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Generation 1.5 Writers' Success in Correcting Errors Marked on an Out-of-Class Paper

■ This exploratory study investigates how successfully advanced Generation 1.5 college writers can revise their grammar errors in out-of-class writing when a specific set of grading symbols is used and grammar addressing these same points is being taught. While recent research on Generation 1.5 writers' error correction using data from in-class writing gives insight into their ability to self-edit (Ferris, 1997; Ferris & Roberts, 2001), it does not address the more demanding task of revising an out-of-class analytical paper. The study involved comparing an early draft (with errors indicated in various ways) and the final draft of an analytical paper of 58 Generation 1.5 students in an advanced ESL composition class to determine their success in correcting eight of their most frequent and problematic grammar errors. The average success rate for all untreated errors was 32% versus a success rate ranging 77-81% for errors treated in some way, indicating a marked disparity in correction success between marked and unmarked errors. The study also shows conditional and word-choice errors are the most difficult of the errors studied for these students to correct. Implications of the findings for error treatment and grammar instruction are discussed.

The students in ESL college composition courses at our university are primarily "Generation 1.5 immigrants"—long-term residents who have been schooled in U.S. K-12 settings for a substantial amount of time but who have received little or no formal ESL instruction.¹ These students already have a strong command of spoken English. However, they have been placed in our classes because their writing does not yet meet the demands of academic literacy as defined by our university. In fact, our students struggle to maintain a high degree of grammatical accuracy when writing the kinds of complex analytical essays that are assigned in university classes. Our students report that, in high school, evaluation of their writing was content based with little emphasis on grammatical accuracy. While many of our students are familiar with the process of writing and are highly aware of the importance of content because of having been in process-oriented writing classrooms, they are often unaware

of many of the mistakes they are making and they typically have limited knowledge of grammar rules that could help them in editing their work.

In our ESL college composition classes, we use a uniform error-treatment approach in which we locate errors (usually by underlining them) and then we identify these errors using a standard set of error-marking symbols developed by our department. The impetus for our study was our desire to examine more closely how students were responding to this error-marking system when they revised their drafts. Because earlier studies on the effectiveness of different types of error treatment had focused on error treatment of in-class writing with in-class revision of that treatment, we wanted to explore how students were responding to this error-marking system while undertaking the demanding task of revising an out-of-class analytical essay. We thought such a study could provide insights into teacher error-marking behavior, student error-correction behavior, and the effectiveness of various error treatments. The ultimate goal in a study of this nature is, of course, to help Generation 1.5 students become better self-editors so that they can decrease their error rate as they face the demands of academic writing.

Research on ESL Error Correction and Generation 1.5 Writers

Studies have shown that ESL writers in general desire error correction (Bates, Lane, & Lange, 1993; Chandler, 2003; Cohen, 1987; Ferris, 1995b; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Lane & Lange, 1993, 1999; Leki, 1991; Radecki & Swales, 1988; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986), even though the effectiveness of correction has been questioned (e.g., Truscott 1996, 1999). Studies have also shown that ESL writers pay attention to such feedback, especially when they are taught how to use it as part of the writing process and can see its positive impact on their writing (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Blanton, 1987; Chandler, 2003; Cumming, 1989; Ferris, 1995a, 1995c; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Hillocks, 1986; Kroll, 1990; Polio, Fleck, & Leder, 1998).

Other studies have examined various types of error treatments. Lalande (1982), as well as Robb, Ross, and Shortreed (1986), found that making errors salient rather than simply correcting them for the student resulted in improved sentence accuracy in rewrites. Fathman and Whalley (1990) found that simply underlining grammar errors had a positive result on grammatical accuracy in rewriting. Even though Ferris's research was focused on the broader scope of "the influence of teacher commentary on student revision" (p. 315), when she (1997) compared the underlined grammatical errors in a first draft that had been paired with end or marginal comments specific to the error with a second, revised draft, she found students were able to successfully correct 68% of the underlined errors paired with marginal comments (3% of overall comments) and 78% with the underlined errors paired with end comments (14% of overall comments).

