

Engaging Foreign Language Students in Corrective Feedback to Writing

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This study examines foreign-language students' reactions to written corrective feedback (WCF) and the effectiveness of a personalized feedback protocol created in consultation with each student. Using action research methods, the researcher studied the affective reactions of students in an intact fourth-semester Italian class ($N=16$) in a U.S. university through the qualitative analysis of questionnaires and interviews. In addition, a quantitative analysis of students' written production determined accuracy rates in novel writing assignments. Quantitative results showed that three students improved over the course of the semester, five participants saw a decrease in accuracy rate, while the other participants had fluctuations in accuracy rate. Qualitative results show that students felt more positively about WCF in the foreign language courses (compared to their English-taught university courses), and that the three students who improved demonstrated a strong growth mindset and had very positive affective reactions to WCF. Findings suggest that foreign language teachers should work to improve students' affective relationships to WCF and help them to develop a growth mindset.

Table of Contents

Preface.....	viii
1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Studies on Written Corrective Feedback in L2 and FL Classes	2
1.2 L2 Students' Reaction to and Engagement with WCF	6
1.3 Research Questions	12
2.0 Methods.....	14
2.1 Research Design.....	14
2.2 Participants	14
2.3 Materials.....	15
2.4 Procedure	16
3.0 Findings.....	19
3.1 Quantitative Analysis of Participants' Written Production.....	19
3.2 Qualitative Analysis of Participants Questionnaires and Interviews	23
3.2.1 Reactions to Written Corrective Feedback.....	23
3.2.2 Student Preferences and the Personalized Feedback Protocol.....	26
3.2.3 Reactions to Written Corrective Feedback at the End of the Study Period.....	28
4.0 Discussion.....	30
4.1 Personalized WCF and Grammatical Accuracy	30
4.2 Participants' Preferences for WCF	33
4.3 Participants' Reactions to Corrective Feedback	35
4.4 Limitations	40

5.0 Conclusion and Implications for Teaching.....	42
Appendix A First Student Questionnaire	44
Appendix B Mid-Semester Interview Questions.....	45
Appendix C Exit Questionnaire.....	46
Appendix D Table of Participants' Preferences for WCF	47
Bibliography	48

List of Tables

Table 1 Total Word Count and Error Count per Essay	20
Table 2 Attempted and Successful Uses of the Present Subjunctive for Each Participant..	21
Table 3 Accuracy Rate of Grammar for Each Participant and Essay.....	22
Table 4 Example Affective Reaction Codes and Sample Participant Comments.....	25

Preface

I would like to thank the following people for their ongoing professional and personal support, guidance, advice, time, and patience over the years: Dr. Rick Donato, Dr. Lina Insana, Dr. Francesca Savoia, Dr. Brett Wells, Dr. Dolores Lima, Dr. Heather Hendry Annegan, and all of my colleagues in the Department of French and Italian at the University of Pittsburgh. In addition, I want to thank all of the students who participated in this study. I would also like to thank my family for their unconditional love and support.

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how I could better engage my students in corrective feedback to their writing assignments in my foreign language (FL) Italian classes at the University of Pittsburgh. My interest in this topic came from my years of experience as FL instructor in a higher education institution. The problem of practice that I sought to address dealt with two primary concerns, namely that students do not read or review the corrections that instructors have provided, or they do not learn to repair linguistic forms and stylistic errors in subsequent revisions and in new written works. I have heard this complaint from other FL instructors, too: students often look at their grade and then put the paper away in a notebook, sometimes never to be seen again.

The present action research study sought to engage students more with their feedback by employing a personalized feedback protocol that was developed for each student in an intact class. This feedback protocol was based on students' own stated preferences and was developed in conjunction with each student. Specifically, I wanted to make written corrective feedback (WCF) more meaningful for students and engage them in three ways: linguistically, metacognitively, and affectively. First, linguistic feedback requires that students to pay attention not only to lexicogrammatical errors, but also to stylistic elements such as register and tone, which may be different in their first and second (foreign) languages (van Beuningen, 2010). Second, metacognitive skills are the processes involved in thinking critically about corrective feedback, reflecting on language forms and writing processes, and then making stylistic edits and grammatical corrections. Third, affective factors, or emotional reactions to stimuli, may influence how students respond to WCF (Varlander, 2008; Bitchener, 2012). Students often become

frustrated or discouraged when they receive corrective feedback, and it is important that they understand that feedback is a useful and necessary part of the writing process and not a cause of frustration.

The literature review that follows has been organized thematically into two sections. In the first section, past research on WCF in second (L2) and foreign language (FL) classes, the types of WCF used, and the findings of these studies are presented. These studies focused almost exclusively on the effectiveness of WCF in subsequent revisions or writings with specific regard to lexicogrammatical errors. The second section describes feedback and individual and affective factors in research taken from both L2 classes and native or first language (L1) educational contexts.

1.1 Studies on Written Corrective Feedback in L2 and FL Classes

Since the early 1980's, one focal point within the field of foreign and second language writing pedagogy has been the role of written corrective feedback (WCF). Feedback in the FL classroom can take on a variety of forms. Feedback may focus on lexicogrammar issues, structural or stylistic concerns, or a combination of both. Instructors may use direct feedback, in which the teacher corrects the form for the student or points out the error in an explicit way. It could also be indirect, which involves the use of editing symbols or generalized comments about student performance, without indicating which errors were committed (Bitchener, 2008; Storch, 2010; Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Written corrective feedback may also be focused (that is, used on a discrete number of types of error) or unfocused, focusing on all lexicogrammatical and structural features (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Feedback may be a formative assessment, in which error

correction is part of a process that is used to help develop students' performance over time, or a summative assessment, where error correction is used to assess a product of student learning. Given the wide variety of kinds of feedback, instructors' numerous purposes and objectives when providing WCF, and students' reactions and use of WCF, it is not surprising that research on the topic has yielded numerous (and often conflicting) results.

Early research on WCF consisted of classroom-based studies on both FL and English as a Second Language (ESL) students. Storch (2010) reviewed eleven frequently cited articles on WCF that were published between 1980 and 2003 and found that many had methodological issues, such as lack of a control group or not giving students a new writing assignment after providing feedback. In addition, Storch (2010) found that some kinds of writing tasks were inappropriate for research on students' reactions to and use of WCF. One example of such an assignment was student journals, which are informal assignments that "are unlikely to motivate students to pay attention to grammatical accuracy" (p. 33). Of the eleven studies reviewed in the period 1980-2003, only six found that WCF was effective and that accuracy improved in subsequent revisions. In addition, the findings were inconclusive regarding the effectiveness of different kinds of WCF.

More recent studies on WCF have also produced mixed results, especially when it comes to the kind of WCF used. Storch (2010) also examined a second set of 12 articles from 2003-2009 that attempted to address some of the methodological issues found in prior studies. The author found that eleven of the twelve studies reported that accuracy did improve in subsequent writing assignments (including post and delayed posttests). The findings were inconclusive, however, regarding the effectiveness of different kinds of WCF. While the studies from 2003-2009 addressed research design flaws, most of them were experimental and not classroom-based (and therefore, not ecologically valid). Furthermore, the more recent studies focused on a narrow range

of English-language forms, such as definite and indefinite articles and past tense verbs. In addition, Storch (2010) found that affective factors were largely ignored, despite the fact that there is a body of research that suggests that they are important to learner uptake of WCF. These results are similar to those of Bitchener and Ferris (2012), who conducted an extensive review of articles on WCF. The authors sorted the articles according to several variables (including the type of WCF, whether short- or long-term effects were analyzed, and the educational and L2 backgrounds of students). Bitchener and Ferris (2012) found that results varied, but that in studies that used a control group, the students who received WCF performed better on subsequent written texts than those that received no WCF. They also found that it was unclear if unfocused feedback was effective, but that “the long-term effectiveness of providing a single treatment of focused written CF on discrete, rule-based linguistic categories of error is clear and compelling for the limited linguistic environments investigated so far” (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012, p. 73-73). They also found that direct WCF was more effective in recent studies (especially when WCF included metalinguistic feedback), but that overall, the effectiveness of the various kinds of WCF was inconclusive and sometimes conflicting.

