reasons for comprehensive marking were:

- *Teachers want to look at the overall performance of students*
- *The errors made by junior form students are basic and have to be pointed out*
- *When the compositions are not too long (e.g., for junior forms), comprehensive marking is manageable*
- *Students prefer comprehensive marking to selective marking*
- *Teachers are considered lazy if they do not mark all student errors*
- *Students have to rely on teachers to tell them what errors they have made*
- *If teachers don't mark all errors, students do not know what kinds of errors they have made*
- *It is the teachers' duty to mark all student errors*
- *Parents want teachers to mark all errors*

(Lee, 2003, p. 221)

Considering the above interview sum-up, teachers who want to be selective in their marking could probably feel a lack of responsibility because the students most often demand to be comprehensively corrected (Lee, 2003). Ferris (2006) (as cited in Hyland and Hyland, 2006)

claims that teachers tend to mark “treatable” (verbs, subject-verb agreement, noun endings and articles errors) indirectly and “untreatable” (word choice and word order) errors directly because teachers believe “students are unable to self-correct untreatable errors marked indirectly” (Hyland and Hyland, 2006, p. 85). Teachers who practiced or favored selective marking stated these reasons:

- *Can save time*
- *Students can focus on specific areas*
- *Compositions are long*
- *Heavy workload*
- *Even if teachers mark all errors, students will still make the same errors next time/students are not learning from their errors*
- *Students cannot remember what teachers have marked*
- *Marking all errors cannot really help students improve grammatical accuracy*
- *Teachers are not marking machines. They should spend more time on teaching and lesson preparation*
- *Students are not happy when they get back their compositions full of red marks*
- *Not all students can handle comprehensive marking – e.g., for those students who have a large number of errors in writing, comprehensive marking is overwhelming and demotivating*

(Lee, 2003, pp. 221-222)

One of the interviewed teachers gave an insightful statement on why comprehensive marking is inefficient. “Even if I mark all the errors, they still make the same types of mistakes next time” (Lee, 2003, p. 222). Hyland and Hyland (2006) states that surveys of ESL students show signs that these students “greatly value teacher written feedback and consistently rate it more highly than alternative forms such as peer and oral feedback” (p. 87).

Evans, Hartshorn and Tuioti (2010) made an extensive qualitative survey amongst language teachers, they asked the teachers if they typically provide error correction to students’ writing 99 % of all respondents (1053 participants) indicated that they do provide at least some error correction on student writing, however, 1 % (10 participants) stated that they

never provide any error correction. 903 teachers stated that they spent 61 % of their time to provide feedback on content and rhetorical feature of their students' writing. Amongst those few teachers who do not practice error correction stated these reasons why they did not error correct, the parenthesis is how many teachers who stated this reason.

1. *Content, organization, and rhetoric are more important than linguistic accuracy. (26 %)*
2. *Students should take care of grammar errors by themselves. (23%)*
3. *Error correction is not effective. (11%)*
4. *Context is not appropriate for error correction. (10%)*
5. *Don't want to overwhelm, threaten, or discourage students. (9%)*
6. *Others should help students with grammar errors. (6%)*
7. *Process writing suggests that grammar errors come last. (5%)*

(Evans et al., 2010, p. 59).

When comparing these reasons to the responses Lee (2003) received from her survey one can see a correlation with too much workload on teachers can lead to a negative trend towards corrective feedback. Interestingly, reason number three is a response to the fact that there are not convincing evidence that error correction is actually working, one teacher stated "Ferris has as of yet been unable to prove her point... go Truscott!" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 5). This teacher is right in his or her point but there is convincing evidence that corrective feedback is more beneficial to students' acquisition than the abandonment of feedback (Bitchener et al., 2005; Ellis et al., 2008; Ferris, 2003; Lee, 1997; and Ebadi, 2014). Teachers who answered with "[d]on't want to overwhelm, threaten, or discourage students" may think that their corrective feedback is not accomplishing anything because their students do not respond well to too much error correction, if these teachers would try to adapt a more selective corrective feedback approach the teachers and their students would probably gain much more from corrective feedback. On the other hand, the majority of teachers stated that they do correct errors and their main three reasons were, the parenthesis is how many teachers who stated this reason.

1. *It helps students. (45%)*
2. *Students expect it. (22%)*
3. *Students need it. (17%)*

(Evans et al., 2010, pp. 60-61).