In a later study, focused on error treatment, when Ferris and Roberts (2001) examined the relationship between errors underlined, errors underlined and coded, and errors not marked, they found a statistically significant difference in correction success between errors marked and errors not marked but not between errors underlined and errors underlined and coded. In their

study, when the students did in-class rewrites of an in-class essay whose errors had been treated, they were able to correct 64% of underlined and coded errors (using five fairly broad categories of error: verbs, nouns, articles, word choice, and sentence structure) and 60% of errors underlined but not coded. In the control group whose errors were not marked at all, students were able to correct only 18% of their errors in a timed rewrite.

Besides the research on error treatment, systematic work has been done on refining ESL error coding. Bates, Lane, and Lange (1993) devised grading symbols based on the 15 most frequent ESL errors, prioritized into more serious (global) and less serious (local) errors,² and Ferris (1999) introduced the concept of treatable and untreatable errors, those that are rule based and those which do not have rule-based answers.

Our study was inspired by Ferris's work with Generation 1.5 writers (1997) on error treatment in out-of-class revisions and Ferris and Roberts's work (2001) on timed in-class writing and error correction (50 minutes with 20 minutes of self-editing in class after the paper was returned).³ While the in-class approach gives valuable insight into Generation 1.5's ability to self-edit authentic writing, we wanted to revisit Ferris's 1997 work on out-of-class revisions using a comprehensive error-identification coding system to address the demanding task of revising an out-of-class analytical paper.

It is important to look at college writing in this light as students are held to high standards when they write papers for courses they are taking. The language demands of out-of-class writing are self-evident: longer paper length; more analytical topics with little room for narrative examples; dual emphasis on content and clarity; the increased sophistication of abstract language with its more Latinized word choice; more frequent use of nominalizations; and more complex sentences, including those with noun clauses, subject and object infinitive and gerund phrases, and judicious choice of passive voice. ESL students engaging in this level of writing need to be very aware of how skillfully they must revise to produce a polished product.

Our students write analytical papers based on a reading passage and receive grammar instruction throughout the 10-week quarter. When students submit their drafts, all their instructors use the same set of grading symbols for identifying errors. Careful revision is emphasized as learning that skill is essential for the very real task of writing a paper for any college class. Given our curriculum, we were most interested in our students' ability to deal with out-of-class error correction in an analytical essay, specifically moving from revising a working draft to producing a final, graded product. As we have defined it, a working draft (also called a preliminary draft), is the first draft the student hands in to the instructor. Previously, the student may have worked on it with peers and/or a tutor or even revised it several times. These drafts typically are longer and in better shape than an in-class draft that has had limited editing.

Our study is based on the following research questions:

1. How successful are our Generation 1.5 writers at correcting errors that are treated using underlining plus coding (the standard error-marking system in our ESL composition courses)?

2. How successful are they at correcting errors that are underlined and corrected by the teacher?
3. How successful are they at correcting errors that are underlined but miscoded?
4. How successful are they at correcting errors that are inadvertently left untreated?
5. Which types of errors appear to be more amenable to treatment?

Study Design

Data Collection

Two groups of advanced ESL students participated in the study: One group had placed directly into the advanced-level ESL composition class. The other group had placed into the intermediate-level ESL composition class before progressing to the advanced level the following quarter. Each class was 10 weeks long (a quarter) and was taught by the same instructor. All students were broadly identified as Generation 1.5; in other words, they had obtained a substantial share or even all of their schooling in the US. The majority reported that they had acquired English informally and had received little or no ESL instruction during their years of attending U.S. schools. With the exception of three Spanish speakers, all students came from Asian language backgrounds. This distribution reflects the current demographics at the authors' university.

For the study we collected 58 pairs of out-of-class essays—each consisting of an early draft and a final draft. During the fall quarter, 32 pairs were collected; the essay prompt focused on conceptions of success and failure in our society. During the winter quarter, 26 pairs were collected; the essay prompt focused on diversity and stereotyping in society. Although the essay topics differed, both prompts had an academic focus that required students to use higher-level vocabulary, decontextualized language, and complex syntactic forms. (See Appendix A for the essay prompts.)

In both cases, the essays were the last out-of-class writing assignment of the quarter. We chose to examine the last assignment because the students had had the maximum opportunity to adjust to the writing program's grading symbols and to master the grammar topics taught during the term.