The mixed results on the effectiveness of WCF has led some researchers to question whether feedback is truly beneficial to students. For example, in reviews of studies on WCF, Truscott (1996, 2007) has claimed that WCF is not useful in the process of acquisition of lexicogrammatical forms. In fact, Truscott (2007) claimed that WCF had a “small harmful effect on students’ ability to write accurately” and that “if [WCF] has any benefits, they are very small” (p. 270). This is due to the inconclusive and conflicting results of past studies, but Truscott (1996) also claimed that other reasons are both theoretical (i.e., the ways in which learners acquire syntactic, morphological, and lexical items may happen in different ways and may require different

kinds of WCF) and practical (e.g., the teacher cannot be sure that the student noticed the error committed or may not understand the teacher's feedback). There are also affective factors to consider, since feedback may lead students to believe that they have done poorly on an assignment (Truscott, 1996).

Truscott's (1996, 2007) claims that WCF is unproductive are worthy of consideration, since they indicate that there are some practices regarding WCF that may be discontinued due to their ineffectiveness. For example, second language acquisition research has shown that WCF must be noticed and understood, and that students must be willing to pay attention to the feedback and then use it in order for uptake to occur (Polio, 2012). Thus, providing WCF on the final version of a paper may be an ineffective way of having students engage with feedback, especially if a summative grade is also given. This may indicate to students that the evaluation (and feedback) process is now complete and that they no longer need to engage with the WCF. Although most scholars agree that WCF can be effective, Truscott's (1996, 2007) comments regarding the potential negative emotional effects of feedback do seem to be valid (Varlander, 2008).

While studies on the effectiveness of various kinds of WCF in L2 and foreign language classes is relevant to the present study, it does not provide a complete picture of the feedback process. Students' reactions to and engagement with WCF are an essential part of this process, but relatively little research has been conducted on it. The next section of this literature review provides an overview of studies on students' engagement with WCF in both L1 and L2 classrooms.

1.2 L2 Students' Reaction to and Engagement with WCF

While a great deal of research has focused on the kinds of WCF employed in L2, FL, and ESL classes and how it affects students' linguistic development, relatively little research has focused on how students react to and engage with WCF. For example, Storch and Wigglesworth (2010) asserted that most of the research on WCF has focused on the revisions (or lack thereof) that students make in subsequent writings, but that very little research has been conducted on how students actually process feedback. The authors posited that this may be due to the difficult nature of examining and analyzing students' internal thought processes. Other scholars from the field of educational research have also noted the paucity of studies on affective factors and WCF (Dowden et al., 2013; Varlander, 2008). Clearly, engagement is an important part of the learning process, and engagement with feedback is necessary if students are to notice errors and correct them, which can lead to uptake (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010b). Within the studies on engagement with WCF, there has been a call for more research on affective factors such as emotional responses to feedback (Leki, 1990; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010a; Kormos, 2012).

In her literature review of research on emotions and feedback, Varlander (2008) found that little attention has been paid to the role of emotional responses in feedback processes, but that psychological evidence indicates that emotions do affect students' responses to feedback. Individual factors such as emotional responses, value judgements on feedback, and attitudes towards writing and WCF are important for the development of writing in the target language. Bitchener (2012) claimed that if students "are unwilling to attend to and engage with the feedback that they are given, it would seem self evident that uptake will not occur and that learning will not occur," and that individual factors "may mediate whether or not [learners] consolidate their knowledge for ongoing retrieval" (p. 359). Recent research on individual factors and students'

engagement with feedback has provided some insight on the effectiveness of WCF. In this section, I will describe the research on students' attitudes and beliefs about WCF, how the quality of WCF affects students' engagement with feedback, and the role of interpersonal factors in the feedback process.

Students' attitudes and beliefs regarding L2 writing and WCF can play a part in how a student engages in the feedback process. If and how a student values feedback may depend on the student's language learning goals, "which are related to the feelings of enjoyment and enhancement experienced during the process of language learning" (Kormos, 2012, p. 394). In their case study on L2 ESL learners, Storch and Wigglesworth (2010a) found that students who had positive beliefs and values about WCF engaged with the feedback more, which they claimed led to retention and uptake. In addition, students who were more motivated to improve their writing also engaged more with WCF, which also led to increased uptake and retention. In a parallel study, Storch and Wigglesworth (2010b) found that uptake may be explained by numerous factors that include noticing, but also that "learners exercise their volitional control not only in what they notice but also in whether they accept, accommodate, or reject the feedback provided" (p. 184). Students' expectations may also play a role in how they react to WCF. Students tend to expect feedback regarding surface errors, such as lexicogrammatical errors, and many students believe that WCF is helpful and even necessary for their linguistic development (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994, 1996; Hyland, 2003).

The nature and quality of the feedback is another factor that may help determine student reactions to WCF. Curt, brief, or vague feedback (which may be a result of the heavy grading workload of teachers) often causes frustration in students, who tend to prefer clear, precise, and elaborated responses (Treglia, 2008; Weaver, 2006). In addition, students tend to prefer specific

and unambiguous feedback (Underwood & Tregidgo, 2006). Directive comments, or feedback that explicitly tells students what to revise or correct, could focus too heavily on surface errors and may “[give] students the idea that the teacher wants to control the essay and that the teacher is picky” (Underwood & Tregidgo, 2006, p. 81). This can lead to feelings of frustration or rejection in students. Additionally, Dowden et al. (2013) found that students had negative emotional responses when teachers focused solely on surface details and did not comment on the content of their paper. Logically, students do not want to feel like they have performed poorly, and therefore surface error correction may have a negative effect on students’ attitudes toward L2 learning (Truscott, 1996). Facilitative comments, or ones that provide suggestions, questions, or reflections, are sometimes preferred by students (Underwood and Tregidgo, 2006). Students’ preferences for global, content-based feedback or local, surface-level error correction likely depend on individual factors. For example, Hedgcock & Lefkowitz (1994, 1996) found that FL students expected and preferred surface-level grammatical feedback, while ESL students valued macro-level feedback on the content of their texts. It is important to note that there does not seem to be any generalizable findings regarding the kinds of WCF that students prefer (Underwood and Tregidgo, 2006), and that both global and local comments may be valued to varying degrees, depending on the student.

In the literature on engagement with WCF, there is much debate on whether positive or negative feedback is more effective. Here, too, there seems to be no consensus on which kind is best. Some students tend to prefer positive feedback (which can take the form of praise or constructive criticism), but too much praise can seem disingenuous to some students (Hyland, 1998). While negative feedback and criticism can demotivate students and inhibit them from engaging with WCF, praise does not necessarily mean that student writing will improve, since it

simply reinforces writing practices already in use (Underwood & Tregidgo, 2006). Therefore, a combination of positive and negative feedback could be most effective.

Suggestions, or constructive criticisms, are one mitigation strategy that can lessen the negative effects of WCF. Mitigation is defined as language that includes “a positive phrase preceding criticism or the use of hedges such as “perhaps” or “maybe”” (Treglia, 2008, p. 114). Hedges, or the use of qualifiers “some” or “a little” or verbs like “seemed” or “could” that soften criticism, are frequently used by L2 teachers. Another form of mitigation is the use of questions that are meant to stimulate student thinking about WCF. While mitigation may soften the blow of criticism, it may also confuse students who may misunderstand the teacher’s intentions (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Treglia (2008), however, found that mitigation was helpful to nine of the fourteen L1 and L2 English composition students that participated in her study. Direct and blunt negative comments made them feel “unmotivated to revise but also diminished their capacity to think” (Treglia, 2008, p. 128). The author concluded that, “[teachers] do not have to mitigate every comment but should be aware that comments that combine praise with constructive criticism are an effective tool to provide students with the confidence and motivation they need to actively engage in the revision process” (Treglia, 2008, pp. 130-131). It has also been posited that a balance of both negative and positive feedback is preferred by most students (Weaver, 2006).

