

## Chapter #12

### TOWARDS IMPROVED CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN JAPANESE EFL WRITING INSTRUCTION

**Richard S. Lavin**

*Prefectural University of Kumamoto, Japan*

#### ABSTRACT

This paper addresses issues in tertiary EFL writing instruction, focusing on the situation in Japanese universities. Students in Japan typically find academic writing extremely difficult, partly because at high school they typically write no more than two or three sentences for a single “composition”. Thus, university writing instruction needs to tackle nearly all aspects of writing from a near-beginner level. This paper describes the writing curriculum at a Japanese provincial public university, focusing especially on the approach to corrective feedback taken by the author. This approach chiefly leverages two technologies—a blog with microposts and Google Docs—to bridge the gap between two strands of feedback: standardised feedback and contextualised feedback. Traditionally, standardised feedback has been seen as less useful but more sustainable, while contextualised feedback has been regarded as potentially more useful, but impractical in terms of teacher time. The approach described may make it possible to provide feedback that is both contextualised and sustainable. More generally, this account shows one example of a writing instructor, embedded in his local context and facing its inherent challenges in an imaginative way, addressing those challenges using the resources at his disposal to effect small improvements.

*Keywords:* writing, English as a foreign language, corrective feedback.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Japan is facing a population crisis, which presents major challenges to the tertiary education sector. As the total population falls, so does the number of school-leavers, now down to close to 1 million from a peak in the 1960s of around 2.5 million. Competition for university places has fallen, to the extent in some cases that every applicant can get in. In terms of wider access to education, in some ways this is a positive trend. More worrying, though, is the general drop in academic standards. This trend is particularly marked in general English proficiency, as measured by TOEIC or mock TOEIC scores (Nippon.com, 2015).

The author teaches at a provincial university of about 2,100 students administered by the local government. The Department of English Language & Literature (henceforth English department), to which he belongs, has an intake of 45–50 students per year, as well as a very small number of students on master’s and doctoral programmes. In this paper, I describe the approach taken to writing instruction in the author’s department and specifically by the author himself, concluding the paper with a description of an innovative approach taken to computer-mediated corrective feedback, which has some implications for feedback scholarship. Although much of the content concerns the learning and instruction taking part in this department, it should also be relevant to other institutions in Japan, as well as in other countries, particularly in Asia, with similar levels of English. The general approach can also be adapted to other contexts, though the specific content of the feedback described will be different.

Pedagogical practices necessarily respond to the contexts in which they are embedded. In this section, I outline the situation of academic writing in Japan, and make some remarks concerning the state of writing pedagogy.

### **1.1. Academic writing in Japan**

The traditional focus in high school English classes is the learning of grammar and vocabulary through reading. More recently, there is a focus on communication, narrowly defined as conversation. Neither in the past nor in the present is it usual for students to write compositions of more than two or three sentences, and these compositions tend to be on everyday topics, such as what the student did in the holidays. In addition, although quite a large number of high-school classes are devoted to grammar explanations, writing grammatical sentences represents a major challenge to students. It seems that little grammar has really been internalized.

Thus, for Japanese students writing tends to be extremely difficult (e.g., Davies, 2010). In particular, teaching academic writing to Japanese university students presents a major challenge. A fairly common approach in English departments in Japanese universities is what might be recognized in many western countries as a process approach (Emig, 1971; Horowitz, 1986), with some adjustments made in recognition of Japan's unique circumstances. This is also the overall framework in the author's department. This approach has had some successes, in the author's view. Many students have developed a reasonable grasp of how to structure an essay. However, numerous problems still exist at the sentence level, and the number of errors is too large to be handled in a reasonable way simply by giving traditional feedback on drafts of essays and graduation papers. This conclusion echoes that of Hartshorn (2008), who notes that, even after mastering rhetorical conventions, L2 writers tend to "struggle to extricate themselves from the linguistic gulf that separates them from their native-speaking peers" (p. 1). Qu (2017) also emphasizes the necessity of focusing on language problems. Hinkel (2004) suggests that some modern practices in L2 instruction are imports from L1 instruction that may not be suitable, and that deemphasizing grammar and vocabulary is one of these. Thus, the approach described in the present paper addresses itself overwhelmingly at the "linguistic gulf," mainly grammatical errors, noted by Hartshorn (2008).