The errors in the preliminary drafts of the essay were marked by the instructor using the grading symbols common to all classes taught in the ESL program at our university. These grading symbols, based on the system devised by Bates, Lane, and Lange (1993), allow an instructor to code errors for the most common types of grammatical, lexical, and syntactic problems. After the preliminary drafts had been marked, they were returned to the students, who then used the instructor's feedback to write their final drafts. The final drafts were then marked by the instructor using the same notation system as in the early draft. A final grade was also assigned before the paper was returned to the students.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the essays, we decided to focus on eight errors that we most commonly found in our Generation 1.5 students' writing: verb tense, verb form, modals, conditional sentences, word form, word choice, subject-verb

agreement, and number (singular/plural). These are also the errors that are addressed during the three-quarter ESL writing sequence at our university. They also provided a mix of rule- and non-rule-based errors and of global and local errors.

The following grammatical and lexical points were addressed in the analysis (see Appendix B for example sentences) and were coded as follows:

1. Verb tense error (*vt*): The incorrect verb tense was used by the student.
2. Verb form error (*vf*): An incorrect form of a verbal was used or, in the case of a tensed verb, some part of the verb phrase was incorrectly formed.
3. Modal error (*modal*): An error was made either in the choice of the modal used or in the formation of the verb phrase containing the modal.
4. Conditional error (*cond*): The conditional sentence was incorrectly formed either through the use of an incorrect verb tense or form, choice of an incorrect modal, or the omission of some of the forms (verb or modal) in one or both of the clauses.
5. Word form error (*wf*): The incorrect form of a word was used (e.g., an adjective form was used rather than the correct adverbial form).
6. Word choice error (*wc*) (*prep*): The incorrect lexical item was used to express an idea or an incorrect preposition choice was made by the student. Word choice errors with prepositions not only involved choice of the wrong preposition but also the use of a preposition where none was needed or the omission of a preposition where one was required.⁴
7. Subject-verb agreement error (*sv*): An error was made involving subject-verb agreement.
8. Number error (*num*): An error was made involving the use of singular instead of plural or vice versa.

Each of the preliminary drafts was coded by two raters. If the two raters disagreed, they discussed the options and agreed upon a final designation. Both raters (the authors) are experienced ESL writing instructors who have taught in a university-level ESL writing program for many years using this notation system. As a final check, a third rater, a research assistant who was an international graduate student in the Applied Linguistics Program at the authors' university, read and analyzed the work of the other two raters. The other two raters then discussed any questions the third rater had posed and determined the final designation. In coding the errors we used the following categories:

1. The error was underlined by the instructor and an error-marking symbol was placed above it to indicate the nature of the error (i.e., *vt* for a verb tense error).
2. The error was underlined by the instructor and the correct form provided.
3. The error was underlined by the instructor and an incorrect error-marking symbol was placed above it.
4. The error was not marked by the instructor.

5. The error was simply underlined by the instructor with no coding.

We then compared each preliminary draft to its accompanying revised draft in order to assess the student's success in correcting the errors in the preliminary draft. There were only two possible outcomes in the revision process, "success" or "no success"; no category existed for "partial success."

Findings and Discussion

Success at Correcting Underlined Coded Errors

A total of 1,891 student errors (of the eight types we looked for) were present in the 58 preliminary drafts we collected. (The complete data set of 1,891 errors, broken down by error type, treatment type, and treatment success rate, is found in Appendix C.) Of these 1,891 errors, the instructor treated 1,293 (68%) of those errors using *underlining plus coding*. Table 1 represents this subset of 1,293 errors and gives the percentages of errors that students were able to correct in each error category.⁵

Table 1
Correction Success Rates for Underlined Coded Errors

<i>Verb tense error</i>	<i>Verb form error</i>	<i>Modal error</i>	<i>Conditional error</i>	<i>Word form error</i>	<i>Word choice error</i>	<i>Subject-verb agreement error</i>	<i>Number error</i>	<i>Total errors</i>
185/249	84/107	29/36	16/21	86/106	331/466	81/102	184/206	996/1,293
74.3%	78.5%	80.6%	76.2%	81.1%	71.0%	79.4%	89.3%	77.0%

