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An Exploratory Study of Differing Perceptions of Error Correction between A Teacher and Students: Bridging the Gap

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This study was designed to measure and bridge the mismatch in perceptions of error correction (EC) between a teacher and his students. The participants were 32 students in two intact, beginner-level Spanish classes at a mid-size university in the Southwest of the US. The treatment consisted of two learner training (LT) sessions (see Reiss, 1981) in which the teacher explained to the students his approach to correcting written mistakes. Alternate forms of a questionnaire were administered on three occasions in order to obtain data about the students' opinions. A review of the literature identified four main issues related to EC that teachers and students disagree on: discouragement, learner readiness, meaning focus, and grammar. These four areas were therefore the focus of both the LT sessions and the questionnaires. The results showed a significant change in the students' perceptions related to EC after the treatment. Thus, the paper concludes by calling for studies and methodologies that consider a more open and fluid dialogue between second language acquisition (SLA) findings, L2 classrooms, and students' awareness of their L2 learning.

Numerous researchers have noted that there is often a mismatch between the procedures that second language (L2) students and their teachers see as effective for language teaching and learning (Green, 1993; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; McCargar, 1993; Miley & Gonsalves, 2003; Noels, 2001; Peacock, 2001; Reid, 1995; Schulz, 2001). Particularly, current research reveals four main sources of mismatch between teacher and student perceptions with respect to error correction (EC): (a) affect and discouragement (as a possible outcome of EC), (b) learner (un)readiness to acquire certain structures as a justification to not exhaustively correct students' mistakes, (c) the importance of a focus on meaning in L2 writing (as opposed to writing as a form of language practice), and (d) the importance and prioritization of accurate grammar in L2 writing. These differing views can cause problems in L2 acquisition (Green, 1993; Schulz, 2001). More specifically, the disparity between the two groups may have a negative affective impact by causing tension, demotivation, frustration, and other learning conditions that are counter-productive to instructed SLA (Garrett & Shortall, 2002; Green, 1993; McCargar, 1993; Morris & Tarone, 2003; Noels, 2001; Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 1999; Peacock, 2001; Reid, 1987; Terrell, 1977; Tse, 2000). However, as Peacock (2001) points out, the opposite is also true; a match between students' and teachers' beliefs as to what constitutes efficacy in language instruction results in harder work and greater gains in students' L2 learning.

Some researchers such as Schulz (2001) and others (Hyland, 2000; Hyland 2003; McCargar, 1993; Peacock, 2001) recommend that teachers address this potential detriment by exploring their students' perceptions regarding issues in their language learning and, in doing so, equip themselves with the knowledge needed to deal appropriately with discrepancies that arise. Others take this argument one step further by calling for a cooperative, student-inclusive approach to dealing with mismatches in perceptions (e.g., Hyland, 2000; Hyland, 2003). Ferris (1999) additionally recommends that teachers also

remain current on the literature that deals with topics of contention. Still others argue that the teacher knows best and should, thus, employ the approaches and techniques that they consider fitting (Mantello, 1997). This study, however, lies somewhere between these extreme points of view by including the students in the dialogue of how EC is practiced without requiring a compromise of the instructor's empirically and experientially-founded beliefs. This study seeks to find out if the gap in perceptions between teachers and students regarding EC could be bridged via learner training (LT) (Reiss, 1981). Specifically, it explores the difference in perceptions of written error correction between students and their teacher. Is there a gap in perceptions between students and their teacher? Can student opinions be changed via LT? And is this, in fact, a measurable change in their perceptions?

Literature Review

Many studies have noted in recent years the need for further investigation in instructed SLA relating to teachers' and students' perceptions in general and, specifically, to EC (e.g., Ferris, 1999; Tse, 2000). Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1994) recommended that research look into form-focused behaviors of the teacher and the extent to which students who prefer it are able to benefit from it. Closer to the focus of this paper, Noels et al. (1999) call for longitudinal, experimental research into how students' perceptions of language learning can be affected by teachers' behavior. Lastly, a paper by Perpignan (2003) recommends a "comprehensive analysis of the intentions and interpretations of the exchange from both the teacher's and the learner's perspective, as well as of the dynamic nature of the dialogue within its full pedagogical context" (p. 259).

One area in definite need of this type of inquiry is EC, which in recent years, has become a highly and hotly debated issue. Teachers and researchers alike openly question its necessity as well as how and when it can best be utilized in instructed SLA (Brandl, 1995; DeKeyser, 1993; Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ferris, 1999; Gass & Magnan, 1993; Leow, 2000; Lyster, Lightbown, & Spada, 1999; Mantello, 1997; Omaggio Hadley, 2001; Pica, 1994; Schultz, 2001; Truscott, 1996; Truscott, 1999a; Truscott, 1999b). While it is true that an EC component is still considered fundamental to most L2 classes, there is now a heightened sensitivity toward its role and the outcomes that it may or may not yield. Truscott (1996), for example, interprets DeKeyser's (1993) study as offering support for McCargar's (1993) hypothesis that EC would fail to incite widespread improvement in L2 students. Indeed, there is some evidence that the effectiveness resulting from different types and frequencies of EC may be a function of individual differences among the students and not necessarily attributable to the EC itself (DeKeyser, 1993; Lyster, 2001; Mantello, 1997).