### **1.2. A note on writing pedagogy**

Although second-language writing has its own journal, in general second-language writing pedagogy appears to lag behind that of speaking pedagogy. A key reason for this situation is the primacy of speech in structuralist linguistics and methods such as audiolingualism that grew out of that theory (Hinkel, 2010). One key feature of generally accepted speaking methodology is a focus on fluency. (Indeed, a perceived overemphasis on fluency is part of the motivation for the Principled Communicative Approach, Arnold, Dörnyei, & Pugliese, 2015.) In general, when students are engaged in more-or-less free production, teachers will not expect perfect grammatical accuracy, and accordingly will avoid intrusive error correction, with any correction being done according to focus-on-form principles (e.g., Doughty & Williams, 1998), typically in the form of occasional recasts. (See, e.g., Lyster & Ranta, 1997.) Another key feature is the provision of models. Many speaking classes also recognize that students may not have the resources to communicate effectively what they want to say, and therefore provide model dialogues or a list of phrases, or some language material in some other form that students can use and repurpose.

Alongside the primarily process approach mentioned above, there also exists in Japan a very traditional approach, which might be caricatured as “It’s better not to write at all than to write incorrectly” (Beaufait, Lavin, & Tomei, 2007). This needs to be countered whenever it appears, as “grammatical aspects of students’ writing seem to improve more from regular practice than they do as a result of having errors corrected” (Casanave, 1998, pp. 97-8). As Truscott (1996) points out, much revision of writing in response to feedback may cause pseudolearning rather than actual restructuring of the learner’s interlanguage. This idea is at the base of Truscott’s hostility to correction. It is necessary to clarify the purpose of correction in academic writing: Just as students may need correcting in speaking when the speaking involves some kind of performance (such as a speech, lecture, or play), they also need correcting in writing when their purpose is to create an academic essay or other formal piece of work, where the focus is more learning-to-write than writing-to-learn (Manchón, 2011). This kind of work happens alongside fluency practice (explained briefly in the next section), where correction is usually unnecessary, and the study of models, usually through dictogloss (Wajnryb, 2013) and similar exercises. These latter practices are hopefully contributing to interlanguage development, while the corrective feedback system described in this paper is contributing to the skill development necessary for producing formal writing assignments.

## **2. FLUENCY FIRST**

A major problem evident in first-year tertiary writing classes is a lack of fluency. It is not uncommon to find a 5- or even 10-minute writing session—even on an easy topic like *My Summer Vacation*—yielding a single sentence. In addition to an inability to generate much content, it is common to see students erasing everything they have written and starting again, but then not having enough time to complete even a single sentence. This likely signifies a basic lack of confidence in writing, to a large extent attributable to a lack of experience thereof. In the same way as extensive reading advocates claim that the best way to improve reading ability is to do a lot of reading (e.g., Day & Bamford, 1998), advocates of extensive writing (e.g., Lavin & Beaufait, 2003) suggest that frequent writing should be a priority. This also is consistent with R. Ellis’ (2002, 2018) call for a fluency-first curriculum, which is justified by the idea that explicit teaching is necessary, but that it works well only when students have enough lexis to start an implicit process of rule extraction that the explicit teaching can supplement.

Accordingly, all students in the department are required to create their own blog in approximately the third week of their first semester in the department. They are required to write approximately two book reviews a week (see also Section 4, below) as well as diary posts. This department-wide requirement continues for three semesters, and thereafter continues for some students depending on which classes they take.

## **3. A FOCUS ON INPUT**

Fundamentally, all language acquisition theories insist on the importance of abundant comprehensible input (e.g., Krashen, 1982), although some may object to the terminology, and the purported function of the input may differ from theory to theory. Input is widely acknowledged to be lacking in the Japanese secondary English curriculum. (Research by Rob Waring indicates that the quantity of English encountered in secondary textbooks in Japan is approximately half that in South Korea and one-sixth that in Mexico.) Accordingly, the department now requires students to read approximately 100 English

books in the students' first semester. These can be short and easy graded readers or even levelled readers (children's books from the UK or other English-speaking country); the main purpose is to build a habit of reading English. In the second and third semesters, the recommended difficulty level of the books is raised, and the number of books is correspondingly reduced. Thereafter, students are encouraged, but not yet in a department-wide way, to continue reading, with the unofficial target being a total of 1,000,000 words (see Furukawa et al., 2013) by graduation, although as yet only a small number of students reach or exceed that total.

A key feature of the extensive reading programme is that it features an input–output link: Students read books and write blog posts about the same books. Thus, as Plakans and Gebril (2012) point out, the books not only provide a topic and content for the posts but also serve as a language repository. Students are strongly encouraged not only to summarize the content and comment on the book but also to transcribe short excerpts of the book. This exercise, while superficially a trivial one, requires students to hold language material briefly in memory before retrieving it, and thus is similar to activities like dictation and read-and-look-up (Nation, 1991).

