

Enhancing College Students' Descriptive Writings through Facebook Indirect Corrective Feedback (A Case Study at Two Higher Education Institutions in Jakarta)

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ABSTRACT

No doubt that Facebook is so famous among college students to form collaboration among peers and lecturers instantly. This study investigates on how Facebook could facilitate lecturers' indirect corrective feedbacks on students' descriptive writings and how the students made progress in their writings by counting on the lecturers' indirect corrective feedbacks. The samples of this study were 20 students from two higher institutions in Jakarta, i.e. Bina Nusantara University and Multimedia Nusantara University. All of samples took writing classes and used Facebook while sharing the writing process with the lecturers and their peers. To gather the data, the open-ended questionnaires were addressed to the 20 students in order to validate the findings. Then, the data were analyzed descriptively. The findings reveals that indirect corrective feedbacks from the lecturers posted on students' Facebook wall were helpful to reduce grammatical errors made by the students in their descriptive writings as well assist the students to improve the final draft paper. Thus, the use of Facebook is considered effective to accommodate the process of enhancing students' writings.

Keywords: indirect corrective feedback, Facebook, descriptive writing

1 INTRODUCTION

Writing feedbacks is always a tricky business for many EFL lecturers. Vague remarks on the writing can overwhelm the students, and at the end it will demotivated the pupils to like writing tasks. In addition, the students can sometimes misused the feedback when it is clear and direct by doing copy paste the feedback instantly without considering the reasons of making that mistakes. As Williams (2003) states that "the vast majority of students does not record nor study the mistakes noted in the feedback". In other words, giving comments on the students' errors explicitly is ineffective since most of the students often ignore it.

Because written feedback is crucial to develop the students' writing, most of writing courses offered to the university students enforce the lecturers to provide writing feedbacks on any students' writing products. The lecturers can apply certain kinds of the feedback methods, which are classified into two common methods: Direct Feedback and Indirect Feedback. Then, the feedback methods can be applied orally or written.

For university students, writing is one of prerequisite subject that should be mastered. Every universities sets up its English standard for its graduates, including in the two universities: Bina Nusantara (BINUS) University and Multimedia Nusantara University (UMN), where this study takes place. All graduates from these universities

are required to pass a standardized English proficiency tests, such as IBT TOEFL and TOEIC. Besides, the need to provide the students with writing skills is to assist the students in doing lots of academic assignments like papers, reports, articles, theses, and other written tasks during studying.

From time to time, feedback exchanges are exploited in many channels like F2F, emails, and paper correspondences. Unfortunately, with a huge number of students providing feedbacks through those channels are considered worthless and inefficient. Most of lecturers feel exhausted with the process of correcting the students' writing by commenting directly. That's why in many cases, lecturers in most of universities, including from two universities: BINUS and UMN, like to employ Indirect Feedback method than Direct Feedback. Indirect feedback is used to help the students realize the errors they made and able to do self-revision on it. As McKay (2013) points out that "Indirect Feedback means that the teacher provides the students with some indication that an error exists in their writing". By giving feedback indirectly, the lecturers help the students to study the errors stated on the writing. The students can re-read the lecturers' and the peers' remarks anytime and could respond it on time. So, it will be more efficient for the students to improve the writings after gaining some comments.

To be more effective and in assessing the students' writing, the lecturers of the two institutions make used the social networking sites as Facebook, Line, What's Up and etc. However, in this study the research will just take a look on the use of Facebook as a tool of communicating written feedbacks for the students from BINUS and UMN. Facebook is chosen to be the tools of feedback exchanges because it is popular and has tremendous users in the world. Also, the lecturers can monitor and controlled the information shared in the Facebook. Furthermore, Facebook is more secure since it provides Closed Group Platform where only members can open and share the information on its walls.

Based on the facts above, this research paper seeks to investigate to what extent the indirect feedbacks exposed in Facebook can improve the writing performances of the students' from the two universities; i.e. BINUS and UMN. The study is also conducted in order to give insights for the lecturers from the two universities about the common errors typically produced in writings by the students from different universities, i.e. BINUS and UMN.