Another often cited argument against the value of EC relates to a natural order of acquisition. The debate over how and when to correct mistakes rarely lacks mention of the difficulty that L2 teachers encounter in their need to recognize students' readiness to acquire certain structures (Crookes & Chaudron, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2001; Lightbown & Spada, 1999; Lyster et al., 1999; Philp, 2003).

There is no shortage of evidence pointing to the fact that a perceptual mismatch between teachers and students regarding EC is common across L2 classrooms (Green, 1993; McCargar, 1993; Peacock, 2001; Schulz, 2001). Numerous studies (e.g., Peacock, 2001; Schulz, 2001) reveal that EC (in both written and spoken language) is desired and seen as necessary by at least 88% and as many as 98% of L2 students, who generally place a higher value on EC than do their teachers (Green, 1993; McCargar, 1993). Hyland and Hyland (2001) also studied English as a second language students' perceptions of different forms of written feedback (i.e., praise, criticism, and suggestion). They found

that in addition to a disparity in preferences between students and teachers, considerable variation also exists among students.

In contrast to the inter-student variability found in Hyland and Hyland's (2001) study, Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1994, 1996), Leki (1991) and Hyland's (2003) studies of second and foreign language classes all revealed a strong, uniform preference in students for form-focused feedback on "all their errors" (Leki, 1991, p. 206) especially in academic contexts where the preferred work is that which is error-free (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1996; Hyland, 2003; Mantello, 1997). One of the striking conclusions is that EC was "highly valued by all of them" (Hyland, 2003, p. 228). Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1994) further analyzed the results of their study and proposed that such an inclination is attributable to two major factors. First, learners mainly view their language use as "a form of language practice" (1994, p. 157). Along the same lines, Truscott (1999a) claims that L2 students unknowingly adhere to behaviorist notions that relate language learning to habit formation. Second is the influence of the priority that L2 teachers give to form (Porte, 1997; Truscott, 1999b). Krashen (1999) echoes this finding in his assertion that adult L2 learners expect attention to be given to grammar correction in the classroom as a result of past experience in language classrooms.

Whatever the cause, students seem to be generally opposed to the idea that they are "allowed" to make mistakes (Green, 1993). Multiple studies show that they are actually overwhelmingly in favor of EC (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Hyland, 2003; Schulz, 2001; Truscott, 1999a). Overall, it seems that students tend to view EC not as pejorative but rather as a constructive element that is necessary to L2 learning (Noels et al., 1999). That said, one final element of EC to consider from the student perspective is affect. Students' preferences in real life situations (i.e., upon being corrected in class) versus on self-report measures such as questionnaires or course evaluations may contradict each other. EC in the L2 classroom has been shown to produce negative feelings (e.g., anxiety, embarrassment, frustration) (Garrett & Shortall, 2002; Green, 1993; Morris & Tarone, 2003) and a decrease in motivation (Brandl, 1995; Gardner, 1985; Noels, 2001; Noels, et al., 1999; Peacock, 2001).

The views of EC from the other side of the desk are quite different. One belief held by many L2 teachers is that they should not correct every student error that is made (McCargar, 1993; Schulz, 2001). This belief stems mainly from the training that they receive. At some point during their teacher training programs, most language teachers receive instruction on a version of the communicative language teaching method that, as both Lightbown and Spada (1999) and especially Truscott (1999a) are quick to point out, encourages anywhere from a reduction to a total rejection of attention to formal aspects of language. It is a broad method that sometimes opts for more focus on meaning with focus on form (e.g., EC) occurring only as needed.

Teacher training, supported by wide agreement amongst SLA researchers, also maintains that the learner's path is predictable (i.e., that it follows certain stages and sequences) yet non-linear (Doughty, 1991; Ellis, 1984; Lightbown & Spada, 1999; Long, 1990; Mackey, 1999; Philp, 2003; Pienemann, 1998; Spada & Lightbown, 1999; VanPatten, 1998). Furthermore, most teacher training programs also uphold the belief that errors may assist L2 learners to adjust and reformulate their interlanguage system (Gass & Varonis, 1994; Nicholas, Lightbown, & Spada, 2001; Philp, 2003). In light of this, many teachers wish to foster the idea that mistakes are okay. Many teachers, then, choose not to correct students' errors in an effort to avoid contradicting the message that mistakes are okay (Lyster, 2001). Such beliefs supported by teacher training programs and SLA literature are two major contributors to teachers' belief in reduced EC.