Note. Successful student corrections/total errors treated

When we aggregate the error counts and correction counts from the eight categories, we see that the *correction success rate* was 77%. (Students had produced 996 successful corrections out of a total of 1,293 underlined and coded errors.) Our results differ somewhat from the landmark Ferris and Roberts (2001) study in which Generation 1.5 students were able to correct only 64% of their underlined and coded errors. This difference may be attributable to the fact that Ferris and Roberts studied error correction in a batch of in-class essays: After the marked essays were passed back, students had only 20 minutes to attempt their error corrections. By contrast, our study examined error correction on out-of-class essays and thus our students had ample time to examine the error feedback and come up with solutions. The difference may also be attributable to study design; Ferris and Roberts conducted a controlled study with 3 separate groups of students, each of which received only one type of error treatment. The instructor who did the error treatment in our study had no flexibility to vary the treatment type based on his or her perception of what would produce the most successful error correction because of program constraints.

As can be seen from Table 1, the total number of errors varied widely by category: The entire group of students made only 16 conditional errors but 446 word choice errors. However, the *correction success rate* was surprisingly similar among the error categories, varying from a low of 71% to a high of 89%. In other words, no particular error type stood out as being exceptionally

resistant to treatment—or exceptionally responsive to treatment. On the other hand, the slightly higher success rate in correcting *number errors* may be due to the fact that many of these errors involved a simple binary choice of adding or removing a plural -s, thus making correction relatively easy. The slightly lower success rate in correcting *word choice errors* may be due to the fact that these errors are not “rule-governed” like other errors in the study. They thus required more extensive dictionary work for correction—something that students may not have been willing to take the time to do or had the dictionary skills necessary to do.

Success at Correcting Errors for Which the Instructor Supplied the Correct Form (Direct Correction)

Table 2 represents the subset of the 1,891 errors where the correct form was supplied by the instructor. Interestingly, the data suggest that the instructor may have perceived word choice to be an error unamenable to treatment by *coding*, for she often switched to *underlining and direct correction* when she found a word choice error. As can be seen in Table 2, she very rarely used this technique for errors in verb form, verb tense, modals, conditionals, subject-verb agreement, and number. For those categories, she used it only a total of 17 times. However, for word choice alone, she used direct correction 99 times. She clearly had the sense that many of us have as teachers—that word choice is a different kind of error that is more difficult for a student to correct. This perception certainly warrants further investigation.

Table 2
Correction Success Rate for *Underlined Corrected Errors*

<i>Verb tense error</i>	<i>Verb form error</i>	<i>Modal error</i>	<i>Conditional error</i>	<i>Word form error</i>	<i>Word choice error</i>	<i>Subject-verb agreement error</i>	<i>Number error</i>	<i>Total errors</i>
5/5	3/3	2/3	1/2	2/2	78/99	1/1	1/1	93/116
100%	100%	66.7%	50%	100%	78.8%	100%	100%	80.2%

Note. Successful student corrections/total errors treated

It is also interesting to note that students were able to correct only 78.8% of the word choice errors for which the instructor supplied the direct correction. When the instructor supplies the correct form, it is clearly not a guarantee for success.

Success at Correcting Miscoded Errors

Table 3 represents the subset of the 1,891 errors where the underlined errors were miscoded. As noted above, the instructor underlined and correctly coded 1,293 out of the total 1,891 errors in the data set (68%). However, the instructor occasionally underlined an error but *miscoded* the error. This occurred for 129 of the 1,829 total errors in the data set (7%). Table 3 shows success rates for underlined miscoded errors.

Table 3
Correction Success Rates for *Underlined Miscoded Errors*

<i>Verb tense error</i>	<i>Verb form error</i>	<i>Modal error</i>	<i>Conditional error</i>	<i>Word form error</i>	<i>Word choice error</i>	<i>Subject-verb agreement error</i>	<i>Number error</i>	<i>Total errors</i>
19/22	25/32	4/4	9/12	8/10	26/30	8/12	6/7	105/129
86.4%	78.1%	100%	75%	80%	86.7%	66.7%	85.7%	81.4%