Another important factor regarding engagement with WCF is the interpersonal aspect of the feedback process. Hyland and Hyland (2006) noted that written feedback can be merely unidirectional, especially when summative assessments are given, and that teachers must work to engage students in the process. The authors maintained that how “teachers choose to express their feedback can affect both students’ reactions to it and the extent to which they use it in their revisions, and may have a significant impact on writing development” (p. 207). Students’

perceptions of the role of the writing teacher is another factor to consider regarding engagement with WCF. The teacher is at the same time an evaluator, the audience of the written work, and the writing coach supporting the student (Leki, 1990). Students often see the teacher as an evaluator, because they care about their grades. Due to this, the role of the teacher as writing coach is diminished and the advice of the coach is valued less.

The role of the teacher in the L2 writing class is important. Teachers may be described as dualistic responders, who emphasize the “right” or “wrong” ways of writing and focus on corrections of surface features. They can also be relativistic responders, who focus on students’ ideas and content and tend to ignore surface features (Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Treglia, 2008). According to some scholars, a third option is preferable: reflective responders attend to “both ideas and stylistic devices while attempting to offer options for revision without being controlling” (Treglia, 2008, p. 107). This echoes Leki’s (1990) metaphor of teacher as writing coach and stresses the role of the teacher-student relationship in the feedback process. Students feel more compelled to engage in the feedback process when they have sufficient support from their teachers and believe that teachers should encourage students to become agents in their learning (Dowden et al., 2013). Treglia (2008) stated that “most writing experts suggest that for [dialogue] to happen teachers should abandon authoritarian views and adopt feedback styles that involve students in making their own decisions” (p. 108). The student-teacher relationship, therefore, is a determining factor in whether students engage with corrective feedback, and students should feel that the teacher is invested in students’ learning and development. Hyland and Hyland concluded that each “feedback act carries assumptions about participant relationships and how teachers think these should be structured and negotiated” (2006, p. 207). Therefore, teachers should carefully consider

the kinds of feedback they provide, how students could reaction to it, and how students may engage with it.

Due to interpersonal aspects, stressing the idea of WCF as a dialogic process also is an important factor in determining the effectiveness of feedback. Many scholars on feedback agree that teachers should give WCF on intermediate drafts (not the final graded product) and that students and teachers need to have an “ongoing dialogue” regarding feedback and improvement (Leki, 1990, p. 63). Underwood and Tregidgo (2006) also asserted that feedback should not be given along with the grade, because students then view the comments as a way to justify the grade given. More dialogue between teachers and students regarding feedback and revisions may also help avoid misunderstandings and miscommunications (Hyland, 1998). Providing students with a range of possible options to help them improve their writing and then letting them make their own decisions is another effective way to increase student agency in the feedback process (Treglia, 2008). In general, attending to students’ individual beliefs and opinions on writing and WCF should be a priority for instructors providing feedback (Hyland, 1998, 2003).

Since there appears to be no “one kind suits all” approach to written corrective feedback, some scholars have suggested that teachers try to work one-on-one with students to see which kinds of WCF work best for them (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994, 1996; Hyland, 1998; Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Underwood and Tregidgo (2006) suggested that teachers conduct student surveys to see what kinds of WCF students prefer. These individualized approaches to WCF are of particular importance to the present study, since I sought to engage my students more in the feedback and revision process by using a personalized feedback protocol.

1.3 Research Questions

Most scholars that study written corrective feedback agree that it can be used as an effective way to help students acquire lexicogrammatical structures and improve accuracy. Although there seems to be no consensus on which kind of feedback is most effective, most studies have found that students benefit from WCF, especially when compared to a control group. Some researchers have posited that WCF is most effective when students are engaged with the feedback in a positive, encouraging way. Students who are driven to improve their language skills are more likely to engage with the feedback and uptake is more likely to occur. While affective factors, such as emotional responses, clearly play a role in the feedback process, little is known about how these emotions affect students' engagement with WCF. It appears that individual factors, such as educational background, personality traits, and personal learning goals, also determine if and how students engage with WCF.

Despite the lack of consensus on which kind of WCF is best, past research has demonstrated that there are some effective practices for instructors to use. For example, WCF is likely more effective when provided as part of a dialogic feedback process in which the teacher provides students with some agency in their roles as writers and editors. WCF also seems to be more effective when provided as part of a formative assessment, and not when provided as a summative assessment. Finally, teachers should determine students' personal preferences and learning styles before providing written feedback, so that it may be tailored to fit the students' needs. All of these factors were considered in the development of the present study.

Based on the literature review, the following are my research questions:

1. What are my students' reactions to written corrective feedback?
2. Does the personalized written corrective feedback protocol increase students' accuracy

over time on specific features of creative and expository writing?

3. Do students' reactions to written corrective feedback change over time? If so, how?

Based on these research questions, the present study focused on a longitudinal analysis of participants' reactions and attitudes toward WCF and the use of a personalized feedback protocol.

2.0 Methods

2.1 Research Design

The design of this study was based on action research. Action research was well suited to this study since it brings "together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern" (Buss & Zambo, 2016). An action research study allowed me to reflect on my own teaching while trying to verify the efficacy of the new personalized written feedback protocol. Although action research has its limitations (including lack of a control group and a small sample size), it provided a useful framework to study an intact class in an authentic setting.

2.2 Participants

The participants ($N=16$) consisted of an intact fourth-semester Italian class at the University of Pittsburgh. Since the study design was rooted in action research, the researcher was also the instructor of this course. Of the sixteen participants, eight students were female and eight were male. The participants came from a diverse range of linguistic backgrounds, from heritage speakers ($N=2$) to students who had studied Italian in high school ($N=3$), to students who had previously studied abroad in Italy in 4- or 6-week summer programs ($N=3$). Participants ranged from first-year to fourth-year university students. To maintain the ecological validity of the classroom-based research design, no participants were excluded from the study.

The course in which the participants studied was a content-based course taught entirely in Italian. In the course, students examined the last one hundred years of Italian socio-political history through the lens of popular and literary culture. The instructor-researcher had taught this course regularly for over ten years under a different course title (the title was changed and the content of the course slightly modified when the Italian major was revised). The instructor used a variety of assessments in the course, including quizzes, exams, oral presentations, and written assignments. The three essays that make up the basis for the present study are described in the Procedures section of this paper.

2.3 Materials

The materials consisted of two questionnaires, one face-to-face interview, and the three essays that participants wrote over the course of the semester. All participants completed all components with the exception of one participant that could not attend the face-to-face interview. In order to evaluate the participants' attitudes towards and reactions to written corrective feedback, I asked that students complete an initial questionnaire (Appendix A) with questions that targeted their emotional reactions towards feedback in their first language and in their FL classes. I also asked their preferred forms of WCF, including direct, indirect, focused, unfocused, positive, and negative feedback, along with preferences regarding the focus of the feedback (grammatical, lexical, or structural or compositional feedback).

The questionnaires consisted of two pen-and-pencil forms conducted in class that was modeled on Leki's (1991) survey that she included in her seminal study on students' preferences for written feedback in ESL college-level writing classes. Leki's survey included Likert-scale

statements and multiple-choice questions that explored students' preferences and also their writing goals in their ESL class. The researcher modified this by using open-ended questions that asked students to describe their preferences so that personalized feedback could be given to students (open-ended questions were not an aspect explored in the Leki (1991) study).

In the mid-semester point of the research protocol, participants also met with the instructor-researcher for a face-to-face interview. The interview (Appendix B) consisted of questions regarding the personalized feedback protocol, participants' reactions to the feedback, and their progress in the course.

In order to determine how participants' accuracy improved over time, the researcher compared their first, second, and third essays written for class. Each essay focused on a different theme (related to the course content) and each was designed to elicit specific grammatical features. The procedures for these essays are detailed in the next section of this paper.

To monitor longitudinal reactions to feedback, students completed an exit questionnaire at the end of the semester (Appendix C). The questions asked about participants' attitudes towards the feedback they received in the course and how they reacted to the new feedback protocol. It had a similar structure to the first questionnaire.

