

# Providing Coded Feedback to Improve The Quality of Students' Writings at The Study Program of English of Universitas Brawijaya

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**Abstract:** This action research was aimed at solving the students' language-use problem in a Writing IV class at the Study Program of English of Universitas Brawijaya by using coded feedback. The codes were adapted from Ferris (2002:69) and Boardman and Frydenberg (2002:181). Prior to the provision of coded feedback as the response to the students' errors in their essay, the students were introduced and trained on the use of the feedback codes. After the practice, the students received coded feedback in their essay draft. Coded feedback was given (1) on the editing stage of writing process; (2) to global errors and high frequency errors; and (3) with an underline to locate the errors where necessary. The criterion of success was that the average score of the students' revised drafts could be improved to the level of *good to average* in the rating scale adapted from Boardman and Frydenberg (2002:180) and Jacobs *et al* (1981, in Weigle, 2002: 116). After reflecting on the action, it has been found that that the students' language use in their writing could be improved to the expected level of performance after one cycle of treatment.

**Key Words:** coded feedback, language use, academic writing

Language use in writing has been a problem for EFL students including those in the Study Program of English of the Faculty of Cultural Studies at Universitas Brawijaya. In this study, the students taking Writing IV in the Academic Year of 2010/2011 were not able to revise the language use in their essay although the teacher had given general comment and asked the students to refer back to the writing rubric that been discussed in the class. These findings highlight the need to solve this accuracy problem in EFL writing courses.

Providing an appropriate treatment is essential in EFL writing classes. It is necessary to ensure that the students can identify the errors they make, learn how to fix them, avoid repeating the same errors, and produce a comprehensible and acceptable piece of writing. This is in line with Ferris (2004:3-9), who suggests the importance of error treatment in L2 writing, that the absences of explicit instruction and feedback on errors may cause adult learners to fossilize, not to continue making progress in language accuracy. In addition, learners tend to appreciate feedback and thus be more motivated to make corrections and improve their writings compared to

those who receive no feedback. In the context of second language learning, instructions that focus on language use can benefit learners because by activating the learners' monitor, which is "the part of the learner's internal system that appears to be responsible for conscious linguistic processing" (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen, 1982:58). Monitor is identified as one of the two ways by which adult learners' gain L2 proficiency. Therefore, error feedback is appropriate for an EFL classroom attended by adult students to facilitate them to identify and correct the errors.

Feedback on the students' language-use problems can be given in a written form. The first type of written feedback is direct feedback, which is done by marking and providing the correct form of the language structure. The other form is indirect feedback, given by, among others, coding the errors, underlining them, or indicating their number in the margin next to the line where the errors are found without providing the correct forms. Although indirect feedback does not provide the correct use of the targeted language forms, it is considered useful as it is labor-saving and engages students in some cog-

nitive processing (Ferris, 2004:49, 73-74). Coded feedback will help the students identify their errors and stimulate them to think of how to revise the errors. This is considered more thought-provoking and labor-saving than providing the students with direct correction.

Findings of several previous studies support the use of coded feedback. Erel and Bulut (2007) have found that indirect coded feedback group committed fewer errors than the direct feedback group, especially in 15 error types, such as subject-verb agreement, tense, missing, article usage, singular-plural form, preposition, pronoun, or word order. Hartshorn (2008), who tested the effect of error correction on writing accuracy of two groups of ESL writers; a control group ( $n = 19$ ), who were taught with traditional process writing methods and a treatment group ( $n = 28$ ), who were taught with coded feedback, has found out that a systematic approach to corrective feedback can have a positive effect on the accuracy of L2 writing for both non-grammatical and grammatical errors. Alghazo, Abdelrahman, and Qbeitah (2009), focusing on university students' self-correction ability in six error categories: noun, article, verb tense, verb form, wrong word, and sentence structure, have found that the students given indirect feedback corrected more errors than the no-feedback group, and the coded indirect feedback group significantly reduced more errors than the non-coded feedback students.