#### **4. PROVIDING TARGETED CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK (1): A CUSTOM WEBSITE**

##### **4.1. Corrective feedback in L2 writing**

There are now countless studies available on corrective feedback on writing, especially since Truscott's (1996) highly controversial call for the abandonment of corrective feedback. Truscott's call was the result of the observation by many writing teachers that error correction does not lead automatically to uptake (performing the suggested correction), still less to a reduction of errors in subsequent compositions. However, a look at examples of actual corrective feedback, as shown in Zamel (1985), for example, shows that "ESL writing teachers misread student texts, are inconsistent in their reactions, make arbitrary corrections, write contradictory comments, provide vague prescriptions" (p. 86). This may be the major reason why some studies have failed to find a beneficial effect for feedback as it is often practised. An emerging consensus suggests that feedback can contribute to substantial improvements in student writing if done well. In particular, it should be selective (e.g., Ferris, 2011) and sustainable (and of course sustained) (Carless, Salter, Yang, & Lam, 2011). For Hartshorn (2008), also, manageability (equivalent to sustainability) is one of the four criteria of sound feedback practices.

Feedback has always been sustained to a certain degree in the department, in the sense that writing classes are offered over five continuous semesters, an unusually high number that is not true of other skills classes such as reading. Unlike other classes, writing classes usually contain fewer than 20 students, often around 15. The sustained nature has been boosted in recent years by the previously mentioned incorporation of blogging into a first-semester general skills class, with regular corrective feedback (via blog comments). The introduction two years ago of Extensive Reading & Listening classes in the second and third semesters—also featuring blogging centred on book reviews, and also with feedback in comments—has greatly increased the total quantity of feedback. In addition, students in the author's third- and fourth-year seminars also write book reviews in the same way, also with feedback via comments.

Hattie and Timperley (2007) suggest that it is important that feedback be embedded in a process that also includes Feed Up, which addresses goals, and Feed Forward, which addresses next steps. Although the bulk of this paper focuses on Feed Back itself, it is also possible to use the proposed feedback site as part of Feed Up and Feed Forward steps, and this issue will be discussed briefly in the final section.

#### **4.2. E-feedback on L2 writing**

The effect of medium on corrective feedback has not yet been fully examined. The default position is that, fundamentally, the effects of the same feedback delivered in different ways would be very similar, with differences in effects being attributable to individual differences (some learners may, for example, dislike computers) or to specific features of the feedback system used. With e-feedback, these differences are likely to be very large, as software and tastes evolve, making it very difficult, or even impossible in principle, to compare e-feedback as a whole with handwritten feedback.

In any case, as the possibilities of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in L2 writing instruction came to be explored, it was natural for researchers to focus primarily on peer interaction, since language education as a whole has come to emphasize language as a system that emerges in communicative use (Beckner, et al., 2009), with what is learned corresponding to a large extent with that which is encountered frequently (Ellis & Collins, 2009); even in research where corrective feedback is featured, the focus tends to be on peer feedback (e.g., AbuSeileek & Abualsha'r; Tolosa, East, & Villers, 2013; Vinagre & Muñoz, 2011; Ware & O'Dowd, 2008), rather than on teacher feedback.

Departing from the peer feedback paradigm, Akbar (2017), contrasting synchronous with asynchronous CMC, found that, where corrective feedback occurred, in synchronous CMC it consisted exclusively of recasts, whereas in asynchronous CMC it also included clarification requests. Akbar's study concerned quasi-naturalistic communication between native and non-native speakers, rather than teacher-delivered, intentional corrective feedback.

Research by Ene and Upton has focussed on teacher e-feedback. Taking a Hippocratic approach to technological innovation (First, do no harm.), they are concerned first of all about any unforeseen problems that might arise from switching from a handwritten to an electronic mode. Ene and Upton (2014) find that electronic feedback is usually delivered in a principled way and that there is no reason to avoid it. In a later paper (Ene and Upton, 2018), they examine the effectiveness of feedback delivered to students via comments in Microsoft Word. They find that, if the feedback is given in a principled way with care taken to tailor the feedback to the students' levels and needs, the feedback is just as effective as handwritten feedback. They further suggest that this type of asynchronous feedback can profitably be supplemented with synchronous feedback.

In Tuzi (2004), a custom, database-driven website was used for the delivery of (mainly peer) feedback. Tuzi noted that, although students tended to prefer oral feedback to the electronic feedback delivered via the website, the e-feedback seemed to encourage focus on larger writing blocks, leading to macro revisions more often than oral feedback did.

Tafazoli, Nosratzadeh, & Hosseini (2014) compared feedback delivered via email to conventional, paper-delivered feedback in an ESP course. They concluded that the email-delivered feedback was more effective in improving the students' grammatical accuracy, as well as more appreciated by the students. Sain et al. (2013) also compared email-delivered feedback with conventional, paper-delivered feedback, and found that the email-delivered feedback succeeded in improving students' writing skills. Perhaps more importantly for our purposes here, they also found that the email-delivered feedback saved time.

