

Integrating Grammar into a College Composition Course

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Integrating grammar into a mainstream college composition course:

Challenges:

- Lack of time to teach grammar
- Varying needs of students (English level and L1, NS vs. NNS)
- Instructor confidence in teaching grammar
- In-class or even adaptive software-based grammar instruction can be "One size fits all"

Possible Solutions:

- Grammar workshops outside of class informed by student need (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Chuang & Nesi, 2006)
- Targeted grammar feedback through error codes/ logs and reflections (Conti & Sato, 2015)
- Educate instructors to recognize most common errors & use correction codes.
- Create individual modules to teach most common error types, and assign to students as needed.

Procedure

1. Grammar workshops:

During the Fall '18 and Spring '19 semesters, a series of optional grammar workshops were held outside of class, covering these topics:

- Connecting sentences with conjunctions (i.e. *although*) and conjunctive adverbs (i.e. *consequently*)
- Using non-restrictive adjective clauses and appositives to add additional information to a sentence
- punctuation with periods/commas/semicolons, paraphrasing and citations

2. Correction codes, Error logs, and Reflections:

Students were also given indirect feedback through the use of correction codes, and asked to record their errors and corrections in a log, followed by an end-of-semester written reflection on how their grammar may have improved.

- Correction codes were used for subject-verb agreement, verb tense, plural, article, and run-on/fragment/comma splice errors.
- Students were asked to fill out their error logs upon receiving feedback on each piece of writing in the course

Results

Grammar workshops:

- Students found the grammar workshops beneficial to their writing (4.15/5.00, n=7) and said they used the grammar they learned from the workshops in their writing (4.30/5.00, n=7).
- Analysis of student writing revealed that 4 of 6 students who attended at least 2 grammar workshops showed use of more advanced transition words/phrases covered in the workshop in their subsequent writing.

Correction codes, Error logs, and Reflections:

- A common theme in student reflections was that the correction codes helped them to "notice" errors, reduce their error frequency, and know which error types they should focus on. Students commonly mentioned specific error types in their reflections (articles, comma splices, etc.)
- Despite this, analysis of student writing over the semester showed no statistical change in the frequency of their errors after receiving feedback in the form of correction codes.

Implications

- Hold grammar workshops outside of class, or develop and guide students to specific, targeted grammar modules.
- Empower teachers & save time - standardize error correction codes and error logs
- More longitudinal studies on efficacy of correction codes (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005)
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References & Further Reading:

Conti, G. & Sato, Y. (2015). Metacognitive enhancement and error correction: a discussion of the shortcomings of traditional error treatment and of the potential benefits of learner training in self-monitoring strategies. The Language Gym. Retrieved from <https://gianfrancoconti.wordpress.com/2015/05/07/why-teachers-should-not-bother-correcting-errors-in-their-students-writing/>

Ferris, D. & Hedgcock, J. (2005). *Teaching ESL Composition*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.