1.1 Statement of Problems

This study formulate the research question as follows:

1. What sorts of errors did the students make before and after obtaining indirect feedbacks from peers and the lecturers?
2. To what extent do the students' descriptive writing improve after receiving Indirect Feedback?

1.2 Aims of the Study

This study has the following aims as follows:

1. To identify types of errors the respondents make before and after obtaining indirect feedbacks.
2. To find out what improvements the students made in the descriptive writing after having indirect feedback.

1.3 Significance of the study

This research could provide useful information on the issue of Writing Feedbacks. Furthermore, the study would be beneficial for the lecturers or the teachers, to promote Autonomous Learning in the large classes. In addition, this study would be useful for any EFL learners or language learner to become an independent learner who knows how to do self-correction of any writings produced.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Enhancing students' writing skills are tedious task for most of universities lecturers. It is due to a fact that the students tend to like Speaking than Writing. Majority of students also have problems to order the ideas logically and structurally correct. In addition, the university students, especially in the first and second year consider writing just like a process of messaging or texting. The writings are sloppy and very short. The worse is the students keep using the informal language and do not care with the grammar or the structures of the sentences produced. That's why many EFL lecturers are sometimes feeling guilty when the assessment should be made fairly.

A common type writing that often challenges the English lecturer to comment on it is Descriptive Writing. As Purdue OWL (2016) states that "descriptive writing is a genre of an essay that ask students to describe something that needed to be appealing to the senses of the readers. To do so, the writers or the students should embellish the moment with senses". Therefore, in other words descriptive writing allows the students to present information about a thing vividly by relying on the students' five senses, i.e. see, smell, hear, touch, and taste. By knowing how to describe a thing or presenting information about a thing, the students have learned how to report or present an idea, how to describe a setting of research, how to make a brief summary of a text or literature, and how to list measurements. In short, the students need the basic skills of writing to equip the beginning of academic life.

Yet, assessing writing such as descriptive writing, is often tiresome. Lecturers should use an appropriate written correction approach to be efficient and effective. Moreover, the lecturers need to assure the students that writing process should focus not only on the final product of writings, but also on the process of composing the writing. In this case, a student must write several drafts and gets feedback on every draft the student made. The students must do revisions based on the lecturers and peers' comments given between first draft and final draft to improve the writing quality. Ferris (2003) mentions that "Teachers feedback can and often does help student writers to improve their writing from one draft to the next and over time. In short, writing is not an

instant process which involves several stages of writing development called “The Process-Oriented Writing” (Grabbe and Kaplan, 1996).

2.1 Types of Feedback in Written Correction

Teaching writing to students involves the process of giving feedback to correct or revise the students' drafts. The goal of giving feedback to students' writings is to concern with information that can enhance the writing performance. Ur (1996) says that “In the context of teaching in general, feedback is information that is given to the learner about his or her performance of the learning task, usually with the objective of improving their performance”. Supporting Ur (1996), Roger (2001) mentions that “Feedback is not just about weaknesses. Student will respond if teachers are encouraging as well as allowing mistakes, emerging capabilities, and give ideas for directing further learning”. Therefore, feedback is really vital to facilitate the students to learn to do self-evaluation, to be confident of the writing tasks, and to improve performance of the writing.

Two common methods that often used by the writing lecturers are direct and indirect feedback. Direct feedback is the techniques to correct the students' writing errors by giving feedback on the errors explicitly. For example: A student writes *‘Yesterday I borrow book from the library’*. The lecturer, then, corrects the mistake directly by crossing the word ‘borrow’ and writes the word ‘borrowed’ above the error word. Lee (2005) defines direct feedback as “when the correct form is written on students' paper”. On the contrary, indirect feedback is feedback that given to alert the students on the errors made on the writings by underlining, circling, or using error symbols or codes. So, the lecturer does not write any corrections on the students' paper. The lecturer asks the students to fix the error implicitly. For example, the student writes *‘Yesterday I borrow book from the library’*. Then, to correct the error made by the student, the lecturer will cross out the word ‘borrow’ and write VT above the error. When the student see the teacher comment, the student recognize the error and fix it by changing the word into ‘borrowed’. In this case, the indirect feedback functions as a tool to promote autonomous learning. As McKay (2013) says “indirect feedback require the students to monitor their own errors and try to fix the errors on their own”. That's why indirect feedback utilizes more often than direct feedback in the university level.