### 4.3. Use of Google Docs and other collaborative websites

Google Docs has been mentioned in research and teaching contexts by a number of scholars, such as Mansor (2012). Ishtaiwa and Aburezeq (2015) point to its uses not only for student–student collaboration but also for student–teacher interaction. Working at the intersection of L2 writing and computer-supported collaborative writing, Strobl (2014) analyses the contributions of collaboration over Google Docs to both the quality of written products and the writing process. The present author also uses Google Docs frequently with students in order to enable frequent consultation on undergraduate, Masters, or doctoral theses. Google Docs used by itself excels in such uses, enabling intense and ongoing personally tailored guidance. In this paper, however, we are concerned with the tool as part of a system enabling the sustainable delivery of feedback to comparatively large numbers of students, hence the two-part design of the system described.

### 4.4. Website design

The chief innovation in the approach described in this paper is to split the feedback work into two sites. Since many of the errors made by students are of a finite number of predictable types, the bulk of the work is done by a website designed to deliver standardised feedback. Then, feedback on an error in a student assignment can be given simply by directing the student to the part of the site that explains the error and how to correct it.

The individual feedback stage will be addressed in Section 5. Here, I describe the website that houses the standardised feedback. The website in question is a free one created on [wordpress.com](https://wordpress.com), and called *Rick's Research Writing* (<https://rickresearchwriting.wordpress.com/>). The WordPress software, much of it run on [wordpress.com](https://wordpress.com), is claimed to run 31% of all internet sites ([wordpress.com](https://wordpress.com), Sept. 23, 2018). Unlike most other sites, though, the author uses the P2 WordPress theme for this site. P2 has certain similarities with Twitter and other, similar microblogging sites, in that the site homepage has a small posting window, removing the necessity to move between an admin page, to post or edit, and the homepage, to view. This at one stroke removes a small but significant impediment to frequent posting. (For this reason, students in some of the author's classes are encouraged or required to use the same theme.)

Rather than designing the standardised feedback site initially, which would have required pre-defining the errors to be addressed, and then starting to use it only once it was completed, the author has built the site gradually while teaching writing classes. In many class sessions held in computer labs, students are required to create multiple short posts in a single session. This creates frequent chances for students to make errors. The frequent posting affordance of P2 means that, when the author sees even the smallest of errors in a student's writing, he has two options: If it is an idiosyncratic error, he tailors his response to the student or ignores the error. If, however, it is an error of a common type, and he does not yet have a standardised response prepared, he copies the error-containing sentence, pasting it into a new post as a quotation, adding a short explanation, and then publishing the new post, all within the space of a minute or two.

As an example, if a student writes:

I want to go England.

the author can quote the sentence with an indication that it is incorrect, add the correct version, and add a title such as "Don't forget prepositions!" to complete a post on the standardised feedback site. This standardised feedback can then be delivered to the student in the manner described below. In this way, the site has grown organically over a number of years, coming to cover a wider and wider range of students' general feedback needs.

#### 4.5. Permanent artefacts

Referring back to the previous example, a traditional way of responding in classtime would be to talk to the student, perhaps pointing to the offending sentence. Out of class, a traditional way of responding might be to write a note in the margin reminding the student not to forget prepositions, or a simple underline if the judgement was made that the student would notice if their attention were directed to the site of the error.

*Figure 1.*

*A screenshot of a sample micropost from rickresearchwriting.wordpress.com. This post has error marking, textual enhancement, tags, and an external reference.*

## One of...

What do you think of this sentence?

*The Lord of the Rings is one of my favorite ~~book~~.*

The hint for why it is incorrect is in the expression *one of*. That expression is used with books. So of course singular *book* is incorrect. The correct version is:

*The Lord of the Rings is one of my favorite books.*

Check out another similar sentence:

*Ichiro is one of the few players in MLB history to score 3,000 hits.*

Sometimes, the “one of the...” construction is best avoided. The following isn’t e:

*Krashen is one of the researchers who focused on input.*

...but in most cases the following would be better:

*Krashen is one researcher who focused on input.*

[#plural](#) [#number](#) [#nouns](#)

Barker A-Z, p. 180

By introducing an extra step, the method proposed leads to the creation of a kind of permanent mediating artefact (Lavasani, 2016): It mediates the instructor’s feedback to the learner, and, being available at a fixed location (with its own URL), it is available for

infinite reuse in a standard form. This has a practical advantage—the teacher does not need to craft an ad hoc response for each error warranting comment—and a principled one: by being directed to a standardized response, possibly multiple times, the learner is led to a heightened awareness of their error as an instance of a specific class of error, rather than as a one-off, thus leading to greater engagement and deeper processing.

