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Bitchener, John & Ferris, Dana R. (2012). *Written Corrective Feedback in Second Language Acquisition and Writing*. NY: Routledge.

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I start this review with orientation, and after much thought, I determined that I couldn't better summarize the purpose, scope, and intention of *Written Corrective Feedback in Second Language Acquisition and Writing* than did its authors, John Bitchener and Dana Ferris. They write:

> This book surveys theory, research, and practice on the important and sometimes controversial practice of *written corrective feedback* (written CF), also known as "error/grammar correction," and its impact on second language acquisition

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> (SLA) and second language (L2) writing development. Drawing from both second language acquisition (SLA) and writing/composition literature, it critically analyzes and synthesizes several parallel and complementary strands of research: work on error/feedback (both oral and written) in SLA and studies of the impact of error correction in writing/composition courses. (p. viii)

Indeed, based on my reading and research, their further orientation for the reader—that "this is the first book to intentionally connect two separate but important lines of inquiry" (p. ix)—highlights the substantial and original work Bitchener and Ferris have undertaken. I defer to the authors from the outset because they certainly deliver on these claims and do so in an incredibly organized and purposeful manner. Take the way they structured the book in order to reflect their purposes. Chapters are set in dialogue. The SLA perspective in Chapter 3, for instance, is followed by the L2 writing/composition perspective in Chapter 4. Bitchener and Ferris neatly delineate these dialogue sections into theory, research, and practice (e.g., Chapters 3 and 4 detail SLA and comp research, respectively). Finally, the authors synthesize and discuss implications at the midpoint in Chapter 5 and at the conclusion in Chapter 8.

Without doubt, Bitchener and Ferris' *Written Corrective Feedback in Second Language Acquisition and Writing* is an excellent resource. It surveys the area literatures and research, discusses some of the foremost tensions relevant to written CF, and neatly scaffolds educators and researchers through all this and into significant new research ideas and related projects. In fact, the extensive notation of where the research is troubled or absent is perhaps the book's biggest asset to educators and researchers. It's certainly not only unique in its attention to both SLA and L2 composition, but it is also current and up-to-date. Bitchener and Ferris describe their ideas of the people who would most benefit from the book, and those people would surely find *Written Corrective Feedback in Second Language Acquisition and Writing* useful—from professors in teacher education to TESOL certification instructors to linguists, writing lab/center staff, students of language, scholars in educational psychology, and more.

That said, *Written Corrective Feedback in Second Language Acquisition and Writing* is not without points of contention. Bitchener and Ferris show dispositions to the theory and research in their areas, for example, that are clear (i.e., they have ideological commitments in the area). My review, though, even sees these interpretive or ideological (or what they call *philosophical*) conflicts as generative products of the book—pushing us to discuss written CF in SLA and L2 composition in ways that should benefit the theoretical, research, and experiential bases.

Below, I detail points I found contentious or potential problems with Bitchener and Ferris' ideologies, probably based on my ideological commitments. Beyond those points, I discuss how they, initiated by the book, prompt possible discussions in the future.

Written Corrective Feedback in Second Language Acquisition and Writing is based on an unstated premise or series of premises about the goal(s) of SLA and L2 composition. I find it clear, for instance, that Bitchener and Ferris understand the goal (or one of these goals) as accuracy—that is, the accurate use of the L2 grammar and other language structures and features. Some of us, and some of the scholars detailed in the book, may not agree. Bitchener and Ferris see one alternative goal—fluency—as, at least, secondary to the primacy of accuracy.

When explaining the theoretical clash of Krashen versus the interactionists, for example, Bitchener and Ferris go to a study by Harley and Swain from 1984 that showed of the "French immersion program in Canada" that

> even though learners may develop fluency, functional abilities, and confidence in using the target language, they fail to achieve high levels of performance in some aspects of French grammar even after several years of full-day exposure to the target language. (p. 17)

Of course, "high levels of performance" is synonymous with "accuracy" there. As an ESOL teacher, L2 writing teacher, and teacher trainer, I definitely promote pragmatism, fluency, and confidence, and often explain and show students how privileging accuracy usually doesn't make sense. As a second language learner, my

goals were the same. I wanted to be able to speak idiomatically, in Sichuan dialect (not the derided, standard Beijing dialect), and to be able to humorously and confidently talk with the boisterous taxi drivers in Chengdu about, for example, their befuddlement at why I was unmarried.