Another impetus for the reduced role of EC chosen by L2 teachers is the preference to avoid an over-controlling or negative appearance in the eyes of their students

(Noels, 2001; Noels et al., 1999; Tse, 2000). Noels et al.'s (1999) study of the impact of teachers' communicative style on motivation found that students who perceive their teachers as controlling (i.e., not supportive of students' autonomy) and uninformative (i.e., do not provide useful feedback) are more likely to be amotivated, have higher levels of anxiety, and have less desire to continue studying the language.

Finally, many teachers chose not to correct all students' errors because they believe that exhaustive EC is simply ineffective. Truscott (1996, 1999a) is perhaps the most adamant and influential among those who oppose EC. He bypasses the question of "how?" by means of resurfacing the fundamental debate of "if?" oral and written grammar EC should be employed at all. His answer is "no." He claims that EC should be altogether abandoned, citing a potpourri of motives for such drastic action: (a) explicit EC can be detrimental, (b) many teachers themselves are unable to completely understand students' mistakes and therefore should not attempt to fix them, (c) it is nearly impossible for a teacher to adequately balance consistency with variation to account for their students' individual linguistic and affective needs because the effectiveness of different EC techniques depends on certain attributes of the individuals (e.g., previous achievement, extrinsic motivation, and anxiety) (DeKeyser, 1993). Truscott (1996, 1999a) also supports his claims by citing several studies (e.g., DeKeyser, 1993; Van den Branden, 1997) that showed anywhere from little positive effect to a negative effect resulting from oral grammar correction.

In sum, what the literature relevant to this study of teachers' and students' perceptions of error correction tells us is that we have three related conditions. The first is that most language teachers no longer view exhaustive EC as necessary or helpful (e.g., Ferris, 1999; Truscott, 1996). The causes of this belief and consequential reduction in correcting students' (written) errors are found mainly in their professional training during which language teachers come across convincing practical and theoretical evidence (e.g., discouragement, learner readiness, and focus on meaning vs. on grammar) that they should not correct every student error they encounter (e.g., Ferris, 1999; Truscott, 1996). Second, multiple studies have found that L2 students generally hold to the antiquated behaviorist notion that their mistakes are inherently bad and, particularly in writing, must be corrected by the teacher (e.g., Hyland, 2003; Schulz, 2001). These two conditions combine to produce our third: the injurious mismatch between what students believe to be helpful and what the teacher actually does (e.g., Garrett & Shortall, 2002). This very gap, that has been found to decrease the effectiveness of instruction, is what we address in the following study.

Method

The problem addressed in this study is the difference in perceptions of written error correction between students and their teacher. Each Subproblem carries with it an assumption that is supported by the research cited above. Subproblem 1 assumes that the teacher whose class was used for this study is representative of university foreign language teachers in terms of his beliefs and practices as they relate to EC. Subproblem 2 assumes that an affirmative answer is found to Research Question 1.1. Given these assumptions, the following two subproblems and their research questions were addressed and tested:

Subproblem 1: Is there a gap in perceptions between students and their teacher?
1.1 - Before the treatment period, is there a gap between the students' and the teacher's perceptions of EC on written work?
1.2 - After the treatment period, is there a gap between the students' and teacher's perceptions of EC on written work?

Subproblem 2: Can the students' opinions be changed via Learner Training Sessions (aka., treatment)?
2.1 - Is there a change in the students' perception of how discouragement and learner readiness relate to EC before and after the treatment on these areas?
2.2 - Is there a change in the students' perception of how grammar and a focus on meaning relate to EC after the treatment on discouragement and learner readiness?
2.3 - Is there a change in the students' perception of how grammar and a focus on meaning relate to EC after the treatment on these areas?
2.4 - Is there a change in the students' perception of how discouragement and learner readiness relate to EC after the treatment on grammar and a focus on meaning?
2.5 - Does learner training on how discouragement and learner readiness and on how grammar and focus on meaning relate to EC equally help change the learners' perceptions?

Participants

All 37 participants who formed part of this study belonged to one group of second-semester Spanish students in two intact classes at a mid-size university in the Southwest of the US. Of the 37 students 22 were female and 15 were male. With the exception of one native speaker of German, all were Anglophones between the ages of 17 and 24. Their experience with Spanish language instruction varied from one semester to five years. The teacher was a graduate student who was a near-native speaker of Spanish.

Materials

Three alternate forms of a four-section, 16-item questionnaire were employed to measure the students' opinions regarding the four identified issues relating to EC: discouragement (D), learner readiness (R), meaning focus (MF), and grammar (G). Before creating each alternate form, a 24 item questionnaire bank was written; six items per issue were included, three of which the teacher agreed with ("X" items) and three that he disagreed with ("Y" items). Each form of the questionnaire therefore included an equal number of questions from each issue (e.g., Discouragement) as well as an equal number of items that the teacher agreed and disagreed with (see Appendices A and B).