2.4 Procedure

The study began in the third week of class and ended in the fifteenth and final week of class. The first questionnaire was given to participants in the third week of class. The first questionnaire was conducted in English and during class time; it was accompanied by a brief introduction to the most common forms of WCF currently used. For the first questionnaire, each

student created a participant username based on the name of an animal and a color in Italian. Participants used these usernames as non-identifiable labels over the course of the study.

The information regarding participants' preferences for WCF was then used to develop a personalized feedback protocol for each student. For the personalized feedback protocol, the instructor created a table (Appendix D) that indicated each student and their preferences for WCF. For example, a student might be identified with the following preferences: "direct, unfocused, positive and negative with an emphasis on lexicogrammatical structures". The instructor then gave that student only direct (i.e., explicit) feedback on all grammatical and lexical errors, along with both positive and negative feedback, highlighting where the student did well and where he or she could improve. The language of the feedback was both in Italian and in English, with the majority of feedback in the target language. English was used for particularly difficult grammatical concepts and dense semantic, semantic, or syntactical explanations.

Participants completed the first take-home writing assignment (Essay 1) in the fifth week of class. Essay 1 was a creative writing assignment in which participants reimagined the Romulus and Remus myth in a contemporary context. The instructor used the personalized feedback protocol for each student and provided feedback according to their preferences. There was no grade or other summative assessment provided at this time. Once participants received the instructor's feedback, they had approximately one week to submit a revision, which was evaluated with a rubric, WCF, and a letter grade that contributed to the students' final grade for the course. Essay 2, which participants turned in during the seventh week of class, consisted of an expository essay in which students gave their opinions on a movie viewed in class. For Essay 3, which was turned in during the thirteenth week of class, the students had to select and provide a cultural analysis of

an Italian viral video, providing opinions on its content and message. Participants' essays consisted of approximately 250-500 words per essay.

Each essay was designed to elicit a particular grammatical structure. In Essay 1, the *passato remoto* (the perfect past tense) was the target structure, as it is highly common in literary and narrative texts. In Essay 2, participants could have used the *passato remoto* when discussing the historical context of the film and they should have also used the present subjunctive (the grammatical focus of the second essay) when using certain verbs to give opinions. In Essay 3, students should have also used the present subjunctive to express opinions. At no time were students asked explicitly to use these verbs, so that the grammatical choices used by them would not be directly influenced by the instructor. The researcher employed this design in order to examine the type and token frequencies of certain grammatical structures in the analysis of student errors. The analysis occurred after the end of the semester.

Participants underwent an interview during the ninth week of class (with the exception of one female student, who underwent the interview at the beginning of the tenth week, and a male student who was not able to complete the interview). In these interviews, the researcher addressed concerns that students may have had regarding WCF and attempted to determine whether the personalized feedback protocols were effective and how they could be improved.

In the fifteenth week of class, participants completed an exit questionnaire that focused on affective factors, including students' reactions to WCF, and questions that asked about students' own perceptions of their development in writing over the course of the semester.

3.0 Findings

3.1 Quantitative Analysis of Participants' Written Production

In order to analyze type and token frequency of participants' errors, an error coding procedure adapted from Ferris (2006) and Han and Hyland (2015) was used to indicate errors with regard to content, lexical errors, syntactic errors, and grammatical (morphological) errors. After an initial analysis, four main categories of errors emerged: grammatical errors, lexical errors, spelling errors, and structural (or compositional) errors. The researcher created an operational definition for each category. Grammatical errors consisted of incorrect morphological endings with verb tenses and moods, incorrect verb tense or mood choice, incorrect plural forms, and incorrect use of articles, prepositions, and other non-derivational words. Incorrect or inappropriate word or phrase choice was labeled as a lexical error. Spelling errors consisted of errors with derivational noun endings, use of incorrect anglicized or auto-corrected words, and incorrect use of punctuation and capitalization. Structural errors were defined as those relating to compositional features such as paragraph structure, register and tone, and other stylistic elements. For the grammatical and spelling errors, an error was counted when the participant made a mistake and also when a form should have been used in a mandatory context (e.g., if an article was missing in a noun phrase, often mandatory in Italian). Table 1 shows the total numbers of words and errors according to type for each essay for the entire class.

Table 1 Total Word Count and Error Count per Essay

Essay	Total Word Count	Total Errors	Total Grammatical Errors	Total Lexical Errors	Total Spelling Errors	Total Structural Errors
Essay 1	5115	538	439	45	60	2
Essay 2	5492	530	382	64	83	1
Essay 3	4839	458	363	17	78	0

The majority of errors (77.6%) consisted of grammatical errors, while spelling errors accounted for 14.5% of all errors. Lexical errors comprised 8.3% of all errors, and structural errors accounted for less than one percent (.2%) of all errors. An analysis of these results will be provided in the Discussion section of this paper.

Since the focus of the essay design focused on particular grammatical features (the *passato remoto* and the present subjunctive), an analysis of the token frequency was done on this as well. While all students used the *passato remoto* in the first essay, only three used the *passato remoto* in the second essay, accounting for just four tokens of this verb tense overall. Due to the paucity of tokens in the second essay, an analysis of uptake or retention was not possible. In the second essay, all students used the present subjunctive to express an opinion, with accuracy rates that ranged from 22.2% to 100%. In the third essay, thirteen participants used the present subjunctive, but there were considerably fewer tokens of this form. Table 2 shows the attempts of use of the present subjunctive, the accurate uses of the verb type, and accuracy rates for both essays.

Table 2 Attempted and Successful Uses of the Present Subjunctive for Each Participant

Participant	Essay 2			Essay 3		
	Successful Uses	Attempted Uses	Accuracy Rate (%)	Successful Uses	Attempted Uses	Accuracy Rate (%)
CacatuaArgenta	1	1	100	0	1	0
CaneGiallo	4	5	80	0	0	0
CaneRosa	7	12	58.3	3	3	100
CanguroGrigio	6	6	100	2	2	100
CapraRosa	2	9	22.2	0	0	0
DelfinoGiallo	1	4	25	0	6	0
GattoGrigio	6	6	100	3	3	100
LioneBianco	4	6	66.6	1	4	25
LupoRosso	8	9	88.8	1	3	33.3
OrsoPolareRosa	2	5	40	0	1	0
PinguinoBlu	4	5	80	0	2	0
SerpenteBianco	8	9	88.8	1	1	100
TartarugaNera	0	2	0	0	4	0
TigreBlu	2	3	66.6	0	1	0
TigreViola	3	7	42.8	3	3	100
VolpeViola	3	3	100	0	0	0

In order to see if participants improved overall over the course of the semester, an accuracy rate was calculated for each participant using the category of grammatical errors alone. The researcher chose this category since grammatical errors made up the majority of the overall errors, and because the lexical and spelling errors potentially represented outliers. For example, some lexical and spelling errors were likely the result of autocorrect, and many spelling errors were the result of repeated use of capital letters in the title of the film in Essay 2 (only the first word of a film title is capitalized in Italian). Table 3 shows the accuracy rate per essay for each participant.

Table 3 Accuracy Rate of Grammar for Each Participant and Essay

Participant	Accuracy Rate (%) for Essay 1	Accuracy Rate (%) for Essay 2	Accuracy Rate (%) for Essay 3
CacatuaArgenta	92.01	91.19	85.66
CaneGiallo	92.66	94.39	92.25
CaneRosa	92.18	90.63	90.39
CanguroGrigio	91.84	97.19	98.76
CapraRosa	93.87	91.13	94.90
DelfinoGiallo	87.50	84.23	75.15
GattoGrigio	97.91	96.06	97.45
LioneBianco	86.18	96.77	91.44
LupoRosso	91.03	90.79	95.07
OrsoPolareRosa	91.55	91.73	88.72
PinguinoBlu	83.90	93.79	94.37
SerpenteBianco	94.77	96.02	97.79
TartarugaNera	90.23	89.55	89.19
TigreBlu	93.54	93.00	91.20
TigreViola	90.79	95.69	94.38
VolpeViola	90.91	90.60	90.74

Due to the fact that accuracy rates were generally high and in the same range (between 75%-98%), a visual representation in the form of a graph or chart was not feasible. However, Table 3 shows that three participants improved their accuracy rates over the three essays (CanguroGrigio, PinguinoBlu, and SerpenteBianco). Five participants saw a decrease in accuracy rate over the course of the semester, while the other participants had fluctuations in accuracy rate (with rates either decreasing then increasing or increasing then decreasing). An analysis of these accuracy rates will be provided in the Discussion section.