Note. Successful student corrections/total errors treated

Overall, the error-correction success rate was surprisingly similar to the correctly coded errors; students produced successful revisions for 77% of the correctly coded errors (996 successes for 1,293 total errors) and for 81.4% of the miscoded errors (105 successes for 129 total errors). The fact that students are successfully correcting errors even when those errors have been miscoded by the instructor might suggest to some that the coding part of error treatment is irrelevant to students' success.⁶ This suggestion would be in line with Ferris and Roberts's (2001) study, which found little difference between students' success rate in correcting underlined errors (60% success) versus underlined and coded errors (64% success). Ferris and Roberts determined that the difference was not statistically significant. Thus, in their study, the addition of coding did not appear to have an influence on students' correction success rate. However, two factors caution us against drawing such a conclusion. First, the Ferris and Roberts study used a smaller number and broader categories of error codes and thus students were provided with less specific information about the error. Therefore, the code may not have been of great use to the student. Second, students were under time pressure to make the corrections in an in-class setting; they did not have the opportunity to use resources such as grammar texts or learners' dictionaries. In our study, many of the miscoded errors actually did provide students with relevant correction information. For example, *vt* errors were sometimes incorrectly marked as *vf*, drawing attention nonetheless to the fact that the problem was with the verb. It is clear that students can correct a sizable share of their errors using the error-treatment system at our university—underlining plus coding. Further investigation is needed to determine the exact role of coding in the error-correction process.

Success at Correcting Untreated Errors

When faced with many essays to mark, an instructor finds it virtually impossible to "catch" every error in every essay. In our set of essays, the instructor left 346 of 1,891 errors (18.3%) untreated. This gave us the opportunity to examine how successful our Generation 1.5 writers were at self-correction without error treatment. Table 4 illustrates the correction success rates for untreated errors.

Table 4
Error Correction Success Rates for Untreated Errors

<i>Verb tense error</i>	<i>Verb form error</i>	<i>Modal error</i>	<i>Conditional error</i>	<i>Word form error</i>	<i>Word choice error</i>	<i>Subject-verb agreement error</i>	<i>Number error</i>	<i>Total errors</i>
20/67	10/21	3/11	1/18	12/29	44/126	3/12	19/62	112/346
29.9%	47.6%	27.3%	5.6%	41.4%	34.9%	25%	30.6%	32.4%

Note. Successful student corrections/total errors treated

For individual error types, we are confronted with the problem of small sample sizes. However, when we aggregate the error types in the right-hand column, a clear picture emerges: Students were able to correct only 32.4% of the untreated errors. By contrast, as noted earlier, they were able to correct 77% of the errors that were underlined and coded and 81.4% of the errors that were underlined and miscoded.

Readers might hypothesize that the lower correction rate for untreated errors could be due merely to the fact that the errors were more difficult to catch—and thus the instructor missed them when applying the error treatment and the student missed them when revising the draft. However, we examined these untreated errors carefully and found no evidence that these errors were qualitatively different from the errors that had been treated by the instructor. For example, we found nothing unusual or non-rule-governed about the verb form and verb tense errors that the instructor left untreated. We must, therefore, conclude that these untreated errors were a random and momentary lapse in concentration, a normal part of the marking process.

Errors That Are Amenable to Treatment

Although we had anticipated differences in the students' success rate for correcting rule-based and non-rule-based errors, their rate of success among the eight different errors did not differ greatly, with the possible exception of word choice, which had only a 71% success rate. The success rates for the eight error types ranged from 71% to 89% (*wc* = 71%; *vt* = 74%; *conditional* = 76%; *vf* = 79%; *s-v agreement* = 79%; *modal* = 81%; *wf* = 81%; *number* = 89%). In contrast, for errors that were unmarked, the range was 6-48% (*conditional* = 6%; *s-v agreement* = 25%; *modal* = 27%; *vt* = 30%; *number* = 31%; *wc* = 35%; *wf* = 41%; *vf* = 48%).

Word choice (including prepositions), however, is problematic for many Generation 1.5 writers in our classes because they cannot turn to rules to help them choose the appropriate word to use in a specific situation. Also, Generation 1.5 students who have been in mainstream language-arts classes have usually not been trained to use a learner's dictionary to help them make the appropriate lexical and preposition choices. They frequently use a native-speaker dictionary or thesaurus to correct their word-choice problems. However, if their vocabulary is limited, they cannot use these tools successfully. Moreover, when students have made mistakes without correction for a long

period, the mistakes may have begun to “sound right” to them and, therefore, they may be less likely to respond to feedback from their instructor.