The three questionnaires were given to the students as a pretest, midtest, and posttest. After all the data were collected, each X item was coded as a score ranging from one to five (from disagree to agree). The Y statements were coded oppositely thus ranging from five to one (from agree to disagree). Averages for each of the questionnaires as well as for each issue within each questionnaire were then obtained to analyze the data. Additionally, in order to answer research questions 1.1 and 1.2, the teacher took the pretest and posttest forms of the questionnaire.

The reliability coefficients were calculated for the three questionnaires as well as for each of the four issues within each questionnaire. The questionnaires' total reliabilities were consistently moderate (.69 - 0.71) although the individual issues' reliabilities varied more and were generally weaker (.18 - .85). All statistical analyses for this study were performed using SPSS 10.0 (Noru is, 2000).

Procedure

This study had only one group of participants. Therefore, in order to enhance the generalizability of its findings, a time-series design was employed (see Hatch & Lazaraton, 1990). The decision for this design was based primarily on the multiple measures and treatments that were to be used.

Participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and would in no way affect their class grade. All data gathered were kept anonymous and informed consents were gathered for each student. Participants were told that the purpose of the study was to see what they thought about their writing in Spanish and that there were no right or wrong answers. Information about the purpose of the questionnaires and the learner training sessions was purposely kept vague as to not create a bias in the answers.

As displayed in Table 1, the study was carried out over the course of five phases. Phases I, III, and V consisted of administering three alternate forms of a questionnaire of attitudes towards EC (see Appendix A). Phases II and IV were the LT sessions (aka., the treatment). The first form of the questionnaire (pretest) was administered prior to any treatment, the second questionnaire (midtest) followed the first treatment, and the third questionnaire (posttest) was administered after the second treatment. Participants' scores for each category were based on their ratings on the 5-point Likert scale applied to each item.

Table 1
The Five Phases of the Study

Stage	I	II	III	IV	V
	Pretest	LT session 1: discouragement & learner readiness	Midtest	LT session 2: meaning focus & grammar	Posttest

The treatment was carried out in two phases. Each learner training session focused on two of the issues related to EC; LT1 dealt with D and R while LT2 focused on MF and G. The objective of each session was to open a dialogue with the students about how these issues relate to decisions of how and when to correct their written mistakes. The content of the sessions was research-supported yet simple and informal so that it would remain accessible to the students without being intimidating.

Both sessions were conducted during the last ten minutes of two class periods and in the L1. The primary materials used for the learner training were two differently corrected copies of a student's composition that were shown on a transparency. Discussed over the course of the two LT sessions were the two versions' of feedback and their salient features. The first copy was an example of the feedback that the teacher actually gave a student, which was mainly meaning focused and was not exhaustive in terms of the EC that was provided. The grammar mistakes that were marked were those that the teacher deemed appropriate to that student's level and communicative needs/objectives.

The second copy of the composition, however, was quite different. Most of the marks focused on improper grammar usage. The paper's grammar was corrected exhaustively, all but ignoring the student's level, content, and affect.

After presenting the different types of feedback on the composition, the topics assigned to each session were briefly explained. Some mention was also made of the empirical, logical, and practical basis on which the teacher's beliefs rest but the dialogue was kept at a level accessible to the students. The classes were able to identify instantly with the idea of being discouraged by a teacher's marks. The treatment given to learner readiness, being a concept that students would not be as familiar with, included some background information (e.g., that learners cannot acquire certain structures before their L2 development allows, like present before past before future before conditional or [-ing] before past tense [-ed] before third person singular [–s]). For meaning focus, emphasis was put on the relative importance of content and accuracy in (L2) writing. In the grammar component of the LT sessions the teacher explained that grammar should be seen as more of a means than an end to successful communication. Next, the LT sessions turned to a series of discussion questions that related to the two contrasted approaches to EC. Some of the sample questions used to lead the discussion were as follows:

1. Do you think that getting a paper back that looks like this (show heavily marked composition) might frustrate you compared to getting one that looks like this (show reduced EC composition)?
2. How many of you think that you would benefit from errors that are marked in this way?
3. Would you prefer to get a composition with comments about the message that you are trying to get across and the language errors, or one that just focuses on the language?

The questions dealt with the distinct types of EC as they pertain to the two issues focused on in each LT session. Finally, the students brought to the discussion their own comments, questions, and doubts.

In addition to the two formal learner training sessions, the topics discussed during the scheduled sessions (e.g., the roles that learner readiness, meaning focus, etc. play in EC) were recycled whenever the students received feedback on their writing. That is to say, each student had multiple opportunities to see how what they had learned during the scheduled sessions applied to their work. Therefore, while the two learner training sessions were the only occurrences of scheduled, prepared treatment, the explanations and training given during the sessions were reinforced throughout the entire treatment period. Lastly, in order to not confuse the topics, discussion during each LT session did not include the two topics assigned to the other session.

Results

Table 2 through Table 5 present the results of the data collected and analyzed for the present study. These results are contextualized in terms of each of the seven research questions guiding this study as stated in the "Method" section.