3.2 Qualitative Analysis of Participants Questionnaires and Interviews

The two questionnaires and the interviews were transcribed and coded using the Dedoose online program in order to see how participants perceived corrective feedback and how their opinions changed over time. The coded transcriptions were then used in a data reduction protocol in order to determine the main themes of the questionnaires and surveys.

3.2.1 Reactions to Written Corrective Feedback

The participants in this study described their experiences with written corrective feedback in a wide variety of ways. In the first questionnaire, participants responded with both positive and negative comments when describing their reactions to WCF in their English-taught university courses. Some participants described a lack of feedback in some courses, while others said that the feedback they received was lacking in depth or clarity. Other participants felt more positive about receiving feedback and said they even enjoyed receiving feedback. Reactions were especially positive when WCF was perceived as helpful or useful, and when students felt that their instructors were invested in their progress. Participant CanguroGrigio said:

I enjoyed receiving written feedback because it helps me understand what I did well and what I need to improve on. It also makes me feel like the professor cares more about their students when they give feedback.

Participants' reactions to WCF in their foreign language classes were generally perceived in a more positive way. Only four students wrote four negative comments with regard to feedback in the FL classes, compared to twelve negative comments when asked about their feedback in English-taught university courses. Of these four students who said they reacted negatively to WCF,

all four also stated that they also found WCF beneficial in some way. Negative reactions were either directed at the participant (“I feel annoyed with myself”) or at the feedback itself (e.g., “[WCF] is overwhelming to me sometimes” and “[...] having corrections with no information along with it is frustrating”). Some participants also stated that unfocused feedback, where all errors are indicated, was at times overwhelming. Others appreciated when all errors are corrected. Participant CaneGiallo said, “I would rather see all the issues marked incorrect so I know for sure that they’re wrong [...] it helps me recognize errors in the future”. Most participants believed that WCF, whether focused or unfocused, was useful for language learning.

Fifteen of the sixteen participants said that there were differences between the kinds of feedback they received in FL classes compared to English-taught university courses. Most noted that feedback in English-taught courses focused more on content, while FL courses focused more on grammatical and lexical items. Some participants also said that their feedback in FL classes tended to be more positive. Participant LupoRosso commented:

There is basically no positive feedback in English classes which leaves me unsure of where I stand in my work. In Italian, it is much more positive and keeps me aware of my abilities.

Most participants said that the differences in WCF in their FL and English-taught courses were to be expected. Regarding the focus on grammar in FL classes, participant SerpenteBianco stated:

This is to be expected, as my Italian class is for students who are still in the process of developing expressive and conversational fluency in Italian. The feedback in my Italian class is focused on helping me to express my thoughts properly in Italian.

The sole participant that felt that there were no differences in kinds of WCF said that in both FL and English-taught courses, “constructive, negative feedback and [...] positive feedback is always the same”.

Participants’ reactions to WCF in their FL classes fell into several different categories. Table 4 provides examples taken from various participants along with sample quotes demonstrating their affective reactions to WCF.

Table 4 Example Affective Reaction Codes and Sample Participant Comments

Affective Reaction	Comments
Contentment	<p>“Positive feedback makes me feel good about my ability to express myself and like I’m learning more”</p> <p>“Depending [on] what the errors are I’m happy to see feedback because it helps me learn and improve my writing”</p>
Confidence	<p>“I felt confident about the feedback since it was clear [and] concise. I felt that I would be able to make the corrections and learn from them.”</p>
Disappointment	<p>“My reaction was disappointed because I was making simple mistakes [...]”</p>
Overwhelming	<p>“[...] the feedback can be overwhelming and negative”</p>
Appreciation	<p>“I’ve gotten a great deal of specific, grammatical feedback that I appreciated”</p> <p>“I appreciated the attention of a one-on-one meeting”</p>
Reassured	<p>“[...] feedback was reassuring as it confirmed I am on the right track”</p>

Table 4 represents some of the most common reactions among participants. Many of the comments fell into the general category of positive affect, including ones that expressed contentment, confidence, appreciation or the feeling of being reassured. While less numerous, other comments expressed negative affective reactions, such as disappointment or a feeling of being overwhelmed.

One unanticipated result of the questionnaires and interview was that thirteen participants gave unprompted statements that can be described as being part of a “growth mindset”, which is the idea that learning and the mastery of skills can improve through practice, input from others, and effort (Dweck, 2006; Lou & Noels, 2019). Examples of participant statements that demonstrated growth mindset included comments about being able to learn from their mistakes, encouraging comments about the development of their language and writing skills, and metacognitive comments around error correction and repairing mistakes. Of particular note is that in the coded analysis of participants’ statements, the highest co-occurrence of coded descriptors was “growth mindset” and “positive affect” (i.e., positive affective reaction), suggesting that students who demonstrated a growth mindset also felt more positively about WCF. Further analysis of this is featured in the Discussion section of this study.

3.2.2 Student Preferences and the Personalized Feedback Protocol

The personalized feedback protocol for each student was created by asking participants their preferences. Ten of the sixteen participants said that they preferred to have WCF on all aspects of their essays: grammar, lexicon, and compositional features and content. The other six stated that they preferred only grammatical and lexical feedback. Only two participants asked for indirect feedback. In later interviews, these two students said that preferred indirect feedback

because engaging in the error correction process helped them retain information better. Ten participants asked for direct feedback, and the remaining four participants did not clearly indicate their preference with regard to this kind of feedback. Of the students that preferred direct feedback, in later interviews they stated that they liked the unambiguity of direct feedback and that they wanted to be sure that they had the correct answer. One participant explained, “[...] whenever I get direct feedback, I know what I did wrong and then I don’t have to be wondering, is this new correction wrong? [...] when I do get the direct [feedback], this is how I can apply [it], and this is how I can move forward”. Ten participants stated that they preferred a combination of positive and negative feedback, and two participants said they preferred negative feedback over positive. The remaining four students did not indicate a preference with regard to this aspect of WCF.

Participants’ preferences regarding focused feedback (where select lexicogrammatical items are corrected) and unfocused feedback (where all errors are addressed) were less clear. This lack of clarity became evident when it was observed that some students contradicted themselves when asked on the questionnaire if they preferred focused or unfocused feedback. Six students explicitly said that they preferred unfocused feedback, two explicitly stated that they would like focused feedback. The other eight participants did not state a preference. In the question on whether they prefer that all errors be corrected, all but two (the two who stated previously that they preferred focused feedback) said that they preferred that all their errors were corrected. This may indicate a misunderstanding of the term “unfocused”, but more evidence would be necessary to confirm this claim.

3.2.3 Reactions to Written Corrective Feedback at the End of the Study Period

In both the interviews and the exit questionnaire, all participants claimed that the personalized feedback protocol was effective or helpful. Some students perceived a potential affective benefit from the personalized feedback, saying that it “probably makes [the students] feel better”. Other participants said that the personalized feedback protocol “helps students be more comfortable with the class” and that it made them feel more at ease because they could say exactly what kinds of feedback they wanted. In the exit questionnaire, all participants stated that they believed the personalized feedback protocol helped them improve both their linguistic and their compositional skills. All participants also said that they thought that their overall writing skills had improved over the course of the semester, but few could provide specific examples of how it improved. Some claimed that writing had become easier, that they felt more confident in their written work, and that they could express themselves more in the target language. Several participants stated that they thought more about grammatical concepts or recognized their grammatical mistakes as they were writing and could then correct them as they wrote.