Based on the explanation, coded feedback is considered as appropriate treatment for the errors of use language use in EFL students' writings. Therefore, this study is conducted to find out how coded feedback, which is marking language-use errors with codes, can be implemented to improve the quality of students' writings.

## METHOD

This is action research because the study is aimed at describing how coded feedback was used to solve the existing language-use problem in the writing IV class at the Study Program of English at Universitas Brawijaya. The subjects of the research were the 14 students who joined Writing IV Class A in the Academic Year 2010/2011. The rhetoric structure was argumentative essay. The class was taught collaboratively by the teacher-researcher and a co-teacher who was an English native speaker.



**Figure 1. Action Research Procedure**

Source: (Kemmis and McTaggart: 1988 cited in Burns: 2005)

This study took several stages, which were planning, action, observation, and reflection (Figure 1).

### Planning

In the planning stage, the researcher designed the coded feedback, designed the lesson plan, prepared teaching material and media, and set up the criteria of success. The coded feedback was adapted from Ferris (2002:69) and Boardman and Frydenberg (2002:181). Other codes or symbols may be created and used depending on the errors found in the students' essay.

After preparing the codes, the method of giving the feedback was also designed. In general, coded feedback would be given in the following manner.

Coded feedback was given on the students' second drafts because feedback on ideas and organization was given on the first drafts, and the students' language use in draft two may differ from that in draft one.

The teacher-researcher would use coded feedback to mark global errors, which interfere with the ideas, as the purpose of writing in good language use is to facilitate the communication of the writer's ideas. Besides, coded feedback would be used on the frequent errors because these errors suggest that the writers are not aware of them. Not giving coded feedback on all errors was also meant not to discourage the students with drafts full of error marks.

If an error was a group of words, such as in fragment or sentence structure, the words were underlined to identify which part exactly needed revision.

The next step was designing two lesson plans and preparing the materials to introduce and train the students on the use of coded feedback. The students would discuss the codes and practiced in identifying and correcting the errors that had been coded in several writing samples taken from students'

writings in the previous projects and from Langan (2001).

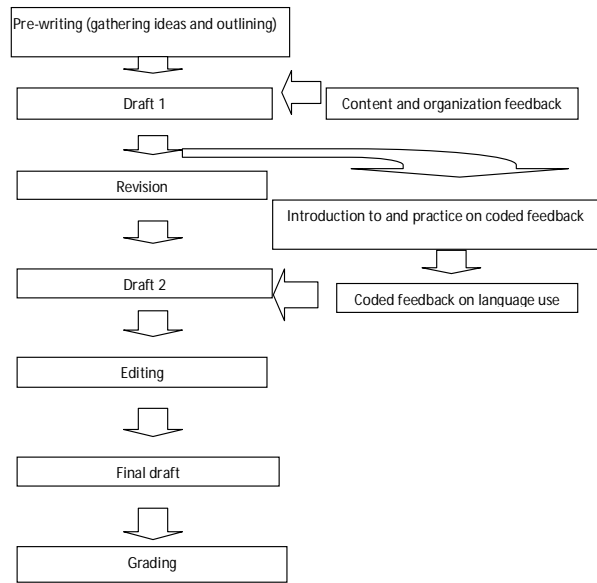
It is necessary to set criteria that will determine the success of action research in solving the problem. In this study, a criterion of success was established that after receiving coded feedback, the students could improve the quality of their argumentative essays in terms of their language use to the level of *good to average* on the rating scale based on the writing rubric by Boardman and Frydenberg (2002:180) and Jacobs *et al* (1981, in Weigle, 2002: 116) presented in Table 1. In the rating scale, the level of *good to average* is scored from 22 to 20. This means that in their revised drafts, the students were expected to be able to write simple sentences effectively-with some errors with complex sentences and errors of agreements, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, and prepositions, yet the comprehensibility of the text was maintained.

**Implementing the Action**

Prior to giving coded feedback, the teacher introduced and trained the students on its use. The training was done in two 60-minute sessions. After the training, the students started receiving feedback in form of symbols in the second draft of their essay. The drafts were returned to students for revision. The students revised their work into the third draft and submitted it for grading. This process was based on the design strategy summarized in Figure 2.