The general approach has a lot in common with coded feedback, which can use shortened forms such as S.V (subject–verb agreement; e.g., Salimi & Valizadeh, 2015) or colours to represent different kinds of error (e.g., Shvidko, 2015). The difference is that, instead of using codes or colours, we use URLs. They combine the advantage of codes or colours—they are quick and easy for the teacher to add—with the more elaborated feedback that can be given in a blog post.

#### 4.6. Short and focused posts

As mentioned earlier, the blog consists largely of microposts, i.e. posts that are short and focused on one specific type of error. This is part of the solution to a very common problem with feedback delivered directly, in an ad hoc tailoring to the specific composition: that it is simultaneously both too short and too long. It is too short because it is not usually practical to write enough to explain adequately what the problems are: it would take too long for the teacher to do this each time, and, on paper-based compositions, there usually is insufficient space on the paper to do so. At the same time, even something approaching useful commentary on a composition is too long for the teacher to compose, and the quality may suffer when he or she is commenting on a large number of compositions.

An example micropost (shown in Figure 1) is titled “One of...”. It has an example sentence containing an error of this type:

The Lord of the Rings is one of my favorite book.

This is followed by three sentences explaining why it is incorrect, and then a corrected version:

The Lord of the Rings is one of my favorite books.

Conventional localized feedback on this kind of error might consist simply of an underline or a circle under the final *k* of *book*. If the student fails to realize the nature of the error immediately, the feedback is likely to be disregarded.

Alternatively, the teacher might write *books* by hand. This is likely to result in successful uptake, but that uptake risks being of the most mechanical kind.

Another approach might be to make a more general note, reminding the student to “Mark nouns for number” or “Don’t forget to add an ‘s’ to plural nouns.” This approach frequently fails to result in uptake.

In short, the proposed approach, because it involves crafting an appropriate post with an example and explanation only once, enables reliable delivery of feedback that has already been determined to be appropriate.

#### 4.7. Textual enhancement

Poor uptake has already been alluded to as a problem with conventional feedback. Textual enhancement is one possible solution to this problem.



Figure 1 shows an example each of, respectively, error marking and emphasis of a correct form. As can be seen, the error is marked with strikethrough formatting, and the correct form is bolded, thus promoting noticing.

There is no principled reason why the same thing cannot be done in conventional feedback. However, it would be prohibitively time-consuming, and in practice it would be difficult to remember to reliably include all the elements in a standardized notation. At least with paper-based work, it would also be difficult to find the space, and there is always the risk of poor handwriting sabotaging the teacher's efforts.

#### **4.8. Tags**

A glance at Figure 1 shows tags, preceded by the pound sign. The tags in this case are “plural”, “number”, and “nouns”. These encourage students, after checking the post to which they have been directed, to look at related posts, usually those at a higher level of generality or abstraction. In this specific instance, clicking on “plural” takes one to a page with the “One of...” post and three others. Clicking on “number”, a more abstract concept, takes the browser to a page containing the “One of...” post and seven more. Clicking on “nouns” takes the reader to five posts, including the “One of...” post.

The selections mentioned are partially overlapping; by enabling readers to take multiple paths through a body of information, meeting the same information but in slightly different contexts, the site follows the principles advocated by Spiro and colleagues (e.g., Spiro, Feltovich, Jacobson, & Coulson, 1995) for knowledge that lacks a definitive specification.

#### **4.9. Links to external information**

Some of the posts on the site also refer to specific page numbers in more comprehensive guides, available on campus, allowing students to explore topics in more detail and with more varied examples.

### **5. PROVIDING TARGETED CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK (2): GOOGLE DOCS**

A paper-based workflow would necessitate laborious and error-prone transcription of URLs. To avoid this, the system involves the use of another tool, Google Docs, whose margin comments feature is used to add the URLs. (Google Docs/Drive has also featured in a number of recent studies (e.g., Ebadi & Rahimi, 2017) as a tool for delivering feedback, but to my knowledge it has hitherto been used only to deliver custom feedback rather than for links to pre-composed feedback.) The author maintains a note containing a list of the most frequently used URLs for rapid pasting. It is a feature of this system that no explanations are added to the URLs: a key point is that the linked explanations are written with sufficient clarity and detail to enable the students to understand the explanation. A key affordance of the Google Docs Comment feature is that it is highly granular: a whole sentence, a whole word, or just one letter, or any arbitrary stretch of text can be used as the anchor for a comment, allowing the attachment of multiple comments to a particularly troublesome sentence, with clarity as to what each comment is referring to.

Some errors may be particularly frequent errors in a student's composition. This is often true of subject-verb agreement, especially third-person singular S. If there are, say, 20 examples of this error in a single composition, I would typically comment on, say, the first three instances on a first pass, hoping for uptake as well as an awareness of this as a

common error, leading to the student taking the initiative to check for other instances. Most commonly, the student will correct the specific instances that have been commented on, not noticing the others. On a second pass, I would mark another three or four instances. This is enough to cause some students to check the rest of the essay and find some more instances. For the majority of students, however, it takes at least three passes, usually with an explicit request to look through the rest of the essay for more instances of the same kind of error.