Table 2
Students' and Teacher's Scores Before and After the Treatments

Treatment	Before Treatment 1					After Treatment 2				
	n	*M*	*SD*	*t*	η^2	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	η^2
Total	39			-88.38*	1.00	32			-13.54*	0.86
S	38	2.87	0.25			31	3.73	0.47		
T	1	4.88	0.44			1	4.88	0.44		
Discouragement				-12.77*	0.82	32			-11.50*	0.82
S	38	2.74	1.13			31	3.43	0.76		
T	1	5.00	0.00			1	5.00	0.00		
Readiness				-16.24*	0.88	32			-5.59*	0.51
S	38	2.72	0.78			31	4.05	0.70		
T	1	4.75	0.50			1	4.75	0.50		
Meaning Focus				-13.38*	0.83	32			-9.08*	0.86
S	38	3.70	0.56			31	4.04	0.59		
T	1	5.00	0.00			1	5.00	0.00		
Grammar				-26.53*	0.95	32			-10.74*	0.79
S	38	2.30	0.61			31	3.41	0.69		
T	1	4.75	0.50			1	4.75	0.50		

Note. *p<.001, *df* 30, t_{crit} = 3.65

The results in Table 2 display the students' and the teacher's scores before and after the treatments. To account for the possibility of a change in the teacher's perception of how to provide appropriate feedback, pre and post data were collected from the teacher as well. The data specifically address research questions 1.1 and 1.2; is there a gap between student and teacher perceptions? And does this gap remain after the treatments? As can be seen from Table 2, there are two differing total student means before and after the treatments (2.87 and 3.73 on a scale of 1, least agreement with the teacher to 5, most agreement). The teacher's opinions vary only slightly for the four issues (from 4.75 – 5.00), while students' opinions, conversely, differed much more ranging from 2.28 to 4.05. The data show a significant difference between students' and teacher's perceptions, as well as a significant change in student perceptions upon completion of the treatments. Overall, students' scores showed substantial variation on multiple planes: among themselves, among the four issues, and over time.

The results of the midtest, which was administered after the first treatment (or LT session) are presented in Table 3. These data show the progression in the students' opinions from before to after the first treatment. As can be seen, the students' midtest mean (3.50) appears to have already distanced itself from the scores on the pretest (2.87) gathered before any treatments. As previously stated, the focus of treatment 1 was how DISCOURAGEMENT and LEARNER READINESS play into decisions about EC. The before and after scores for these two areas show a significant change in students' perceptions, thereby providing a positive answer to research question 2.1.

Furthermore, in order to test research question 2.2, the students' average scores on MF and G before and after LT1 were compared using a paired-samples *t*-test to see if the treatment had an effect on the students' opinions. The observed *t* values for MF and G were -2.07 and -4.50, respectively, pointing to a significant change in the area of grammar but not for meaning focus. Though this was not the intended effect of Treatment 1, a change is noted; thus providing a partial answer to research question 2.2.

Table 3
Students' Scores on Four Areas Before and After Treatment 1

Treatment	Before Treatment 1			After Treatment 1				
	n	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	η^2
Total	38	2.87	0.25	33	3.50	0.24	-7.10*	0.61
Discouragement (D)	38	2.74	1.13	33	3.44	0.80	-2.63*	0.18
Readiness (R)	38	2.72	0.78	33	3.62	0.80	-4.90*	0.43
Meaning Focus (MF)	38	3.70	0.56	33	3.97	0.54	-2.07	
Grammar (G)	38	2.30	0.61	33	2.97	0.62	-4.50*	0.39

Note. *p<.02, *df* 32, $t_{crit} = 2.46$

The students' scores before and after treatment 2 (the LT session focusing on MEANING FOCUS and GRAMMAR, and how these play into EC), are shown in Table 4. The observed *t* values for MF and G were -0.41 and -3.19, respectively, thus indicating a significant change in students' perceptions with respect to grammar, but not with regard to meaning focus. This provides a partial but positive response to research question 2.3. However, with respect to research question 2.4, no significant difference was found for the areas of D and R, confirming that the second treatment did not have a measurable effect in these two areas.

Table 4
Students' Scores on Four Areas Before and After Treatment 2

Treatment	Before Treatment 2			After Treatment 2				
	n	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	η^2
Total	33	3.50	0.24	31	3.73	0.47	-20.04*	0.93
Discouragement	33	3.44	0.80	31	3.43	0.76	-0.08	
Readiness	33	3.62	0.80	31	4.05	0.70	-1.75	
Meaning Focus	33	3.97	0.54	31	4.04	0.59	-0.41	
Grammar	33	2.97	0.62	31	3.41	0.69	-3.19*	0.25

Note. *p<.02, *df* 30, $t_{crit} = 2.46$

The final research question (2.5) addressed the relative effectiveness of the two treatments. The results convincingly point to the latter session, which discussed the roles of MF and G in EC, as the stronger of the two. To better analyze this research question the students' average changes in scores between the pretest and the midtest as well as between the midtest and the posttest were calculated. They were then compared using a paired-samples *t*-test to see if the treatments had an equal effect on the students' opinions. As shown in Table 5, the observed *t* value was -10.75 and thus a significant difference after the second treatment is noted.

