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Response To Corrective Feedback: Exploring EFL Students' Experience

Ani Susanti

Abstract — Written corrective feedback has been utilized by many teachers and supervisors in EFL writing context to approach students' works, including thesis drafts. Students' positive response to supervisor's feedback plays an important role since it connects the input to learning outcome manifested in the students' revision. This study investigates how EFL graduate-students respond to their supervisors' written corrective feedback on their thesis drafts. In-depth interviews with three selected respondents lead to the findings that the students would revise the draft promptly when they feel motivated with the feedbacks. On the other side, when they are puzzled with the feedbacks, they would firstly ask for clarification to the supervisor, find the second opinion from their friends, and make their prediction to several unclear feedbacks. But when they feel dissatisfied with feedbacks, they would prefer to ignore the feedbacks rather than accept them.

Index Terms — Students' Response, Written Corrective Feedback, Thesis Writing

1 INTRODUCTION

Studies in second and foreign language writing have discussed the most strategic ways of approaching the learners' written works. Corrective feedback, also known as error or grammar correction [1] is acknowledge as one of the most influential strategies since it improves students' cognitive and language progression [2]. Besides, corrective feedback diagnoses the students' weak and strong points and supports them to practice more writing skills [1], [3] and shows them how readers would respond their texts as well [4], [5]. After Truscott [6] claimed that error correction in L2 writing is ineffective and should be abandoned, more evidence in the fields of language (L2) writing pedagogy have confirmed and emphasized the effectiveness of corrective feedback, e.g. [7]–[10]. Effective written corrective feedback encourages student's positive response. Positive response plays an important role in corrective feedback process as it links teacher input and learning outcomes [11]. Students' response to corrective feedback has been assumed in previous research as learner reactions [12], revision behaviors [13], and uptake [14] as well as engagement [15]. Previous studies on students' response to written corrective feedback have focused on both cognitive e.g., [16] and emotional dimension e.g., [15], [17]. Assuming that there is a symbiotic relationship between cognitive and emotion [18], several researchers have examined the students' response to corrective feedback cognitively, affectively and behaviorally and found out that there is a positive impact between corrective feedback and writing skills improvement since most students were excited and had successfully revised their work [12], [19]–[22]. Some studies have identified that student's response depends on the type of feedbacks. [12] and [23] investigate the reactions of students in secondary classrooms and community-college reversely and find that they respond positively to explicit and directive written feedbacks. [16] analyze that students in a disciplinary academic writing class respond feedbacks focusing on content more than that focusing on mechanical errors. However, [24] report that undergraduate students in EFL writing class respond both feedbacks on content similar to that on technical writings. Student's response to feedback is contextually bound. It could be affected by the learners, situation, and instruction [25] and cognitive and psychological maturity of the students [26]. It is closely related to criticism handling and negotiation skills [27]. The higher the education level of the students, the more mature they are cognitively and psychologically. In other words, it could be said that students in the graduate degree are more mature than students in an undergraduate degree. Initiated by previous studies investigating undergraduate students' response to teacher's feedbacks [16], [17], [24], the ways graduate-students respond their supervisor's feedback is questionable. This study sought to investigate "How do EFL master students feel and act after they receive written corrective feedback from their supervisors during their thesis writing?"

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2 RESEARCH METHODS

This study was conducted in a graduate program of English Education Department in a private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, whose students are required to write a thesis in their last semester. Each student is assisted by two supervisors to guide them to organize and report his/her research. The supervision process is flexible but recorded and monitored using supervision card. To get more data, I select the target respondents whose cards have documented at least five times of supervision. I texted all of the fourth-semester students then found five potential respondents, and three of them were accessible for in-depth interviews. The main source of data for this study were interviews with the three participants, Arin, Desy, and Citra (pseudonyms). The interview protocols (see appendix) were mostly adapted from [17], [23]. Each respondent was interviewed three times about what they feel and act after receiving written feedback from their supervisors. The interviews were audio-recorded then transcribed. To support their answer, I requested them to show the feedback points in their drafts and their revisions for those points. The additional source of data for this study were findings from previous studies as well as participants' thesis writing drafts viewing the corrective feedback points and their revisions. Data analysis started with coding, then continued with categorizing and triangulating across data sources. In the

next sections, the findings are reported in two ways. First, the narrative style is employed, where each participant is presented as an individual case. Second, the categorization of the data is displayed in a figure. In the discussion section, I switch back to the expository style to discuss the themes illustrated in the figure.