These results indicate that the majority of teachers, from this survey at least, think that WCF (Written Corrective Feedback) help their students in a positive way and it is these people's insight and arguments which would be prioritized because of their close relationship with the question at hand (Evans et al. 2010). They stated that there was a "keen interest" towards WCF amongst the practitioners and that 85% of the respondents requested the summary of the survey (p. 63). They conclude with the statement "that there is causation between WCF and greater linguistic accuracy" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 66). Ferris states that error feedback may be most effective" when it focuses on patterns of error, allowing teachers and students to attend to, say, two or three major error types at a time, rather than dozens of disparate errors" (Ferris, 2002, p. 50). Statistics from Lee's study revealed that only 22 % of the teachers indicated that the major principle of selection was related to students' specific needs. However, the Education Department of Hong Kong recommends in the English syllabus that selective marking should be based on students' needs. When looking at the Swedish Curriculum for the Upper Secondary school there are no traces of guidance to teachers on whether they were supposed to be selective or comprehensive in their written feedback, see (Skolverket, 2014). Direct feedback may be more appropriate for lower-level students, therefore should teachers experiment with a wider range of error feedback techniques to students that need help to locate their own errors (Lee, 2003). The majority of the interviewed teachers said that they would go through the students' common errors in class when the students' written assignments had been corrected. This indicates that the teachers would compile the students' most common grammatical errors and take some lesson time to go-through the grammatical areas where the students have need of explicit explanation. Other methods, such as conferencing with students or making students record their errors in error logs were not a common practice amongst the teachers even though these methods may help the students' language acquisition in the long run (Lee, 2003). Lee's findings "suggest that teachers tend to treat error feedback as a task with little long-term significance." (p. 231). With the average of 9 % of the teachers "thought that their students were making 'good' progress. When teachers are spending an inordinate amount of time on error feedback and yet feel that students are not making good progress, one could not help but ask: Does the existing error feedback policy pay off?" (Lee, 2003, p 226.) There is some light at the end of the tunnel because there are other strategies teachers can use to help their students to locate and correct their errors independently, peer and self-editing workshops are two examples of

strategies teachers can use to lighten their workload and maybe improve the students' self-correcting skills (Lee, 2003). Ferris and Roberts (2001) arrived to the conclusion that their two test groups which were given feedback to self-edit their work outperformed the control group which did not get any feedback. The two test groups' errors were either marked with codes from five different error categories or in the same five categories underlined but not otherwise marked or labeled.

One of the most recent studies is Ebadi (2014), she investigated if focused Meta-linguistic highlighted feedback had possible effects on grammatical accuracy of writing. Her study consisted of 60 participants which were Iranian intermediate EFL learners. She divided them into two groups, one would only receive "traditional" feedback and the other group would receive focused meta-linguistic feedback upon their drafts. The group which received focused meta-linguistic feedback would get explicit grammar rules and exact references to the place in the text where the error was located. The researchers/teachers would also have mini-lessons where they illustrated, discussed and exemplified grammar rules with the students in small groups.

The two groups were pre-tested on their proficiency so they were as homogenous as possible. Ebadi came to the conclusion that the focused meta-linguistic group outperformed the "traditional" group. She claimed that selective meta-linguistic CF could be used for instructional purposes as well as revising students writing. The reason behind her claim was that the students became more independent learners and they developed autonomy through this selective meta-linguistic CF. However, she concluded that one could not generalize the results to all L2 writing contexts but she stated that selective meta-linguistic CF "would most probably be more efficacious in comparison with the traditional based corrective feedback." (Ebadi, 2014, p. 882). Furthermore, Ebadi wanted language researchers, professors and university teachers to "help each other to enhance and develop focused meta-linguistic corrective feedback for all areas of study." (p. 882). One can draw the conclusion that Ebadi is convinced that focused meta-linguistic corrective feedback is the best way for EFL and ESL teachers to practice.

### 3 Conclusion

This literature review has tried to exemplify and illustrate the major research areas in the field of feedback or more specifically selective and comprehensive feedback. There are many factors one has to consider when looking at these two types of feedback. One has to first establish if feedback is helpful for EFL and ESL learners' language acquisition? With the reviewed literature at hand, I concluded that the evidence in feedback's favor triumphs over the belief that feedback in general is not helpful for students' language acquisition. Most of the reviewed studies show that feedback is helpful for students and that it is a great tool for teachers to practice (Ashwell, 2000; Bitchener et al., 2005; Ellis et., 2008; Sheen, 2007; Ferris, 2002; Ebadi, 2014). When investigating if selective or comprehensive feedback is better than the other one has to consider these factors.

- Should the feedback be on content or form? Or both?
- Should the feedback be direct or indirect?
- Should the feedback be given comprehensively or selective?
- In the case of selective feedback, which grammatical areas focused?

Ashwell (2000) investigated if feedback should be given on content, form, both content and form or no feedback on their writing. He concluded that the test group which was given feedback on both content and form improved the most in comparison to the other groups in both formal accuracy and content quality. However, he stated that “[i]t seems that the content can be improved simply by rewriting” (p. 244). This begs the question, is feedback on content necessary for students when they are writing? Ashwell does not think feedback on content is helping the student more than simply rewriting so one can draw the conclusion that form should be further investigated in the case of selective or comprehensive feedback.