Study Limitations

This is, of course, a small-scale exploratory study. In a follow-up study we would need a much larger population of students so that we could more effectively compare error-treatment methods. In addition, we would need a control group of essays in which no errors were marked. Finally, in our statistical analysis, we would need to determine individual error-correction rates and average those individual rates to determine an overall correction rate for each grammatical feature for each treatment. We could then make a more effective comparison between treatment methods.

The system of underlining and using grading symbols has been found to work so well for the student population in our program that our curriculum requires that this system be used exclusively. Passing the classes in this three-term sequence is very important to these students because they are operating under a deadline for completion of the writing-competency requirement, which, if not satisfied, results in their being disenrolled from the university. The authors thought that they could not, in good conscience, endanger these students in any way by testing procedures that might impede their progress toward this goal. That is why we decided to analyze a set of essays that had been produced under naturalistic rather than controlled conditions.

Implications for Teaching

We believe that our research has important implications for teaching Generation 1.5 writers in college ESL courses. First of all, our data clearly show that the Generation 1.5 students in our classes—who had very strong oral communication skills and an intuitive sense of grammar—could not correct errors effectively, a necessary skill for producing successful final drafts. When the errors were not treated by the instructor in the preliminary draft, the students were unable to correct even half of them on their own and could fix only 6% of conditional errors. Clearly, marking errors is very necessary or the number of successful error corrections in students’ revisions will be considerably reduced.

The study suggests that coding may assist students in correcting their errors, and our data point to a definite need for some type of grammar instruction to accompany this coding process. Given how they have acquired English, our Generation 1.5 writers typically lack a metalinguistic knowledge of English that would aid them in editing. Without this background, using grading symbols alone without teaching the grammar they represent is ineffective. Without this instruction, the students would be unable to correlate a particular grading symbol placed over an error with the pertinent grammatical information. For example, if the instructor indicated a verb tense error by placing the symbol *vt* over the error, that student would not have the grammatical knowledge necessary to attempt to correct the verb tense. Moreover, it would not be of any help to the student if the instructor even went a step further and identified the tense (*vt=present perfect*). In both cases, the student

would not have the grammatical knowledge necessary to make the correction.

As far as which grammar to emphasize, we believe that control of global errors is closely related to successful writing. This information can help the instructor set priorities regarding which grammar to focus on when time to devote to grammar is limited. For advanced writers, one could focus on just those points more related to academic writing than spoken English, such as the past tense of modals, the hypothetical conditional, and verb tenses with aspect.

As teachers, we have all puzzled over whether to make direct corrections or not. Our data support direct correction in the case of word choice, including prepositions. Since choosing the right word is difficult for these writers and since they have limited resources to turn to for selecting the correct word, merely indicating the location and nature of the error might not be sufficient. That being the case, the authors argue that, in many instances, the only way to help the student acquire the correct lexical term may be to provide the correct answer. Such direct intervention is not only time saving in the long run, but it can also help these writers grasp the sometimes subtle differences in the usage of higher-level vocabulary items in academic writing. However, the authors do think that providing the answer is warranted only as a last resort after the instructor has determined the student will not be able to make the correction.

Whether errors that are based on usage (such as word choice, sentence structure, or non-idiomatic phrasing) rather than rules (such as subject-verb agreement or verb form) are more difficult for an instructor to identify and correct than more rule-based types of errors is not a question addressed in our study. What we can predict, however, is that well-trained readers should be able to detect most of the students' errors. A related issue, again not part of this study, is how dependent students might become on instructors' identifying and coding errors so that they fail to develop an awareness of errors to correct other than those marked.

Conclusions

Although an objective of this research was to study grammar correction, we did not test any specific methods of grammar instruction. As experienced teachers, however, we would highly recommend teaching grammar in the context of writing as much as possible and preparing students to self-edit, such as having them keep grammar logs so that they can visualize their pattern of errors. Students can also profit from peer editing for specific grammar errors if they are given specific guidelines to follow; looking for errors in their peers' work can solidify their own knowledge of grammar. We would also recommend that teachers let their students' writing serve as their guide both in regard to grammar points to be taught and the sequence in which to teach them. Those errors most frequently found in their students' writing would have higher priority in terms of what to teach "first" and the amount of time spent teaching it.