It should be noted that, on the next composition, most students will make the same kinds of error again, but may be a little quicker to become aware of the kinds of errors they are making frequently. Experience suggests that three or four consecutive compositions where the teacher has been fairly consistently focusing on a small number of persistent errors are enough to engender a large drop in the numbers of such errors.

### **5.1. Selective feedback**

As has been stated, a key goal is to make students more aware of the kinds of errors they make habitually, and thus able to correct those types of errors. Research suggests that feedback of the traditional kind, where teachers attempt to turn the student's work into an error-free composition by marking all errors, divides the student's attention between a large number of types of error. In many cases, indeed, the student may focus not on types, but on the specific errors marked by the teacher, and attempt to correct them all in a more-or-less mechanical way.

The effectiveness of the approach described depends on selectivity. Comprehensive marking of errors would dilute the student's attention, and marking of infrequent errors is inefficient in the sense that even eliminating that class of error completely will have little effect on the total number of errors in the student's compositions.

## **6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This paper has described an approach to improving students' academic writing, with a particular focus on decreasing the number of errors. After laying a foundation of frequent writing backed up by frequent reading, the approach delivers corrective feedback that is heavily focused on each individual student's persistent errors. By leveraging pre-composed microposts on a blog combined with Google Docs comments, the approach can be said to combine the advantages of personalised and contextualised feedback, on the one hand, with standardised feedback, on the other. Thus, it may represent an efficient, and therefore sustainable, way of delivering effective feedback.

The approach has been developed in an organic way over the last few years to meet the author's personal pedagogical challenges. Using the system as a teacher, the author feels some satisfaction that students are having some success in reducing the number of errors that they make, and remarks by individual students have suggested that they feel the benefits of the system. This paper has described the system and the rationale behind it.

The possibilities of computer-mediated feedback may necessitate a new typology of corrective feedback. Ellis (2008) lists "electronic feedback" as its own discrete type, whereas it is clear that this type of feedback cuts across the other classifications. For example, it can be focused or unfocused, direct or indirect, and can feature or not feature metalinguistic information. It has become clear that the physical limitations of paper-based handwritten feedback create a tension between information-rich, generalised feedback and localised, or situated, feedback, requiring the "outsourcing" of much of the information to an external source such as a list of codes. Making that external information available simply

through a click on a URL in an attached comment effectively makes the information localised, dissolving the tension.

Although in this paper I have focused on Feed Back, in Hattie and Timperley's (2007) framework, the microposts on the site can readily be used as part of Feed Forward, by conducting a mini-lesson focused on a specific post or set of posts before students tackle a writing assignment, with the expectation that students will take particular care over the relevant feature or features. This can be viewed as a kind of preemptive focus on form (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2011), and accords with general advice (e.g., Mack, 2013) that comments need to be linked very closely to instruction.

The approach may even be of some use in teacher training, since, as Hairston (1986, cited in Ferris, 2007) notes, many writing instructors fear fatigue and burnout, or even becoming a "composition slave." Beginning instructors could use the site as it is, being selective about which microposts they use, and gradually compose their own posts on their own blog, first of all for points which are not covered on *Rick's Research Writing* or which are covered in a way that does not fit the instructor's needs, and later as a complete replacement for *Rick's Research Writing*.

The next step is of course to test the effectiveness of the system in a systematic way, and future research will report on the results of such tests. In addition, because the site has been built up gradually, its design prioritizes ease of posting over ease of use. This does not represent a problem with the site's primary use case, which is simply following URLs to read specific individual posts. However, it is not ideal for encouraging pre-emptive engagement by students with the content, for which better search and guided browsing functions (Bates, 1989), as well as more user-friendly classification of posts, are in order. The author is currently planning the migration of the site content to a new site meeting these design goals.