As with the first questionnaire, many students responded with statements that may represent a growth mindset in the exit questionnaire. In general, when asked about their reactions to the most recent feedback that they had received (on Essay 3), fourteen responded with mostly positive statements. One said that she had a “neutral reaction” and one said that he quickly looked at his paper and then put it away immediately, without indicating a specific affective response. Two other students said that they felt disappointed, but they also expressed that response along with more positive comments. An analysis of these comments will be described in the Discussion section of this paper.

An interesting result of the exit questionnaire was that many participants responded with grammatical concerns when asked whether their overall compositional skills had improved. Only one participant said that she did not believe that her compositional skills had improved, since the majority of the feedback given to her was based on lexicogrammatical features and not on the content of the essays. All other participants said that they felt their compositional skills had improved.

4.0 Discussion

Although it is difficult to determine which factors led to an increase or decrease of participants' accuracy in their written essays, the personalized feedback protocol does appear to have some positive effects on students' reactions and attitudes towards corrective feedback. All participants claimed that they felt that their writing had improved in some way (to varying degrees) over the course of the semester. In addition, some participants reported that writing was easier or that they felt more confident when writing. In this section, I will describe both the quantitative and qualitative results, the potential roles of the personalized feedback protocol, the limitations of the present study, and implications for teaching.

4.1 Personalized WCF and Grammatical Accuracy

Grammatical accuracy improved for three participants, decreased for five participants, and fluctuated for the remaining eight participants. These inconclusive results resonate with those of previous research, that found that no one kind of WCF appears to be decisively effective (Storch, 2010; Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). It is noteworthy that overall accuracy rates for all participants were relatively high, with rates between 75% and 98%, with the majority in the 90% range. It may be the case that the participants were simply at a point in their development where common errors represented particularly difficult or marked grammatical structures. Indeed, many of the mistakes occurred with minor grammatical markers that do not carry meaning (e.g., morphological markers that indicate grammatical gender) or ones that occur less frequently (e.g., articles like *lo* and *gli*,

which occur less frequently and are more grammatically marked). Many such errors that are not salient or that do not carry meaning are often ameliorated only for speakers at a higher proficiency level (Li & Vuono, 2019).

It is interesting to note that over 92% of all errors consisted of grammatical (77.6%) and spelling (14.5%) errors. This may be due to the fact that students requested that the instructor focus on lexicogrammatical errors and focus less on compositional and content errors. This could also be attributed to the students' attitudes towards feedback in FL classes and how it differs from WCF in English-taught classes. Indeed, fifteen of the sixteen participants said that WCF was different in their English-taught and target language-taught classes, and many expressed the idea that this is to be expected due to the nature of FL courses. Because students expected a focus on grammar, spelling, and lexicon (as stated in their written comments and interviews), the instructor may have focused less on content and compositional features. That said, there was no incorrect content information found in the essays, and very few compositional errors. This may be due to the relatively easy task of the essays (approximately 500 words in the form of a short story, film review, and expository essay), which students would have been accustomed to writing in their earlier formative years.

With regard to the quantitative analysis, it was unfortunate that there were not enough instances of the *passato remoto* and the present subjunctive to conduct a robust statistical analysis of these structures. In the case of the *passato remoto*, all of the participants used the *passato remoto* in Essay 1, but only three participants attempted to use it in the second essay (and these represented a total of only four tokens of this verb tense). This may have occurred because the instructor did not explicitly say that students should use the *passato remoto* in describing the historical context of the film they reviewed. This was part of the design of the study, since the instructor wanted to

see if students would use the verb tense in a mandatory context. Instead, most students used phrasing and syntactic structures that could be identified as avoidance strategies, sometimes eliminating the need for a conjugated verb form altogether. Examples of possible avoidance strategies included using the imperfect tense to describe past situations, using the historical present (*presente storico*), and using gerunds in place of conjugated verbs in subordinate clauses. All such options are grammatical in Italian and had been previously studied by participants. Thus, it could have been that students simply used structures with which they were more familiar. The paucity of instances of the *passato remoto* could be explained by other factors. For example, students may have simply concentrated on the grammatical structure that was the focus of their unit at the time they were writing Essay 2, the present subjunctive. All participants used the present subjunctive in their second essay, with varying degrees of success, as shown in Table 2. While there were not enough instances of the present subjunctive to perform a comparative analysis between Essay 2 and Essay 3, many students also used the present subjunctive in Essay 3. This could be attributed to their use of rote expressions with common verbs such as *pensare* (“think”) that require the use of the present subjunctive and are high in frequency in Italian language classes. Here, a frequency effect could explain the relatively higher rate of use.

The three students who increasingly improved their grammatical accuracy rates have an interesting common link with regard to their affective reactions to feedback. Participants CanguroGrigio, PinguinoBlu, and SerpenteBianco improved their accuracy rates over the course of the semester, with CanguroGrigio and PinguinoBlu having the most notable increases in accuracy overall (from 92% accuracy in Essay 1 to nearly 99% in Essay 3 and 84% in Essay 1 to 94% in Essay 3, respectively). SerpenteBianco also made gains in accuracy, going from nearly 95% accuracy to nearly 98% accuracy. Despite their relatively high accuracy rates overall, all three

participants made errors common to students at the fourth-semester level of Italian (adjective and noun agreement, errors with articles and prepositions, etc.). All three participants also provided statements that can be described as pertaining to a growth mindset and all three also had very favorable attitudes towards feedback. For example, at the beginning of the semester in the first questionnaire, participants were asked how they felt in general about WCF. Participant CanguroGrigio responded, “I enjoyed receiving written feedback because it helps me understand what I did well and what I need to improve on”. For the same question, SerpenteBianco responded that he was pleased to receive WCF and that it motivated him to correct his mistakes. Similarly, when asked about WCF in language classes, PinguinoBlu said that feedback “inspired [her] to work harder” despite feeling somewhat frustrated by making mistakes. In the exit questionnaire at the end of the semester, PinguinoBlu said of her reaction to the last feedback received, “I was pleased with the constructive feedback I received [...] It helped me feel like I’m making progress but also still have room for improvement”. While other students also made statements that reflected a potential growth mindset, PinguinoBlu, SerpenteBianco, and CanguroGrigio appeared to have noticeably more positive attitudes towards WCF, demonstrated a growth mindset, and demonstrably improved grammatical accuracy rates. Further discussion on growth mindset and students’ reactions to WCF continue in the following subsections of this portion of the paper.

4.2 Participants’ Preferences for WCF

Overall, participants preferences toward WCF reflect findings from previous studies. The majority of the participants of the present study preferred direct and explicit feedback, which corresponds with the findings of a recent meta-analysis conducted by Li and Vuono (2019). Most

participants also said that they preferred linguistic (grammatical and lexical) feedback over feedback related to content or stylistics in their FL classes, which was also found by Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1994). With regard to focused and unfocused oral WCF, the findings were mixed. Only six participants said that they preferred unfocused feedback, while the other ten either had no preference or indicated a preference for focused feedback. In general, however, the preferences of the sixteen participants corresponded with prior research on students' preferences for WCF.

The participants in this study were overwhelmingly in favor of having a personalized WCF protocol. In the exit questionnaire, all participants responded affirmatively when asked if the personalized WCF was effective for the development of their written language skills. Participants appreciated having a voice and some agency in the feedback process. As one participant explained, "I know how I learn best, so having [the instructor] use this knowledge helped me get the most out of this course". Statements like this indicated a more dialogic and interactional approach to written corrective feedback. A second participant said that the personalized WCF protocol was "useful especially at the college level because most students have a grasp of what kind of feedback helps them [...] if the teacher does it one way and that's not the way you learn the best, you can't do anything about it". Yet another participant indicated that the interpersonal aspect of the personalized WCF protocol made her more mindful of her own role in the editing and writing processes, saying that she was "much more aware of each comment" made by the instructor. These ideas align with Hyland and Hyland's (2006) research on WCF, who asserted that teachers must work to make feedback more interpersonal to have it be more effective.

Having an active role and voice in the feedback process also made participants feel more valued, appreciated, and supported. Some stated that the personalized protocol made them not only more aware of the instructor's feedback, but also more interested in attending to their mistakes.