I offer my experiences, not glibly, but purposefully. It strikes me that Bitchener and Ferris may align with dominant research and policy, and I ask, regardless of ideological, philosophical, or dispositional stances, what happens when we reorient ourselves and start asking students and parents and, say, the people in that French immersion program what their language goals are? (I think taxi-type pragmatic answers would dominate.) Consider that K-12 schools in the US find themselves understaffed and poorly-prepared to handle the language needs associated with predominantly white teachers and students who (culturally) live in Black Vernacular English (BE), immigrant and refugee groups who may spontaneously change a school's demographics, student transiency which may temporally impact L2 instruction and efficacy, helicopter parents and invasive administration, and so on. Serious concerns for our schools, but how is efficient written CF, focused on L2 accuracy, going to help address them? Are we as modern educators interested in literacy, in students' social capital (despite the falsity of meritocracy), or are we interested in state exam scores? Is it clearing comp and university writing requirements or is it concise business emails, effective job interviews, persuasive dating profiles, and better tweets?

Or, task the adjunct pool or the professors in the ESOL and L2 comp trenches at community colleges and universities about some of the institutional and cultural conditions that suggest thoughtful attention to pragmatism and fluency and avoidance of written CF directed at accuracy. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* runs columns consistently about everything from confusion about international student integration to addressing feelings of student belittlement at written CF, and the majority seem to implicitly challenge the premise of accuracy.

These writing and language teacher narratives, comp class participation or observation, are bound to also show

something we've all experienced. Students get a paper or notes or any form of written CF and (a) ignore it, instead going right to the numerical score, (b) skim it and toss it in the wastebasket, (c) use it proscriptively for required revisions, or (d) any combination of the above. Not universally, of course, but this sort of sad counterpoint to the research also begs questions of Bitchener and Ferris. For example, they are advocates of written CF in SLA and L2 composition, and thoughtful, well-researched advocates at that, yet I can't imagine anyone who has taught ESOL or L2 writing not rifling through their own anecdotal and experiential evidence, to the case studies and whatnot that complicate the focus on accuracy.

Remember that accuracy is synonymous with grammar, at least in my read and understanding of *Written Corrective Feedback in Second Language Acquisition and Writing*, and it's interesting when Bitchener and Ferris, who have their own stories and who have no doubt heard the sorts of questions I pose here, advocate attention to grammar, despite the evidence about grammar and student motivation. (Notably, ESOL research persuasively finds that, especially in some cultural contexts and with particular L1-L2 dynamics, student confidence or self-efficacy may be crucial; further, and importantly, that those affective states are undermined by pedagogical attention to accuracy and to "negative" corrective CF.) We know that teachers (globally) are under-trained in grammar and linguistics (and comp pedagogy), too, but that is only significant as a deficit if our goals in language instruction boil down to structural, grammatical accuracy as defined by exams. Otherwise, we mire ourselves in the complexities of the real world, a place some of us would rather inhabit (ideologically), and we get the idiosyncrasy and variance and nuance that we know of teachers and students and communities and learning and cultures and so on. That Bitchener and Ferris note the variance in instruction and curricula and imply the subjectivity in assessing effectiveness and accuracy begs further questions of their ideas about the goal(s) of SLA and L2 composition.

After all, concluding that (1) more research is needed to codify and standardize best practices for written CF in SLA and L2 composition and that (2) teacher education should require more and more systematic grammar and

linguistics training makes me wonder what deeply pragmatic L2 experiences Bitchener and Ferris have had, like talking marriage with taxi drivers, that show accuracy and grammatical scores to be more important than fluency and confidence.

Again, Bitchener and Ferris' *Written Corrective Feedback in Second Language Acquisition and Writing* is undoubtedly an excellent resource. It is a thorough and contemporary survey and discussion of theory, research, and practice that provides readers useful and smart ideas about directions for future research, curricular and assessment design, policy, teacher preparation, and pedagogy. Including SLA and L2 composition perspectives is original and will extend the opportunities provided through the book to foster substantial learning and discussion. Moreover, the ideological or philosophical stances Bitchener and Ferris discuss in SLA and L2 composition are not only important and neatly organized (as is the whole book) but are also generative fodder for contention and discussions that should benefit and extend theory, research, and practice. My arguments about pragmatism, complexity, and so on in seeing accuracy as the goal of SLA and L2 composition are but one set of many, many possibilities. Hopefully, my read and my points of contention as expressed in this review will invite scholars, teachers, and students to consider the book and its potential in that regard.

About the Reviewer

Paul A. Crutcher has degrees in philosophy, composition, women's and gender studies, and a doctorate in Curriculum, Teaching, and Educational Policy. He has worked for years in TESOL and SLA, and teaches and researches English methods, curricula, comp, and literature. Paul has published in a variety of mediums, and is currently a field instructor for the secondary English and social studies programs at Michigan State University.

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