However, teachers need to realize that even with careful attention paid to grammar instruction, Generation 1.5 writers may not learn how to correct their errors consistently in a 10-week or 20-week period; what is important is

that their errors will have been made salient and, thus, the students can continue to work on them, including self-monitoring for these errors or asking for specific help on them from a peer, teacher, or tutor.

For ESL composition instructors who are teaching process-oriented writing, the data support the necessity for teachers to emphasize to the student the importance of producing a “good” working draft. Generating ideas and using the correct grammar to express them in an early draft is especially important for ESL writers as they are not skilled enough to find their errors in later drafts. Moreover, if an early out-of-class draft has not been carefully written, students might find themselves faced later with such a high rate of errors to be worked on that they may become overwhelmed and be less likely to correct a good percentage of them. The essay draft that we studied was this type of draft; although it was the first draft handed in to the instructor, the students had received instruction on how to address the topic in class and had been encouraged to write earlier drafts and work on them with tutors, peers, and classmates so that they could produce a more revised piece of writing or a working draft as opposed to a very first draft and, in the process, would spend time focusing on content as well as picking up errors on their own.

Authors

The authors are lecturers in the Linguistics/ESL Program at the University of California, Davis, and have taught English composition and speaking skills to ESL, Generation 1.5, and international graduate students for many years. Their primary research interest is error correction and they have presented at national, state, and regional levels.

Endnotes

- ¹ Joy Reid (1998) says of these students’ second language acquisition: “Specifically, they have acquired English principally through their *ears*: They listened, took in oral language (from teachers, TV, grocery clerks, friends, peers), and subconsciously began to form vocabulary, grammar, and syntax rules, learning English principally through oral trial and error” (p. 4).
- ² Global errors (such as verb tense and modals) are usually the most serious because they often affect more than just a small part of a sentence and impede the reader’s understanding of the writer’s ideas. In contrast, local errors (such as number and subject-verb agreement) are less serious because they usually affect a smaller part of the sentence and, while distracting, generally do not affect the reader’s understanding. The terms global and local come from M. K. Burt and C. Kiparsky’s *The gooficon: A repair manual for English*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1972.
- ³ We can only assume that in their work preceding Ferris and Roberts’s study, Fathman and Whalley were working with Generation 1.5 writers as the makeup of the groups in the study was not described in more detail other than that they were intermediate ESL college composition “students from mixed language backgrounds” (p. 181).
- ⁴ An example would be adding “about” to “discuss,” incorrectly using a preposition with discuss where none is required by confusing it with the phrasal verb “talk about.”

⁵ Note that these numbers actually represent the success rates for the *data set*, not the averages of *individual students' success rates*. We are, in effect, treating the batch of 52 essays as if they were written by a single student. However, the purpose of this study is exploratory: Our goal is to describe what we see in a *batch* of student essays that have been treated a certain way.

⁶ Lest one jump to the conclusion that miscoding is superior to correct coding, one must keep in mind that the difference between these two numbers is not statistically significant, given the differences in the two sample sizes. The problem of statistical significance becomes even more acute when one compares individual error types. Students achieved 100% success in revising incorrectly coded modal errors; however, there were only four such errors in the data set—far too small a number upon which to base any conclusions.

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Appendix A The Essay Prompts

Prompt for Group One Essays

Write an essay responding to *one* of the following questions.

1. In his discussion of people who drop out of college, William Zinsser, in “The Right to Fail,” maintains that attempting new challenges in which they may fail is an important educational experience for young people. Because of this belief, he feels that, rather than condemning drop-outs, our society should grant students the right to fail. Discuss the degree to which you agree with his feelings on this matter.
2. It is clear that William Zinsser defines success in life, in his “The Right to Fail,” in ways that might be different from the definition used by many members of our society. Discuss your definition of success or failure and show how these ideas relate to Zinsser’s ideas on this topic.

Prompt for Group Two Essays

In his essay, “Thinking About Diversity,” Frank H. Wu discusses some of the possibly negative implications of the present-day move to celebrate diversity in this country. Answer one of the following two questions related to the issues discussed by Wu in his reading. As you write your essay, be sure to support your position with your own personal experiences and observations as well as any reading you have done on the issue, including Wu’s essay.