2.2 Exchanging Feedback through Social Networking Sites

In education system, feedback is believed as an effective tool to enhance learning because it provides channel communication between all parties, i.e. students and students or students and teachers. Hattie and Timperly (2007) as quoted in Kio (2015, p.136) mentions that “feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement, and can be used to enhance effectiveness in the classroom”. In other words, effective learning may take place when the lecture and the student share constructive feedback through lots of interactions.

It is believed that learning is a social process. The growth of the students' learning lies on the amount of interaction the students build with the lecture and the peers. As Peterson & Deal (2010) views that "learning as a social cultural event that emphasized interaction within a class, not only between the teacher and the students, but also between the students themselves". Therefore the emergence of social networking sites as Facebook is considered as a solution to stay connected with other people, i.e. the lecturers and the peers. Through social networking sites as Facebook, there will no limitation to expect feedbacks for every user of the social networking sites because the sites are so popular not only among the lecturers but also the students. Connections can be built among the lists of friends the user has. Kio (2015, p. 138) states that "Every member in the model is able to create a path to any other member, thereby achieving peer discourse and generating their social presence". Additionally, the use of social networking sites, i.e. Facebook in the learning process has grown rapidly. A lot of researches have exaggerated the communication pattern between the teacher and the students in learning process, but only one recent research done by Kio (2015) that specifies on applying social networking sites as medium for writing feedbacks. Kio's findings indicate that Social Networking Sites can be an efficient feedback tool, when properly administered by the teachers and actively supported by the students.

3 METHODOLOGY

This research employed 20 students from two higher institutions: BINUS and UMN as the population of respondents. All the students involved were taken Academic Writing classes and English in Focus. The respondents were chosen randomly and were not segmented in terms of gender and year of academic. These respondents were asked to write descriptive essays and uploaded to the Facebook Closed Group administered by two lecturers from the two institutions. Unfortunately, only 8 students were completely done the tasks by submitting first and final drafts. Therefore, the eight students were accounted for the data.

3.1 Data Collection Procedure

To gather the data of this research, two Facebook groups were set up by the two lectures who belong to different universities. The groups only allowed the members, who technically were respondents of the study, to post drafts of descriptive essays and together with the lecturers or the administrator of the Facebook group were commenting on each essay posted. The comments from the lecturers were given at the last after all members of the each group commented on it. Members of each group were free to give feedbacks, either content or mechanic writings like grammar or spelling. After receiving feedbacks, the respondents or the students should fix the draft's problems and uploaded again to the Facebook Group. The lecturers, then, clustering the students' drafts into two categories: before revision and after revision. Then, the lecturers checks the writing drafts

using Paperrater.Com to double check the errors noticed by the members of the Facebook group.

3.2 Instruments

In this study, the researchers used two instruments for collecting the data and one for analyzing the data. First is Facebook, one of popular social networking sites in the world. Facebook was used because all participants had Facebook accounts and often used it for sharing with others. Second is Paperrater.com. This software application was used because it has complete features of writing's assessment such as spelling, grammar, and scores. Finally, the statistical tool as Percentage, used for verifying the differences numbers of error made by the respondents before and after getting indirect feedback.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

There were three major errors made by the respondents: spelling, grammar, and punctuations. For detailed, it can be seen from the following graphs as follows:

4.1 Types of Errors Made Before and After Indirect Feedback

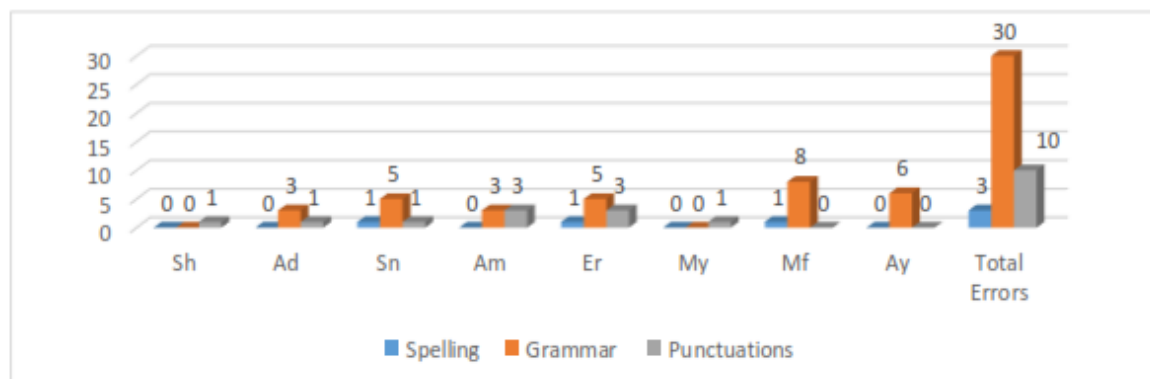


Chart 1. Types of Errors Produced Before Obtaining Indirect Feedback

The chart reveals that the students of the two universities made grammatical mistakes a lot (30 errors) than the other two mistakes, i.e. spelling (3 errors) and punctuation (10 errors). This indicates that majority of the respondents have problems with grammar. The problems with grammar are mostly found in terms of *articles*, *verb-tenses* and *preposition*. Take for example articles. The errors happened due to the

inexistence of articles in the students' mother tongue, which is Indonesian. In Indonesian, missing articles will not mislead the conveyed meaning.

e.g. *There's also **alternative cinema** like *Kinosaurus in Kemang* instead of 'There's also an **alternative cinema** like *Kinosaurus in Kemang*'.*

As Shoebottom (2016) said that "mechanical errors seldom interfere comprehension but can reflect negatively on the writer, particularly in formal/academic settings. In short, grammar mistakes in writing may not always disrupt the understanding, but it could indicate that the writer are the low proficient writer.

After obtaining Indirect Feedback from peers and the lecturers, the students in this study designated less errors than the previous. The students still made mistakes, but it reduced in numbers, as seen in the next graph as follows:

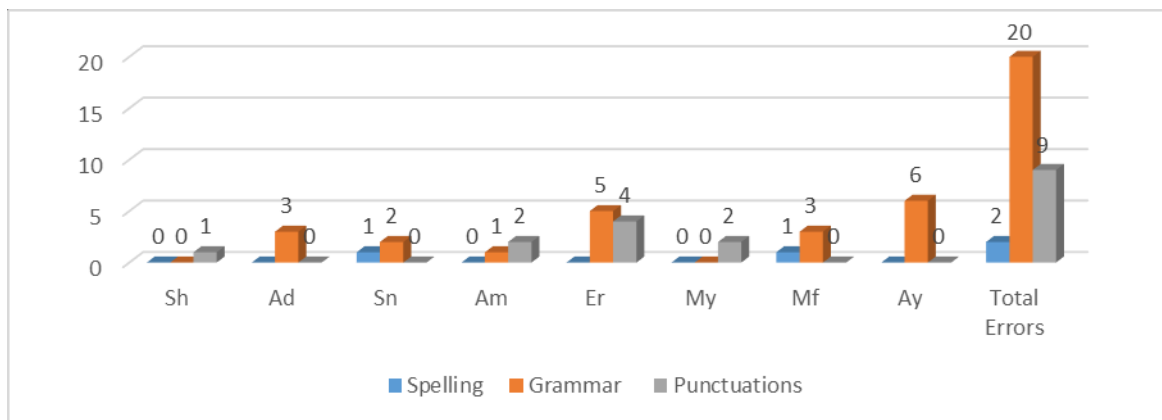


Chart 2. Types of Errors Produced After Obtaining Indirect Feedback

The results show that the respondents or the students of BINUS and UMN were still made errors of spelling, grammar and punctuations. However, the number of errors reduced 1 point for spelling, 10 points for grammar, and 1 point for punctuation. Nonetheless, grammatical error were still higher among the other two. The majority of grammatical errors found on preposition. The students misplace the preposition 'on' and 'in'.