**Observing the Action**

While executing the action, the teacher also observed the activities. The teacher-researcher made brief notes of, among other things, the students' response, the materials, the teacher's response, and



**Figure 2. The Implementation of Coded Feedback in the Writing Process**

the outcome of the teaching-learning activities. To collect the required data, the researcher used some instruments. First is writing prompt to get the data in the form of students' writings. The scores on the final drafts were used as the basis to determine the improvement of the students' writings after the strategy training. The writing prompt required each student to write a five-paragraph argumentative essay on whether or not gay marriage should be legalized in Indonesia. To maintain the reliability of the data collected, the study used independent raters, who were selected based on the area of expertise and experience. The statistical procedure to ascertain reliability of the scores used Pearson Product Moment Correlation (Djiwandono, 2008: 173). The second are observation checklist and field notes to use in classroom meetings. To ascertain a complete and objective observation, the co-teacher would take the

**Table 1. Rating Scale**

| SCORE | LEVEL   |
|-------|---|
| 25-23 | <b>EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD:</b> effective complex constructions • few errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, article, pronouns, prepositions   |
| 22-20 | <b>GOOD TO AVERAGE:</b> effective but simple constructions • minor problems in complex constructions • several errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, article, pronouns, prepositions <u>but meaning seldom obscured</u>          |
| 19-17 | <b>FAIR TO POOR:</b> major problems in simple/ complex constructions • frequent errors of negation, tense, number, word order/function, article, pronouns, prepositions and/ or fragments, run-ons, deletions • <u>meaning confused or obscured</u> |
| 16-0  | <b>VERY POOR:</b> virtually no mastery of sentence construction rules • dominated by errors • does not communicate • OR not enough to evaluate  |

field notes. In addition, the teacher researcher also took notes during the process of giving coded feedback to the students' drafts. Finally, a post-study questionnaire was used to investigate students' response and motivation upon the provision of coded feedback in their writings.

### Reflecting the Action

The students' final drafts were graded based on the rating scale. The teacher would determine the mean, minimum, and maximum scores of the student grades. The data from the observation sheet and field notes were read as they could indicate the students' responses and improvement in their writing skills. Decision should be made on whether the results of the cycle had fulfilled the criteria of success or if the research should continue to the next cycle.

## RESULTS

### Findings in Classroom Meetings

In the first meeting, the teacher introduced the topic and objective of the lesson. Then the students read a short paragraph silently and identified if there were any language use that was incorrect and thus if the paragraph was a good EFL writing. The students jotted down the errors that they found such as the run-on the 1<sup>st</sup> line or the apparent misuse of the word *several*. Some students were very serious that they wanted all the errors be corrected. The students agreed that the paragraph did not display good English use. The teacher then distributed the code list, explained each code and elicited some examples. She presented the sample paragraph in which the grammar error had been marked with the corresponding symbols.

The activity continued to the next sample paragraph. The students worked to identify and correct the coded mistakes. The post-teaching activity was taking feedback and questions from the students about the lesson. In general, the students gave positive response on the activities. They were engaged attentively in the rest of activities because they said grammar was one of their biggest concerns in writing.

The second meeting started with review on the feedback codes. The students worked on another sample paragraph that had been coded to identify the mistakes and correct them. The activities ran quite smoothly as the students were involved actively.

Then the students worked in pairs to identify, code, and correct errors in one paragraph. The class discussed the possible revisions of the errors. At the end of the meeting, the teacher handed the drafts of the students' on-going writing project to the students. The drafts were marked with the codes. The students' assignment was to revise their draft into a third draft. The teacher redistributed the code list (Table 2), in which there were 3 (three) new codes for *missing a transition signal* (<sup>trans</sup> ^); *wrong preposition* (prep); and *OK. You can use that. Good job* (✓).