1. In the reading, the author maintains that although the celebration of diversity is important in our country, it can also have negative effects, such as the stereotyping of certain groups. He gives, as examples of this stereotyping, the idea that all Asians are good in math, science, and computer-related fields. Do you feel that such stereotyping is a negative or positive force for your group? Give reasons and examples to support your ideas.
2. In the reading, the author suggests that not only is there stereotyping of different racial or cultural groups by others but also that there is stereotyping of the group by the group itself. As an example of this, he cites the “whiz kid” image of Asian American students and maintains that both the non-Asian American society and the Asian Americans themselves embrace this stereotype. Do you feel that this type of stereotyping of your group by your own group occurs? Give arguments to support or refute this claim.

Appendix B Samples of the Eight Errors Studied

1. Verb tense error (*vt*)

When I was in high school, I had an Asian friend named Phoebe who
vt
loves to write poems.

Because students in Asia *vt* were forced to learn math since they were three years old, they enter school here ahead of U.S. students.

Asian students study harder because of the stereotypes others *vt* are having of them.

2. Verb form error (*vf*)

We have *vf* face many different stereotypes during high school and college.

He would never *vf* expects any Asian American *vf* receives a bad grade in a math or science class.

When he was applying to UCSD, his parents *vf* seen on his application that he wanted to major in biological science.

3. Modal error (*mod*)

He did not realize that he *mod* can be happier drawing rather than sitting in front of a computer.

Some Chinese *mod* rather spend more time figuring out the solution to a math problem than asking for help.

Young Asian Americans are taking more math and science classes because *mod* they believe they must (*instead of should*) be good in those areas.

4. Conditional sentence error (*cond*)

An Asian child *cond* would be praised and envied by others only if he or she studies in the computer- and science-related fields.

If a different racial group *cond* was to use the same term, there would be serious animosity that could stir up problems.

cond
They would not be consider true Asian Americans if they were not good in math and science.

5. Word form error (*wf*)

wf
Asian students are no longer a power community.

6. Word choice error (*wc*)

Asian students are not good in math just because of their ethnicity but because of their *wc* declaration and hard work.

wc
Frank Wu suggests that racial diversity in our campuses is important to our country.

7. Subject-verb agreement error (*sv*)

sv
Most Asian Americans is proud of this honorable reputation.

sv
The criticism of Asian American students also occurs if the student act too Asian as well.

8. Number error (*num*)

num
Those stereotypes are actually untrue distortion.

num
This huge pressure almost took away my interests in math.

Appendix C Student Errors, Complete Set

The complete set of 1,891 student errors broken down by error type and error treatment, with corresponding error-correction success rates.

<i>Error treatment</i>	<i>Error types</i>								
	<i>Verb tense error</i>	<i>Verb form error</i>	<i>Modal error</i>	<i>Conditional error</i>	<i>Word form error</i>	<i>Word choice error</i>	<i>Subject-verb agreement error</i>	<i>Number error</i>	<i>Total errors</i>
No error treatment	20/67 29.9%	10/21 47.6%	3/11 27.3%	1/18 5.6%	12/29 41.4%	44/126 34.9%	3/12 25%	19/62 30.6%	112/346 32.4%
Underlining and coding	185/249 74.3%	84/107 78.5%	29/36 80.6%	16/21 76.2%	86/106 81.1%	331/466 71%	81/102 79.4%	184/206 89.3%	996/1,293 77%
Underlining and direct correction	5/5 100%	3/3 100%	2/3 66.7%	1/2 50%	2/2 100%	78/99 78.8%	1/1 100%	1/1 100%	93/116 80.2%
Underlining and incorrect coding	19/22 86.4%	25/32 78.1%	4/4 100%	9/12 75%	8/10 80%	26/30 86.7%	8/12 66.7%	6/7 85.7%	105/129 81.4%
Underlining without coding	0/1 0%	0/0	0/0	0/0	1/1 100%	3/3 100%	0/0	2/2 100%	6/7 85.7%
Total	229/344 66.6%	122/163 74.9%	38/54 70.4%	27/53 50.9%	109/148 73.7%	482/724 66.6%	93/127 73.2%	212/278 76.3%	1,312/1,891 69.4%

Note. Each cell indicates number of errors corrected successfully/error treatment type