e.g. *Because of his capabilities, Young is known as a multitalented artist that could make a band and do a lot of roles **on** his own care. (**Incorrect: misused 'on' instead of 'in'**).*

Misused preposition happened because the students concentrate more word to word into English than a string of word. Then, it becomes a tricky problem for the students since prepositions can be compounded words such as 'result in', 'differ from', 'in charge of', and etc. In addition, the native language of the students, i.e. Indonesian, often interfere the comprehension of the students toward the preposition. Like the example above, the students selected the preposition 'on' instead of 'in' because the

students thought 'on' means 'with'. The students did not realize that a preposition may have different function depends on the context. It is really different from the students' native language which only admit a single meaning for a preposition. Thus, it is necessary for the students to consult a dictionary before using a preposition in the sentence in order to minimize the false usage. It, then, in accordance to Koffi (2010, p. 229) that mentions "Prepositions are generally Polysemous, a semantic characteristic of words that have multiple meanings".

4.2 Improvements from Indirect Feedback

Based on the data, it is clear that the students made progress on the final writings after accepting the indirect feedback given by the lecturers and the peers. The scores were improved as it can be seen from the graph as follows:

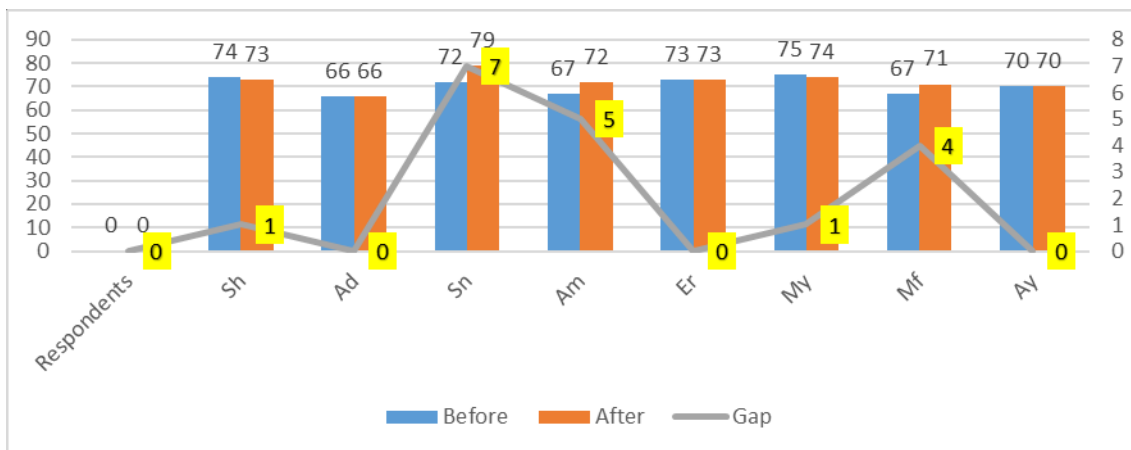


Chart 3: Score Improvements after receiving Indirect Feedback

The chart above verifies that the respondents of this study got higher scores after receiving Indirect Feedback. It indicates that using Indirect Feedback is really helpful. The higher differences of the scores was demonstrated by Sn with 7 points, then followed by Am with 5 points, and the last was Mf with 4 points. Other participants also improved 1 point. Generally, the results proved that Indirect Feedback was the best solution to enhance the students' writing performance.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Writing is a tedious task that necessary for developing creativity and comprehension. To produce better writings, the writer must employ corrections both the content and the structure. For corrections, using Indirect Feedback can help in two ways. Firstly, it helps the language learners to build better understanding toward the error made. Next, it supports to enhance the expected scores. Finally, it motivates the language learners to promote autonomous learning, where the learners will gain confidence on doing self-corrections.

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