Table 5
Difference in Change of Opinions Between After Treatment 1 and 2

Treatment	After treatment 1			After treatment 2				
	n	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	η^2
Total	33	0.48	0.40	31	1.92	0.53	-10.75*	0.79
Discouragement	33	0.60	1.52	31	0.02	1.08	1.46	
Readiness	33	0.94	1.08	31	0.40	1.29	1.43	
Meaning Focus	33	0.30	0.77	31	0.06	0.76	1.06	
Grammar	33	0.71	0.87	31	0.44	0.77	1.07	

Note. *p<.05, *df* 30, t_{crit} = 2.04

Discussion

The present study has addressed the problem of a difference in perceptions of written EC between students and their teacher. Within this main problem, this study has identified two subproblems and aimed to accomplish two corresponding goals. The first was to see if there was a gap between the students' and teacher's perceptions of EC in the areas indicated by the literature (see, for example, Hyland, 2003; Schulz, 2001). The second goal was to find out if learners' opinions could be changed via learner training sessions. The results indicate that the answer to both of these questions is yes.

With respect to the first goal of the study, the results of the first research question addressed (1.1) indicate that indeed there was a perceptual gap between the students and their teacher, particularly in the area of grammar. This was not surprising in light of the numerous findings of previous studies that showed similar results (Green, 1993; Hyland & Hyland, 2001; McCargar, 1993; Schulz, 2001). This finding, especially given its strength of association (η^2 = 1.00), would suggest that the gap was large enough to be a detriment to the students' learning (Morris & Tarone, 2003; Noels et al., 1999, Peacock, 2001). As for the second research question (1.2), there was still a statistically significant difference between the students' and their teacher's opinions after the treatment. This result, however, must be interpreted with consideration to the observed *t* values before and after treatment; before the treatment it was much larger (-88.38) than after the treatment (-13.54) (see Table 1). This difference shows that by the end of the study the difference in perceptions had indeed been reconciled to a noteworthy extent, and thus, making students aware of their learning process, even during one class period, can impact students' perceptions and their overall learning process.

The second goal addressed students' changes in opinion regarding the four issues as they individually and collectively related to EC. Overall, the students' and teacher's perceptions were significantly reconciled following both LT sessions. Research questions 2.1 and 2.2 were answered by comparing pretest and midtest scores (refer to Table 3). The overall difference between the two measures was quite large indicating that learner training on discouragement and readiness was effective not just in changing the students' opinions about those areas but about MF and G as well. In fact, the change for G, which was not explicitly discussed in LT1, was -4.50 and that of discouragement, which was one of the two major foci for that portion of the treatment, was only 2.63. Since discouragement was never explicitly mentioned in the second LT session, we might conclude that this result points to the level of predisposed notions of how students view grammar and its importance to their "successful" learning.

Since the LT session prior to the posttest dealt with MF and G, the greatest changes were expected in these areas. Students' opinions on G changed more than any other area while MF was surprisingly the area of least change. The observed *t* value for R (-1.75), an area which was not discussed in LT2, was actually much larger than that of MF (0.41).

It was expected that the issues of greatest change in the midtest and posttest would be those that were focused on in the preceding LT sessions. The results indicate that this was not the case. The greatest changes following both LT sessions were in the students' opinions of readiness and especially grammar. While it may be argued that such a finding be attributed to the fact that these two issues were where there was the greatest difference to begin with (see Table 2), we would argue otherwise.

Regardless of the topics dealt with in the LT sessions, students' opinions about G were significantly affected. It appears that G is some kind of pervasive, underlying element which is bound to the other issues in the students' minds. This finding falls in line with Hedgcock and Lefkowitz' (1994) claim that learners focus on formal aspects of language, viewing their language use as "a form of language practice" (1994, p. 157) in which grammatical accuracy takes precedence over fluency and other communicative objectives. Similar to other studies of SLA in academic contexts (for example, Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1996; Hyland, 2003), the students were equating successful writing to that which is grammatically error-free. Then, once the students were exposed to some of the other issues that factor into EC, their views of G underwent a major shift because of its centrality in relation to all the other issues.

Conclusion

The findings of this study have important implications for the L2 classroom. First of all, it is apparent that students need to be trained to become more effective L2 learners by better interpreting the feedback they receive from their teachers. To this end, teachers need to reevaluate their methods not only in terms of what the research literature claims but also with consideration to how their students perceive learning and teaching practices. That is not to say that teachers should conform to what their students believe to be helpful. Rather, teachers need to be aware of potential (and real) mismatches between what students see as effective and what is believed to be effective. Teachers must also be willing to engage in an open dialogue with their students about the expected and the actual learning process. By doing so, the students' perceptions are accessible and the teacher is able to voice to them his/her opinions, thus identifying student needs and areas of potential mismatch. Practices such as this may be the only informal means by which a teacher can identify the perceptual disparities between themselves and their students.