When WCF felt more reassuring and less punitive, students felt more positive about receiving corrective feedback. As one participant explained, the personalized feedback protocol “makes [students] feel better and more interested in correcting [errors], rather than “that’s what you did wrong”” (i.e., as opposed to receiving summative negative feedback). Another participant said that the personalized feedback protocol was effective because “[the participant] was more willing to try new things and be wrong because [she knew] that [she] would get appropriate, respectful feedback”. These statements reaffirm the claims of Dowden et al. (2013), who said that students feel more compelled to engage in the feedback process when they have support from their teachers, which can lead to more positive reactions to WCF. It also reinforces Hyland and Hyland’s (2006, p. 207) stance that how “teachers choose to express their feedback can affect both students’ reactions to it and the extent to which they use it in their revisions”, which can potentially lead to uptake and improved writing skills.

4.3 Participants’ Reactions to Corrective Feedback

Participants in the study tended to feel more positively about WCF in their foreign language classes as compared to their English-taught classes. While one cannot rule out the idea that the student participants in this study simply wanted to please their instructor, their responses to the questionnaires and interview questions indicate a dissimilar relationship with WCF in their foreign language classes in comparison to their English-taught courses. This was for two main reasons. First, participants said that feedback in their English-taught courses tended to be harsher and more negative or sparse and infrequent, and so they appreciated the more positive nature of WCF in their FL classes. Second, the participants indicated that they had more positive ways of thinking

about their progress and linguistic development in their foreign language classes. Often, this was demonstrated by a robust growth mindset towards language learning. This section will explore these two concepts in more depth.

It was not the original intent of this research study to examine the differences between feedback to writing provided in academic subject areas taught in English and feedback to writing in FL courses. However, the first question on first questionnaire asked students to recall the last time they received WCF in *any* of their university classes. Since many students made the comparison between English-medium courses and FL courses in the first questionnaire, the researcher included follow-up questions to participants during the mid-semester interviews. It is interesting to note that these comparisons were generated by the students without specific questioning concerning written corrective feedback in their other classes. This unanticipated finding may indicate that this aspect of WCF was already on the minds of participants, or that the differences between the two types of courses were salient enough to prompt comment from participants.

Although many of the participants' reactions to WCF in the first questionnaire were generally positive, some felt that the feedback they received in their English-taught courses was less effective. One participant described feedback in an English-taught college course: "My professor just tore me apart for paper structure and statistics/facts he didn't like in the paper [...] I did not like the feedback so I didn't pay attention to it". Others said that the feedback was vague or ambiguous ("[WCF] mainly focused on APA style errors and asking to elaborate more"), while some said they received very little (or no) WCF in their English-taught courses ("The only courses I've taken thus far which I've received written feedback are in Italian courses"). These kinds of

reactions reaffirm previous research on WCF, which has found that vague, sparse, or curt feedback can frustrate students (Treglia, 2008; Weaver, 2006).

Participants were more positive about feedback in their FL classes. While some did express frustration at making “stupid mistakes”, as one student wrote, others used words such as “reassuring”, “empowered”, and “inspired”. Participant CaneGiallo wrote:

In most Italian classes I’ve taken here, I’ve gotten a great deal of specific, grammatical feedback that I appreciated. Fixing specific errors, word choice, verb conjugations in the context of sentences I’ve already written helps me to see proper structure and how to express myself effectively. I also always enjoyed receiving positive feedback – it motivates me to fix the errors and express myself better. Both make me feel like I’m trying my best but I have room to grow and improve.

Many participants echoed the statements of CaneGiallo, saying that feedback in FL classes “helps better [their] understanding of the language” and fostered linguistic development. In their 2019 meta-analysis of previous research on WCF in the journal *System*, Li and Vuono found that students “demonstrated an overall positive attitude towards WCF” and that in general, students valued and appreciated WCF in their FL classes (p. 104). While the authors did not expand on why students valued WCF and demonstrated positive attitudes toward it, it may be due to the intrinsic nature of the FL classroom. In many U.S. tertiary FL classes, the main objective of the class is to foster the development communication skills. Being non-native speakers of the target language, students assume that they will make mistakes along the way. It is also natural to assume that the goal of corrective feedback is to improve communicative development and facilitate the meaning-making process. The interpersonal and dialogic nature of the FL classroom may necessitate a more interactional, formative WCF process, which is not intended to penalize students, but promote

linguistic development. As one participant noted: “[...] in foreign language classes feedback is aimed to help you become a better writer in the language”. The majority of participants described WCF as helpful or useful in their linguistic development (e.g., “On the last project the feedback I received was super helpful and allowed me to see how to properly utilize Italian grammar”). Participants in the present study noted the role of WCF in their learning and even demonstrated appreciation for it, even when the feedback was negative: “I appreciated both the positive and negative feedback [...] I find the negative feedback more constructive, I can use it for improvement in expressing myself.” For these participants, WCF was expected to help them improve linguistically, communicate more effectively, and promote development.

Given the facilitative role of WCF in the FL classroom, it may not be surprising that thirteen participants demonstrated a growth mindset with regard to their relationship with WCF. While research on mindset has spanned decades in the fields of psychology and education, the role of mindset in the FL classroom has been studied only recently (Lou & Noels, 2019). Having a growth mindset does not determine student outcomes in the FL classroom, but it may be part of the bigger picture of motivation and language learning. Lou and Noels affirmed that “mindsets and their related motivational factors are interrelated as a system that guides behaviors towards particular language learning goals” (2019, p. 4). The authors also maintained that mindset should be further examined and researched in the FL classroom, given the “promise and relevance” of mindset in the field of education (2019, p. 8). In the present study, growth mindset was not a targeted aspect of the research questions or research methods, but students’ comments indicated the presence of a growth mindset nonetheless. Many students acknowledged that they needed to practice but felt that they were improving and could continue to improve. For these students, WCF was an essential part of the learning process.

Many of the participants' comments not only demonstrated a growth mindset, but also showed that students saw WCF in a favorable light. For example, one participant said, "I look forward to getting the corrections [...] because I know that's helping me become a better student and helping me identify what I need to work on". A growth mindset may even help students overcome negative feelings about feedback. As one student said, "It can be intimidating to see what all is wrong [...] but it makes me feel good when I am able to fix it and be proud of the product". Yet another participant explained how they engaged with feedback: "By highlighting the areas I do well in, and areas I need to improve in, I was able to focus on the skills helpful to my language skills development". A growth mindset can also be seen in comments such as those made by the student who said that negative feedback was more constructive because it can be used for improving the student's communicative competence. For students with a growth mindset, feedback was seen more favorably as a useful and necessary part of linguistic development.

Overall, the majority of the students made comments that pertain or could pertain to a growth mindset, but all three of the students who saw improved grammatical accuracy rates demonstrated a strong growth mindset and positive attitudes towards feedback. This may support findings by Storch and Wigglesworth (2010a), who found that students who had positive reactions to and beliefs about WCF engaged with the feedback more, which led to retention and uptake, and Polio (2012), who claimed that students must be willing to pay attention to the feedback and then use it in order for uptake to occur. One implication of the present study is that mindset and other motivational factors play a decisive role in how students engage with WCF, and the role of growth mindset in writing and feedback processes should be studied further.

For the students in this study, the personalized feedback protocol appeared to have a generally positive effect on participants' reactions to feedback over the course of the semester.

Many expressed that it helped them improve their confidence and helped them gain new perspectives on language learning. For example, participant TartarugaNera said, “I have a lot more confidence than I did before [...] this isn’t me being bad [at Italian] this is me being good, I just need to work on some things”. For students with lower self-esteem or less confidence in their language abilities, a personalized feedback protocol could help them better navigate their affective reactions towards their written work. In the exit questionnaire at the end of the term, participants were asked to reflect on their reactions to feedback at that point in the semester. All but three students responded with very positive comments towards WCF on the final essay and the personalized feedback protocol. Of these three, one student said that she felt “neutral” about the feedback, and two expressed some negative concerns. These negative statements, however, were expressed along with sentiments of self-reassurance or appreciation. For example, participant LupoRosso explained, “My reaction was disappointed because I was making simple mistakes, but I felt good that I was being called out on my mistakes”, indicating that he was eager to repair his mistakes. Participant SerpenteBianco, one of the three that saw improved grammatical accuracy rates and a strong growth mindset, said, “I was unhappy to see the mistakes I made, but I was also eager to fix them [...] The feedback was not discouraging, but rather useful”, which demonstrates both a growth mindset and a positive, albeit emotionally complex, relationship with written corrective feedback.