## REFERENCES

- AbuSeileek, A., & Abualsha'r, A. (2014). Using peer computer-mediated corrective feedback to support EFL learners' writing. *Language Learning & Technology, 18*(1), 76–95.
- Akbar, F. S. (2017). Corrective feedback in written synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated communication. *Columbia University Working Papers in TESOL & Applied Linguistics, 17*(2), 9–27.
- Arnold, J., Dörnyei, Z., & Pugliese, C. (2015). *The Principled Communicative Approach: Seven criteria for success*. London: Helbling Languages.
- Bates, M. J. (1989). The design of browsing and berrypicking techniques for the online search interface. *Online Review, 13* (5), 407–424. doi:10.1108/eb024320
- Beaufait, P., Lavin, R. S., & Tomei, J. (2007, September). Improving while no-one's looking: Student progress through uncorrected writing and extensive reading. Paper presented at the *Symposium on Second Language Writing*, Nagoya, Japan.
- Beckner, C., Blythe, R., Bybee, J., Christiansen, M. H., Croft, W., Ellis, N. C. , ... Schoenemann, T. (2009). Language is a complex adaptive system: Position paper. *Language Learning, 59*(2), 1–26. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9922.2009.00533.x
- Carless, D., Salter, D., Yang, M. & Lam, J. (2011). Developing sustainable feedback practices. *Studies in Higher Education, 36*(4), 395–407.
- Casanave, C. P. (1998). Perspectives: Procedural and conceptual parallels between student and teacher product-driven writing projects. *JALT Journal, 20*(2), 90–103.
- Davies, R. J. (2000). *The academic writing of Japanese students of English: Contrastive rhetoric and its implications for an integrated approach to composition pedagogy* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Wales, Bangor). Available from <http://e.bangor.ac.uk/4216/>.

- Day, R. R., & Bamford, J. (1998). *Extensive reading in the second language classroom*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Doughty, C., & Williams, J. (Eds.). (1998). *Focus on Form in classroom second language acquisition*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Ebadi, S., & Rahimi, M. (2017). Exploring the impact of online peer-editing using Google Docs on EFL learners' academic writing skills: A mixed methods study. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 30*(8), 787-815.
- Ellis, N. C., & Collins, L. (2009). Input and second language acquisition: The roles of frequency, form, and function: Introduction to the special issue. *The Modern Language Journal, 93*(3), 329-335. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4781.2009.00893.x
- Ellis, R. (2002). The place of grammar instruction in the second/foreign language curriculum. In E. Hinkel, & S. Fotos (Eds.), *New perspectives on grammar teaching in second language classrooms* (pp. 14-34). London: Routledge.
- Ellis, R. (2008). A typology of written corrective feedback types. *ELT Journal, 63*(2), 97-107. doi:10.1093/elt/ccn023
- Ellis, R. (2018). Towards a modular language curriculum for using tasks. *Language Teaching Research [OnlineFirst]*. doi:10.1177/1362168818765315
- Ellis, R., Basturkmen, H., & Loewen, S. (2011). Preemptive focus on form in the ESL classroom. *TESOL Quarterly, 35*(3), 407-432.
- Emig, J. A. (1971). *The composing processes of twelfth graders*. Urbana, IL, National Council of Teachers of English.
- Ene, E., & Upton, T. A. (2014). Learner uptake of teacher electronic feedback in ESL composition. *System, 46*, 80-95. doi:10.1016/j.system.2014.07.011
- Ene, E., & Upton, T. A. (2018). Synchronous and asynchronous teacher electronic feedback and learner uptake in ESL composition. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 41*, 1-13. doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2018.05.005
- Ferris, D. R. (2007). Preparing teachers to respond to student writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 16*(3), 165-193. doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2007.07.003
- Ferris, D. R. (2011). *Treatment of error in second language student writing* (2nd ed.). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Furukawa, A., Kanda, M., Mayuzumi, M., Miyashita, I., Hatanaka, T., Sato, M., & Nishizawa, H. (2013). *Eigo tadoku kanzen bukku gaido: Mezase issenmango: Tadoku ni osusume no yousho yaku ichiman'yonsensatsu no deetaa wo shoukai* [The complete book guide for extensive reading]. Tokyo, Japan: Cosmopier.
- Hartshorn, K. J. (2008). *The effects of manageable corrective feedback on ESL writing accuracy* (Doctoral dissertation, Brigham Young University). Available from <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=2521&context=etd>
- Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research, 77*(1), 81-112. doi:10.3102/003465430298487
- Hinkel, E. (2004). *Teaching academic ESL writing: Practical techniques in vocabulary and grammar*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hinkel, E. (2010). Integrating the four skills: Current and historical perspectives. In R. B. Kaplan (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of applied linguistics* (pp. 110-126). Oxford University Press.
- Horowitz, D. (1986). Process, not product: Less than meets the eye. *TESOL Quarterly, 20*(1), 141-144. doi:10.2307/3586397
- Ishtaiwa, F. F., & Aburezeq, I. M. (2015). The impact of Google Docs on student collaboration: A UAE case study. *Language, Culture and Social Interaction, 7*, 85-96. doi:10.1016/j.lcsi.2015.07.004
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. New York, NY: Pergamon.
- Lavin, R. S., & Beaufait, P. A. (2003). Ezboard as a medium for extensive writing in Japanese tertiary EFL classes. *Language Issues, 9*(1), 37-59.