Furthermore, what teachers believe to be effective in terms of teaching methodology and practice should be based on research and experience as opposed to intuitions about how languages are best learned; and in turn, shared with students via formal and informal learner training, such as the ones used in this study. More and more, it seems that the mysteries of SLA are revealed through research only to the academic community while leaving learners in the dark. Language learners, meanwhile, seem to be adhering to behaviorist notions about SLA that have long since antiquated themselves. Though it is not necessary to expose students to linguistic theory in the classroom, it seems that both their potential and the teacher's success are being limited by keeping students in the dark about how languages are learned. Discussing the learning process in terms of learning strategies, communicative strategies, use of teacher feedback, and general studying techniques can be the difference between the successful language learner and the student who struggles continuously in the classroom.

Although the findings in this study are confirmed by the research literature, further research is necessary before any generalizing statements can be made with respect to changes in specific teaching methodology. At the very least, exploratory studies are needed in which teachers delve into their students' perceptions of EC and other practices common to the L2 classroom (e.g., pair work) (Ferris, 1999). This preliminary step will likely identify other gaps in perceptions which later studies can attempt to reconcile via learner training or other means.

Further research is also needed in other contexts and in other cultures. This study examined perceptions of a foreign language class in which the teacher and his students came from the same culture. But, the question must be posed of whether the gap in perceptions would be greater and/or less reconcilable if the educational values of the teacher and student were different. It is this type of research that can eventually be most beneficial in bridging the gap between teachers and students.

Appendices

Appendix A – Alternate Questionnaire Forms

Opinions about Error Correction – Questionnaire 1

This is an anonymous questionnaire designed to measure your opinions about error correction on written work. There are no right or wrong answers. The opinions you express here will in no way affect your grade. In the line provided, please write the letter that best describes the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

A	B	C	D	E
I disagree	I somewhat disagree	no opinion	I somewhat agree	I agree

____ 1. The discouragement that may result in students from lots of corrections is a valid reason for a teacher to not mark every mistake.

____ 2. The area of my writing that the teacher should mark most is my grammar.

____ 3. For my Spanish to improve, I need my mistakes corrected, regardless of their difficulty or level.

_____ 4. Teachers should not take into account the negative emotional impact that marking errors might have on their students.

____ 5. I prefer to see comments on my paper that have to do with my accuracy, not necessarily the content of my writing.

____ 6. My level of knowledge and ability in Spanish should determine which mistakes are marked on my papers.

____ 7. If I get corrected on advanced grammar structures I probably won't be able to incorporate these structures into my future writing.

____ 8. The teacher should not consider the students' feelings in correcting students' mistakes.

____ 9. The mistakes I make should be marked even if they have to do with structures and issues that we haven't seen yet in class.

____ 10. The most important aspect of my writing in Spanish is the message that I am or am not able to convey to my audience.

____ 11. When I write I place the most importance on getting my meaning across as best I can.

____ 12. It is not helpful for a teacher to correct all of my written grammatical mistakes.

____ 13. I prefer that all my grammatical mistakes be marked by the teacher.

____ 14. I do not expect the teacher to provide me with more comments and corrections on my Spanish grammar than on any other aspect of my writing.

____ 15. It makes sense for a teacher not to correct all their students' mistakes on account of the negative feelings that the students might feel.

_____ 16. When I write in Spanish, I place more emphasis on writing "correctly" then on making sure that my audience understands what I want to say.

Opinions about Error Correction – Questionnaire 2

This is an anonymous questionnaire designed to measure your opinions about error correction on written work. There are no right or wrong answers. The opinions you express here will in no way affect your grade. In the line provided, please write the letter that best describes the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

A	B	C	D	E
I disagree	I somewhat disagree	no opinion	I somewhat agree	I agree

____ 1. It makes sense for a teacher not to correct all their students' mistakes on account of the negative feelings that the students might feel.

____ 2. When the teacher corrects mistakes, some thought should be given to how the number of corrections might be perceived by his/her students.

____ 3. The mistakes I make should be marked even if they have to do with structures and issues that we haven't seen yet in class.

____ 4. When I write in Spanish, I place more emphasis on writing "correctly" then on making sure that my audience understands what I want to say.

____ 5. If I get corrected on advanced grammar structures I probably won't be able to incorporate these structures into my future writing.

____ 6. I do not expect the teacher to provide me with more comments and corrections on my Spanish grammar than on any other aspect of my writing.

____ 7. If I could choose only one area of my writing to be marked by the teacher it would be the grammar.

____ 8. There are certain types of mistakes that should not be marked because of my proficiency level.

____ 9. Teachers should not take into account the negative emotional impact that marking errors might have on their students.