**Table 2. Correction Symbols**

| Symbol             | Meaning                             |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <sup>trans</sup> ^ | Use a transition signal             |
| prep               | Wrong preposition                   |
| ✓                  | OK. You can use that. Good job!     |
| vt                 | Mistake in verb tense               |
| vf                 | Mistake in verb form                |
| ss                 | Mistake in sentence structure       |
| sv                 | Mistake in subject-verb agreement   |
| art                | Mistake in article use              |
| N                  | Mistake in noun ending              |
| #                  | Mistake in number (plural/singular) |
| pron               | Mistake in pronoun use              |
| run                | Run-on sentence                     |
| frag               | Sentence fragment                   |
| cs                 | Comma splice                        |
| X                  | The word or part should be omitted  |
| ○                  | Not appropriate, should be changed  |
| ^                  | Word(s) missing                     |
| ?                  | Unclear passage or sentence         |

### Findings during the Provision of Coded Feedback Codes and Scoring

While reviewing the students' drafts and giving the coded feedback, the teacher-researcher observed that several mistakes tended to occur in many drafts and/or to repeat in the same draft. Those were, for example, missing word(s) mistake in verb tense, fragment, and the word/part that should be omitted. The followings are excerpt of some student writings.

First is the draft written by Student No. 6 (Figure 3). In the excerpt, there are three parts that are marked with “^” (code number 2, 3, 6), indicating that a word is missing. The student must have put a verb there. Other mistakes are fragment (frag, Number 1), confusing words (Number 4), verb tense (vt, Number 7), words that need to be deleted (X, Number 5), and sentence structure (ss, Number 8). In paragraph 1, line 3-5, the student wrote “*Although gay couples just like any other normally couples which have right to marry.*” This is a dependent

In America today, there are so many gay couples who living together as families. However, the federal government of the United States has not legalized gay marriages. (1)frag (2)

Although gay couples (3) ^ just like any other normally couples (man and woman) which have (4)? right to marry. Some people ^ against homosexuality such communities as unnatural. So, should our government allow and legalized gay marriages? I think our government should not allow it because it is illegal and forbidden by most religions in Indonesia.

(5) ~~One of~~ argument that ^ against gay marriages is Indonesia is a religion country, which (6) (7) vt gay marriages is forbidden action because people were created as a couple (man and woman). Marriages is a sacrament tradition of religion that people must do as couple (man and (8) ss woman). If marriages allows to gay couple are same sex marriage, some religious individuals or groups feel that they will become at risk of having to violate their beliefs by being forced to (9) vt marry same sex couples. In addition, Indonesia professes Eastern culture which had a notion that gay marriages is negative and illegal action. "It's Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve."

Figure 3. A Sample of Students' Writings: Student No. 6, Draft 2

In America today, there are so many gay couples who living together as families. However, the federal government of the United States has not legalized gay marriages. Although gay couples (2) **are** just like any other normally couples (man and woman) which have right to marry(1), some people (3)**are** against homosexuality as (4) **group of unnatural couple**. So, should our government allow and legalized gay marriages? I think our government should not allow it because it is illegal and forbidden by most religions in Indonesia.

(5) **One argument** that (6) **is** against gay marriages is Indonesia is a religion country, which gay marriages is forbidden action because people (7) **are** created as a couple (man and woman). Marriages is a sacrament tradition of religion that people must do as couple (man and woman). (8)**If gay couples are allowed to marry,** some religious individuals or groups feel that they will become at risk of having to violate their beliefs by being forced to marry same sex couples. In addition, Indonesia professes Eastern culture which (9) **has** a notion that gay marriages is negative and illegal action. "It's Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve."

Figure 4. A Sample of Students' Writings: Student No. 6, Revised Draft

clause that cannot stand alone; that is why the code *frag* marks the fragment. Next, when the student wrote "...because people were created as a couple...", he should have used simple present tense because the sentence is about a general fact. Another mistake worth attention is the sentence structure in "If marriages allow to gay couple are same sex marriage, ..." It seems better if passive voice is used.