3 FINDINGS

3.1 Arin

Arin started learning English when she was in the fourth grade of elementary school. She did not enjoy English lessons until she met a diligent teacher who always reviewed her works when she was in the second year of senior high school. She firstly preferred computer department, but she finally decided to take the English department for her tertiary education because her brother suggested her so. Arin turned to love the subjects in the English department, and at the end, she finished her study on time with cum laude predicate. Arin is a high achiever English learner and has a strong commitment to her study. At the time the interview was conducted, Arin was working on her final chapter of her five-chapter-thesis. She said that she was open to any feedback from both supervisors and always asked for more comments. She enthusiastically revised the drafts and showed the revision on the same day the feedback points were given. Arin has a strong commitment to finishing her study punctually, so every time she found unclearly written feedback, she met her supervisors in person asking for an oral explanation. She took almost all corrective feedback from the supervisors, but she puzzled once when working on the first chapter because both supervisors had different advice about the number of research questions. One suggested five research questions, and the other one suggested three research questions. She was confused and finally decided herself to four research questions. She said that she was happy to have a conferencing to follow up her supervisors' written feedback and did believe that conferencing made every note understandable. In the third interview she mentioned that she learned from receiving feedback then imagined if one day she becomes a writing supervisor, she would make clear notes so the students will not be confused and will know how to revise their writing.

3.2 Desy

Similar to Arin, Desy started learning English since the fourth grade of her elementary school. Her initial interest in English was also the same as Arin, and it was her parent who forced her taking English department for prestige reason. But Desy did not enjoy her first semester and had low confidence because she thought that most of her classmates were much smarter. Accordingly, she decided to take English courses, she was positively managing her feeling of inferiority and finally graduated with her bachelor degree successfully even four months earlier than expected. Desy is an above-average and externally motivated English learner who has a high aspiration to be an English teacher.

The interview with Desy was conducted when she was revising the final chapter of her thesis. In the first interview, she said that she got both written and oral feedback from the supervisors and had regular conferencing with them (more often with the second supervisor, Pak Kamal). She was overall happy because she learned a lot from those many detail corrective feedback but was selective in following up the feedback; she did not take the feedback that she thought was going lengthen her study. In the second interview, she pointed out all the supervisors' written corrective feedback points on her thesis draft and showed her revised version. She said that she was once unhappy because the supervisor gave inconsistent feedback since then she decided to audio-record any oral comments from the supervisors. She was also concerned with the number of supervisors, and she expected to have one only, so she did not get confused because of any different point of views from supervisors.In the third interview, she repeated the story about her difficult moment when both supervisors had dissimilar views; she then decided to stop working on her thesis for several days until her mother and friends finally motivated her to move on. In the last interview, she reflected on her experience and said that she would not let her future students confused by giving inconsistent comments.

3. 3 Citra

Different form Arin and Desy who are full-time students, Citra is a part-time student. While pursuing her master degree, she had to work as a civil servant English teacher in one of the public elementary schools in Yogyakarta. Citra started to learn English in the third grade of elementary school. She was interested in taking English department because firstly she admired her older sister who was an English teacher. She also taught that English was an international language; thus everyone should master it. In the first interview, Citra stated that she rarely met her consultant in person. She just put her drafts on her main supervisor's desk, then took the written feedback days after. The supervisor wrote detail corrective feedbacks clearly on her drafts using a red ink pen. She could understand most of the feedback and got the ideas on how to revise them from the supervisor's written notes. But she sometimes got several unclear feedbacks and did not know how to do because she did not meet the supervisor in person to clarify the problems. In the later interview, she stated that she did not always revise the drafts as expected by the supervisor. This was because she made a wrong interpretation of the written feedback given by the supervisor. Moreover, she did not clarify the unclear problems directly to the supervisor. She would rather make predictions herself. Unluckily her prediction sometimes leads her to the wrong track. Then, she had to revise it again. In the last interview, she said that she was not happy with her thesis progress, due to her busy teaching, she was not flexible to meet her supervisor for conferencing.

3.4 Data Categorization Results

This section presents the themes as the results of data categorization from interviews and analysis of feedback points and revisions from the students' drafts (Figure 1). This figure shows the variation of written feedback types from the supervisors, the students' feeling when they get such written feedbacks, and the students' action following up the feedback.