- Lavasani, M. (2016). An exploratory study of the effective mediating artefacts in listening through systemic theoretical instruction (STI) among English as foreign language learners. *Journal of Language and Translation*, 6(2), 79-94.
- Lyster, R., & Ranta, L. (1997). Corrective feedback and learner uptake: Negotiation of form in communicative classrooms. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 19(1), 37-66.
- Mack, N. (2013, March). Colorful revision: Color-coded comments connected to instruction. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, 248-256.
- Manchón, R. M. (Ed.). (2011). *Learning-to-write and writing-to-learn in an additional language*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins.
- Mansor, A. Z. (2012). Google Docs as a collaborating tool for academicians. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 59, 411-419. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.09.295
- Nation, I. S. P. (1991). Dictation, dicto-comp and related techniques. *English Teaching Forum*, 29(4), 12-14.
- Plakans, L., & Gebril, A. (2012). A close investigation into source use in integrated second language writing tasks. *Assessing Writing*, 17(1), 18-34. doi:10.1016/j.asw.2011.09.00.
- Qu, W. (2017). For L2 writers, it is always the problem of the language. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 38, 92-93. doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2017.10.007
- Nippon.com. (2015, March 16). *Universities struggle to cope with shrinking population and globalization*. Retrieved from <https://www.nippon.com/en/features/h00095/>
- Sain, N., Rajendran, C. B., Yoke, C. S. K., Kamaludin, P. N. H., Nawi, S. M., & Yusof, S. M. (2013). Utilising e-mail for online corrective feedback in academic writing among ESL undergraduates. *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Foreign Language Learning and Teaching*, 2(1), 834-841. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263852239\\_Utilising\\_E-mail\\_for\\_Online\\_Corrective\\_Feedback\\_in\\_Academic\\_Writing\\_among\\_ESL\\_Undergraduates](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263852239_Utilising_E-mail_for_Online_Corrective_Feedback_in_Academic_Writing_among_ESL_Undergraduates)
- Salimi, A., & Valizadeh, M. (2015). The effect of coded and uncoded written corrective feedback on the accuracy of learners writing in pre-intermediate level. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 4(3), 116-122. doi:10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.4n.3p.116
- Shvidko, E. (2015, May 1). Written feedback: Using color-coded comments. *TESOL Blog*. Retrieved May 22, 2018, from <http://blog.tesol.org/written-feedback-using-color-coded-comments/>
- Spiro, R. J., Feltovich, P. J., Jacobson, M. J., & Coulson, R. L. (1995). Cognitive flexibility, constructivism, and hypertext: Random access instruction for advanced acquisition in ill-structured domains. In T. M. Duffy & D. H. Jonassen (Eds.), *Constructivism in education*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Strobl, C. (2014). Affordances of Web 2.0 technologies for collaborative advanced writing in a foreign language. *CALICO Journal*, 31(1), 1-18. doi:10.11139/cj.31.1.1-18
- Tafazoli, D., Nosratzadeh, H., & Hosseini, N. (2014). Computer-mediated corrective feedback in ESP courses: Reducing grammatical errors via email. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 136, 355-359. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.05.341
- Tolosa, C., East, M., & Villers, H. (2013). Online peer feedback in beginners' writing tasks: Lessons learned. *The IALLT Journal*, 43(1), 1-24.
- Truscott, J. (1996). The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes. *Language Learning*, 46(2), 327-369. doi:10.1111/j.1467-1770.1996.tb01238.x
- Tuzi, F. (2004). The impact of e-feedback on the revisions of L2 writers in an academic writing course. *Computers and Composition*, 21(2), 217-235. doi:10.1016/j.compcom.2004.02.003
- Vinagre, M., & Muñoz, B. (2011). Computer-mediated corrective feedback and language accuracy in telecollaborative exchanges. *Language Learning & Technology*, 15(1), 72-103.
- Wajnryb, R. (2013). *Grammar dictation* (Resource Books for Teachers). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Ware, P. D., & O'Dowd, R. (2008). Peer feedback on language form in telecollaboration. *Language Learning & Technology*, 12(1), 43-63.
- Zamel, V. (1985). Responding to student writing. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19(1), 79-101.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume grew out of the Education & New Developments 2018 conference. Parts of this paper previously appeared in the Proceedings of that conference. The author would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

## AUTHOR INFORMATION

**Full name:** Richard S. Lavin

**Institutional affiliation:** Prefectural University of Kumamoto

**Institutional address:** 3-1-100 Tsukide, Higashi-ku, Kumamoto-shi, Kumamoto-ken, 862-8502, Japan.

**Short biographical sketch:** Richard S. Lavin is Professor in the Department of English Language & Literature at the Prefectural University of Kumamoto, where he teaches applied linguistics and English in undergraduate and postgraduate courses. His research interests centre around technology-enhanced language learning, writing, and sociocultural theory.