The case of indirect or direct feedback most of the illustrated research is showing evidence that direct feedback is more helpful than indirect feedback (Bitchener et al., 2005; Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen, 2007). Rouhi and Samiei (2010) came to the conclusion that indirect feedback did not help their students with improving the simple past tense (regular and irregular) whether or not the feedback was given selectively or comprehensively. However, Ghandi and Maghsoudi (2014) came to the conclusion that indirect feedback was more helpful than direct feedback in rectifying students' spelling errors. Researcher has also investigated if metalinguistic correction is more beneficial than direct feedback and Sheen (2007) came to the conclusion that metalinguistic comments outperformed direct correction

without metalinguistic comments. If direct or indirect feedback is better than the other remains unproven and therefore should no general conclusions be drawn, however, research has shown that direct metalinguistic comments are a better practice than direct feedback.

Something which has not been addressed amongst the researchers is the fact that when considering different grammatical areas for selective feedback one has to look at the learners' native language. The native language of the learner may probably influence how easily or how difficult it is for the student to acquire the target language. If the native language is from the same "language family" as the target language the learning process will probably be easier. When learners from the Germanic language family are learning English the learning process will probably be easier than for the Sino-Tibetan language family because English is from the Germanic language family. If there are similar rules when considering for example articles between the two languages the process of acquiring the targeted grammatical feature may be easier than for learners with no similar rules for the targeted grammatical feature (Tomasello and Herron, 1989).

Both Lee's (2003) and Evans et al.'s (2010) investigations interviewed teachers on their working practices. These interviews are important for this literature review because they show us how the teachers are actually working with error correction. From Evans et al.'s survey 99 % of all respondents indicated that they do provide at least some error correction on student writing. This is a very promising indication because the teachers also stated that the feedback helped the students. From these results one can draw the conclusion that teachers feel that their WCF helps the students and that the time the teachers use for WCF should not be rearranged.

Truscott (1996) claimed that grammar correction in L2 writing classes should be abandoned. This is a serious claim and many researchers have proven that certain grammatical areas (such as, indefinite- and definite articles) will be improved by feedback from a teacher (Bitchener et al., 2005; Sheen, 2011; Ellis et al., 2008). Important to note is the fact that all three studies Sheen's, Ellis et al.'s and Bitchener et al.'s have all investigated the same grammatical feature – English articles – therefore can no general assumption be made. Researchers should therefore investigate which other grammatical areas than English articles are more efficient when using selective feedback. Ellis et al. also agrees with this, they want researchers to investigate if teachers should give corrective feedback on a single error at a time or whether they can address several different errors when they correct. Bitchener et al.'s study was conducted before Ellis et al.'s and Bitchener et al. looked at three grammatical areas and they only found a positive response to one. They did not specifically investigate if

teachers can address several different errors when they correct but their research surrounded three grammatical areas.

Ferris (2002) stated that error feedback may be most effective when the feedback is focused on patterns of error, this will allow teachers and learners to attend to two or three major error types at a time. This statement sounds logical because when students get their error corrected papers back they will probably feel a decrease of motivation if the paper is full of red line and they will probably have some difficulties with focusing on all the different problem areas. If the teacher pre-select two or three patterns of error the feedback will probably not be too overwhelming for the students and they will more easily focus on these pre-selected errors (Lee, 2003). This could be a question for further investigation, if the two to three patterns of error feedback will be effective and if the students' motivation will increase or decrease with this kind of practice.

Bitchener et al. arrived to the conclusion that direct oral feedback in combination with direct written feedback improved students' accuracy it also was more preferable when improving more "treatable" grammatical areas such as the past simple tense and the definite article. Bitchener et al. furthermore states that "L2 writing teacher [should] provide their learners with both oral feedback as well as written feedback on the more "treatable" types of linguistic error on a regular basis." (p. 202). Sheen (2011) strengthens this claim by stating "focused error correction does lead to gains in linguistic accuracy and also that the more explicit the feedback is, the bigger the benefit is for the students." (p. 14). The question is not if comprehensive or selective feedback is more advantageous than the other, Ellis et al. want to know "if CF is effective when it addresses a number of different errors, it would be advantageous to adopt this approach".(p. 367). They have already arrived to the conclusion that selective feedback is more beneficial to students learning than comprehensive feedback. Ellis et al. (2005) made an interesting suggestion, that most of the written CF studies have examined comprehensive correction or feedback. The studies which have shown positive results in feedback's favor have been selective CF and they have been focusing on grammatical features. They even make the suggestion that unfocussed (comprehensive) CF could be damaging to students, this claim is also supported by Truscott (2007).

This literature review's main question is whether selective or comprehensive feedback is preferable and from the gathered research the evidence is in selective feedback's favor. Feedback which is selected at grammatical features are one of the few studies which show a clear evidence of improved acquisition amongst the students and therefore should the conclusion be that selective feedback is preferable. To conclude, the ultimate goal of any error

correction and feedback should always be to equip students with a range of strategies and tools to help them become more independent self-editors and better language learners (Lee, 1997).

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