____ 10. Spanish students, regardless of their level, should have their mistakes marked by the teacher.

____ 11. When I write I place the most importance on getting my meaning across as best I can.

____ 12. Getting forms and conjugations right is not the most important thing for me to write well in Spanish.

____ 13. The thing I should work on most when writing in Spanish is to be sure that my ideas and message can be understood by my audience.

____ 14. Emotions should not play into the teacher's error correction.

____ 15. Clarity of ideas is less important that clarity of forms (e.g., conjugations) for my writing.

____ 16. The area of my writing that the teacher should mark most is my grammar.

Opinions about Error Correction – Questionnaire 3

This is an anonymous questionnaire designed to measure your opinions about error correction on written work. There are no right or wrong answers. The opinions you express here will in no way affect your grade. In the line provided, please write the letter that best describes the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

A	B	C	D	E
I disagree	I somewhat disagree	no opinion	I somewhat agree	I agree

____ 1. The teacher should not consider their students' feelings when deciding to correct mistakes or not.

____ 2. The most important aspect of my writing in Spanish is the message that I am or am not able to convey to my audience.

____ 3. When the teacher corrects mistakes, some thought should be given to how the number of corrections might be perceived by his/her students.

____ 4. The thing I should work on most when writing in Spanish is to be sure that my ideas and message can be understood by my audience.

____ 5. My level of knowledge and ability in Spanish should determine which mistakes are marked on my papers.

____ 6. Emotions should not play into the teacher's error correction.

____ 7. For my Spanish to improve, I need my mistakes corrected, regardless of their difficulty or level.

____ 8. The discouragement that may result in students from lots of corrections is a valid reason for a teacher to not mark every mistake.

____ 9. Spanish students, regardless of their level, should have their mistakes marked by the teacher.

____ 10. I prefer to see comments on my paper that have to do with my accuracy, not necessarily the content of my writing.

____ 11. Clarity of ideas is less important that clarity of forms (for example, conjugations) for my writing.

____ 12. I prefer that all my grammatical mistakes be marked by the teacher.

____ 13. Getting the forms and conjugations right is not the most important thing for me to write well in Spanish.

____ 14. There are certain types of mistakes that should not be marked because of my level of proficiency in Spanish.

____ 15. If I could choose only one area of my writing to be marked it would be the grammar.

____ 16. It is not helpful for a teacher to correct all of my written grammatical mistakes.

Appendix B – Questionnaire Item Bank

Note: Statements marked "**X"** are those that I, the teacher/researcher generally agree with and those that are marked "**Y**" are those that I generally disagree with.

Discouragement (A)

1. The discouragement that may result in students from lots of corrections is a valid reason for a teacher to not mark every mistake. **X**

2. The teacher should not consider their students' feelings when correcting mistakes. **Y**

3. It makes sense for a teacher not to correct all their students' mistakes on account of the negative feelings that the students might feel. **X**

4. Teachers should not take into account the negative emotional impact that marking errors might have on their students. **Y**

5. When the teacher corrects mistakes, some thought should be given to how the number of corrections might be perceived by his/her students. **X**

6. Emotions should not play into the teacher's error correction. **Y**

Learner Readiness (B)

7. My level of knowledge and ability in Spanish should determine which mistakes are marked on my papers. **X**

8. For my Spanish to improve, I need my mistakes corrected, regardless of their difficulty or level. **Y**

9. If I get corrected on advanced grammar structures I probably won't be able to incorporate these structures into my future writing. **X**

10. The mistakes I make should be marked even if they have to do with structures and issues that we haven't seen yet in class. **Y**

11. There are certain types of mistakes that should not be marked because of my level of proficiency in Spanish. **X**

12. Spanish students, regardless of their level, should have their mistakes marked by the teacher. **Y**

Meaning focus (C)

13. The most important aspect of my writing in Spanish is the message that I am or am not able to convey to my audience. **X**

14. I prefer to see comments on my paper that have to do with my accuracy, not necessarily the content of my writing. **Y**

15. When I write I place the most importance on getting my meaning across as best I can. **X**

16. When I write in Spanish, I place more emphasis on writing "correctly" then on making sure that my audience understands what I want to say. **Y**

17. The thing I should work on most when writing in Spanish is to be sure that my ideas and message can be understood by my audience. **X**

18. Clarity of ideas is less important that clarity of forms (for example, conjugations) for my writing. **Y**

Grammar (D)

19. It is not helpful for a teacher to correct all of my written grammatical mistakes. **X**

20. I prefer that all my grammatical mistakes be marked by the teacher. **Y**

21. I do not expect the teacher to provide me with more comments and corrections on my Spanish grammar than on any other aspect of my writing. **X**

22. The area of my writing that the teacher should mark most is my grammar. **Y**

23. Getting the forms and conjugations right is not the most important thing for me to write well in Spanish. **X**

24. If I could choose only one area of my writing to be marked by the teacher it would be the grammar. **Y**

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