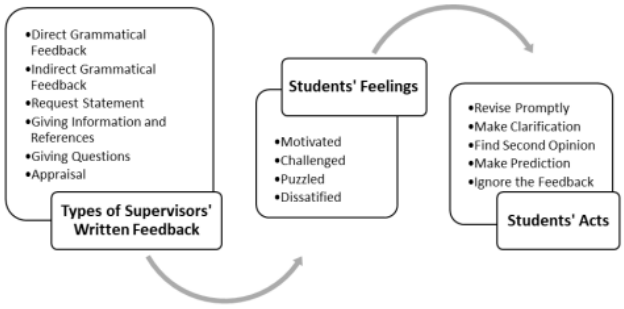

Fig. 1. Data Categorization Result

4 DISCUSSIONS

This study investigated how EFL master students feel and act after they receive written corrective feedback from their supervisors during their thesis writing. Based on the data analysis, the students would act to revise their draft promptly when they felt motivated by the written feedback given by the supervisors. The type of written feedback that could make the students motivated are direct grammatical feedbacks and another type of feedbacks, such as giving information and references, and appraisal as well. This finding confirms previous studies reporting that students reacted more positively to explicit and specific suggestions [12], [23], [24]. This positive feeling is important as it influences the quality of their revisions [17]. Excitement to teacher's feedback prompt the students to successful revisions [12], [19]–[22]. The students would ask for clarification to the supervisor through conferencing when they felt puzzled with the supervisors' feedbacks, especially request statement and giving question types. [3] writes that conferencing contribute to the success of the students' revisions because students and teachers can communicate; thus, miscommunication could be avoided. Another source of confusion found in this study is when two supervisors gave two different ideas in solving the same problems. However, with their cognitive and psychological maturity, the students could end their confusion by making a reasonable decision in their revisions accepted by the supervisors. The feeling of confusion potentially leads to frustration that end to unsuccessful revision [17] but unconsciously the students' negotiation skill develops through such situations [27]. The students in this study find the second opinion when they felt dissatisfied with the supervisor's feedback. Sometimes, when they found difficulties or got confused with the feedbacks, they did not ask the supervisor directly, but they shared the problems with their peers or other students from the same supervisor. Besides, they preferred to make a prediction when they could not meet the supervisor in person to clarify the problems, and when they thought none of the others could help. However, some of the predictions did not lead successful revisions as experienced by Citra. The previous study reports that dissatisfaction teacher's feedback discourages the students from revising their writing as expected by the teacher [17]. Such dissatisfaction drives students to ignore the feedback from the supervisor. As narrated by Desy that she ignored some feedbacks because she thought that they were unnecessary and too demanding. She was pessimistic that she could finish all the feedbacks. The data shows that unclear feedback is among the causes of ignorance. [14] write that retention to feedback is influenced not only by linguistic factors but also by affective factors. This means that in delivering the feedback, a teacher or a supervisor should consider the ability of the students in comprehending the feedbacks and the feasibility of the students in following up the feedbacks [15], [22], [24].

5 CONCLUSION

This study has investigated how EFL graduate-students feel and act to their supervisor's corrective feedback. The findings show that the graduate-students respond to feedback points positively and the other way round depending on the types of feedback and the feasibility of the students to follow up the feedback.Even though this study has employed in-depth interviews with the three female students supported by relevant documents analysis, a future study could involve the supervisors' views to sharpen the perspectives. In addition, this study indicates that cognitive and psychological maturity influences the way the students' response to feedback; thus further study exploring the relationship between those maturity and feedback acceptance is worth to conduct.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Protocol for Interview with Students (Modified from Mahfood, 2016 and Treglia, 2008)

1. When your supervisor returns your draft, do you read all of the written comments or just some of them?
2. During the process of revision how much do you rely on the supervisor's comments?
3. Do you go back to your supervisor and ask her or him to clarify a comment you may not have understood?
4. How do you usually feel after reading your supervisor's comments?
5. How do you feel when you finish writing a draft?
6. What are some types of comments you find helpful? (Student will point them out in the copies of her or his drafts that he/she brings to the interview).
7. Now show me in the drafts any comments you didn't find useful and tell me why.
8. Do you prefer that your supervisor write a lot of comments, a moderate number, or very few? Explain the reason for your preference.
9. Do you feel you have learned from your supervisor's comments? Could you give me some examples?
10. What is one thing that a supervisor can do to help you improve your writing?
11. When in the future you become a supervisor, how would you help your students? Mention some actions you won't never do as a supervisor. Why

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