4.4 Limitations

Many of the limitations of this study are common to those in action research studies. There was no control group, and the sample size was too small ($N=16$) to employ reliable statistical

analyses of variance such as ANOVA. The role of the instructor as principle investigator may also have influenced the results of the study. Future research on affective factors could easily rectify this by including a control group, using a larger sample size, and studying classes that are not taught by the researcher. However, given the many individual variables and external factors that determine successful language acquisition, qualitative research on intact classes in ecologically valid settings are valuable and do not detract from experimental research on language learning and acquisition. Rather, action research studies grant us insights on real classes and students and can effect positive change in educational settings.

5.0 Conclusion and Implications for Teaching

In this section, I will describe my dissemination plan, implications for teaching, and concluding thoughts on this study. The dissemination plan is an essential component of the Doctor of Education program at the University of Pittsburgh. I will share the findings of this study with my colleagues in the Department of French and Italian, and I will also submit this paper for publication. In addition, I would like to present the study at the conference of a professional organization, such as the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACFTL). To this end, I will answer calls for papers in the next academic year.

With regard to implications for teaching, I would encourage colleagues to communicate more with students regarding the WCF process and work with students to develop strategies that are most effective for individuals and their learning styles. One aspect of this study that particularly struck me was the transformation of my role from the traditional one of lecturer and grader, to one that was more facilitative and collaborative. Students must find feedback to be useful, relatively easy to incorporate, and meaningful. Dialoguing with students over the course of the semester showed me how to be a more effective provider of feedback and transformed my own practice in a way that benefited and supported student's proficiency in writing. Additionally, the process of analyzing students' accuracy rates (as opposed to error rates) was especially powerful. In analyzing students' accuracy rates, students appeared very happy to see how well they could write in the target language by highlighting what they knew rather than what they did not know. Empowering students in this way was an unanticipated, but very felicitous, result of this study.

The present study adds to the literature on written corrective feedback and its role in the foreign language classroom, and also adds to the research on affective factors in the feedback

process. There has been an iterant call for the latter for the past 30 years (Leki, 1990; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010a; Kormos, 2012). The results of this study indicate the importance of interpersonal aspects of the feedback process, and may imply that instructors have the capacity to improve (or at least inform) students' relationships with WCF. I agree with Hyland and Hyland's (2006) claims that instructors must work to engage students in the feedback process, and that how "teachers choose to express their feedback can affect both students' reactions to it and the extent to which they use it" (p. 207). The personalized feedback protocol used in this study engaged students linguistically and metacognitively, and appears to have had a positive effect on their affective reactions to WCF. This is likely due to the interpersonal nature of the personalized feedback protocol, as it gave students agency and a voice in the feedback process. It made their opinions and beliefs matter in the process, and students who felt that their teachers were invested in their learning had more positive reactions to feedback. Li (2017, p.155) said of oral corrective feedback, "given that students' CF [corrective feedback] beliefs are predictive of the effects of CF and their noticing of CF, it is necessary for teachers to actively seek students' opinions and provide activities that change students' attitudes [toward CF]", and I believe that this applies to written corrective feedback as well. Instructors have the ability to influence students' reactions and attitudes towards feedback, their accomplishments and setbacks, and how they perceive complex language learning processes.

Appendix A First Student Questionnaire

Questionnaire 1.

1. Think about the last time you received written feedback from a professor or instructor **in a college course (any college course)**. What was your reaction to this feedback? How did you feel upon receiving this feedback?
2. Think about the last time you received written feedback from a professor or instructor **in one of your foreign language classes (including Italian)**. What was your reaction to this feedback? How did you feel upon receiving this feedback?
3. Do you think there is a difference between the types of written feedback that you receive in your foreign language classes (as compared to courses taught in English)? If so, how?
4. What kind(s) of written has helped you improve your written language skills in the past? Can you think of an example? How did you feel about this kind of feedback?
5. What is your preferred written feedback style in a language class? What kinds of feedback have helped you the most in your foreign language classes? Positive, negative, or both? Written, oral (i.e., during a meeting), or both? A focus on content of your paper or your linguistic mistakes (or both)? Why?
6. Do you think that your instructor should correct every error in your written work? Why?
7. How do you feel when an instructor corrects all of your errors?

Appendix B Mid-Semester Interview Questions

Mid-Semester Interview Questions.

1. How did you feel about your work on your first essay when you turned it in?
2. How did you feel about the written feedback that I provided to you after the first assignment? What was your initial reaction? How did you feel when you went to revise your essay?
3. Were there any parts of the written feedback that you felt were confusing or difficult to understand? Which one(s)?
4. Do you think that the feedback that I provided helped you understand grammatical and/or lexical errors in your essay? How? Can you think of an example?
5. Do you think that the feedback that I provided helped you understand the structural and/or content errors in your essay? How? Can you think of an example?
6. Do you think that the personalized feedback protocol in this class is helping you to improve your written Italian? How?
7. Are there any modifications to your feedback protocol that you would like me to make at this time? What kinds of feedback have helped you the most so far this semester? Why?
8. Do you have any other feedback for me at this time?

Appendix C Exit Questionnaire

Exit Questionnaire.

1. Think about the last time you received written feedback in this class. What was your reaction to this feedback? How did you feel upon receiving this feedback? Why do you think that is?
2. Do you think that your personalized feedback protocol was effective in the development of your *language skills*? Why?
3. Do you think that your personalized feedback protocol was effective in the development of your *overall composition skills*? Why?
4. What other kinds of feedback or information from me would you have liked to receive on your essays? Why?
5. Do you think your writing has improved over the semester? How? Can you think of specific examples?

Appendix D Table of Participants' Preferences for WCF

Participant/Student	Requested Kinds of WCF (grammatical, lexical, content/structure)	Preference: Direct/indirect	Preference: Focused/unfocused	Preference: Positive/negative/combination	All errors noted or corrected	Notes
DelfinoGiallo	ALL	No pref. indicated	No pref. indicated	No pref. indicated	YES	Too much overwhelming
SerpenteBianco	ALL	INDIRECT	UNFOCUSED	BOTH POS/NEG	YES	
CaneGiallo	ALL, gram. first	No pref. indicated	No pref. indicated	BOTH POS/NEG	YES	
GattoGrigio	Gram/Lex	DIRECT	FOCUSED	No pref. indicated	NO	
VolpeViola	Gramm/Lex	DIRECT	UNFOCUSED	No pref. indicated	YES	
CaneRosa	Gram/Lex	No pref. indicated	No pref. indicated	NEG more effective	YES	
CanguroGrigio	ALL	DIRECT	UNFOCUSED	BOTH POS/NEG	YES	
PinguinoBlu	ALL	DIRECT	UNFOCUSED	No pref. indicated	YES	
CapraRosa	Gram/Lex	DIRECT	FOCUSED	BOTH POS/NEG	NO	Identify but do not correct all
TigreBlu	ALL	DIRECT	No pref. indicated	BOTH POS/NEG	YES	All errors intimidating
CacatuaArgenta	ALL	DIRECT	UNFOCUSED	BOTH POS/NEG	YES	
TartarugaNera	ALL	No pref. indicated	No pref. indicated	BOTH POS/NEG	YES	
LupoRosso	Gram/Lex	DIRECT	No pref. indicated	BOTH POS/NEG	YES	
LioneBianco	ALL	DIRECT	No pref. indicated	BOTH POS/NEG	YES	
OrsoPolareRosa	ALL (but less content)	INDIRECT	UNFOCUSED	BOTH POS/NEG	YES	
TigreViola	Gram/Lex	DIRECT	No pref. indicated	NEG	YES	Some positive feedback OK

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