In his revised draft (Figure 4), this student improved his grammar use somewhat successfully. He put appropriate verbs to complete the parts that were missing. He inserted the verb were needed in the sentences (Number 2,3, and 6). He combined the dependent clause *although gay couples are just like any other normally couple* with the independent clause *some people are against homosexuality* (Number 1). For the confusing part *such commu-*

*nities as unnatural*, he changed it into *as group of unnatural couple* (Number 4). This change is grammatically acceptable but it seems that the better referent for *unnatural couple* is *homosexuals*-the people-not *homosexuality* like the student wrote in that sentence. This, however, seems to be more of a vocabulary problem, not of language use that became the focus of this research. The other corrections were done correctly based on the codes that marked the errors. For example, error Number 8 is an error in sentence structure, and the student has changed the sentence into passive voice appropriately. Based on the rating scale, this revised draft was scored 21 out of 25, falling under the category of *good to average* because the language use was acceptable. Simple constructions were used effectively and the minor errors did not obstruct the ideas.

It was also noted that the student kept using the plural form of *marriage*, a non-count noun, which does not have a plural form. This mistake was not coded during the feedback. The student might have skipped this error thinking that it was correct since there was no code marking it.

Another sample is an excerpt written by Student No. 2. In Figure 5, it can be seen that the draft has major problems with verbs (subject-verb agreement, verb tense, and verb form). For example, the 1<sup>st</sup> sentence of the 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph should read “*The word gay is bad influence for our culture...*” (Number 1). The 1<sup>st</sup> sentence of paragraph 2 also has confusing structure. It is not an independent clause (*many reasons why they doing that*). The sentence is not clear, so what the student wanted to communicate is not very clear either. Similarly, line 7 of paragraph 2 that says “*...because...they also have same sex like they can understand each other*” may confuse the readers. The teacher-researcher checked this draft and marked the errors in language used with the correction symbols. There were fifteen errors identified in the draft: three verb-form errors

(Number 1, 4, 15) and four ill-formed/confusing sentences (Number 7, 11, 14), among others.

In the revised draft (Figure 6), the student made some corrections, but some of them were not successful. For example, for error Number 1, the student replaced the verb *have* with *has*, which was also inappropriate use of verb in this context because the student actually also had to drop the auxiliary *is* to correct the verb error. Incorrect revision also happened for error Number 5. In an attempt to revise the verb in *are judge*, although the student was correct in choosing to use active voice, she incorrectly used *judges* for *those people*-a plural subject. Next, the student did not revise the sentences as expected, although coded feedback had been given on the error in sentence structure (Number 7) and confusing phrase (No. 14). The revision on the verb *in never have* (Number 15) also failed. The student revised the sentence into *because they have a good feeling with same gay is didn't have a gay marriage but if gay in Indonesia want to married*, and this revised sentence was confusing as well. Despite some appropriate corrections, the draft was dominated with

(1) Vf  
The word of “gay” is have a bad influence for our culture in every country and looks strange because the meaning of gay is a relationship that they like same sex. Some people agree with that, and some people disagree with that. But I ~~am~~ agree because everybody deserve their own mate. We don't need to judge them because it's a human right. They don't make other people suffer with their action. It's mean that they just care with theirsself without noticing with what other people said because they (gay) know that those people are judge them from the cover or we can say that those people are very selfish and don't want to know the problem in the past time of any gay.

(2) (3) sv  
But I ~~am~~ agree because everybody deserve their own mate. We don't need to judge them because it's a human right. They don't make other people suffer with their action. It's mean that they just care with theirsself without noticing with what other people said because they (gay) know that those people are judge them from the cover or we can say that those people are very selfish and don't want to know the problem in the past time of any gay.

(4) vf  
It's mean that they just care with theirsself without noticing with what other people said because they (gay) know that those people are judge them from the cover or we can say that those people are very selfish and don't want to know the problem in the past time of any gay.

(5) vf  
people said because they (gay) know that those people are judge them from the cover or we can say that those people are very selfish and don't want to know the problem in the past time of any gay.

(6) #  
gay.

(7) ss  
Many reasons why they doing that, because they had experience traumatic situation before with opposite sex because in reality I know it from internet, from television, and from the people around me. For example, many couples have affair with another person or we can say that they are unfaithfull with their relationship. Somebody will have a trauma to have a relationship with opposite sex because they (gay) don't want to ^broken heart again and they think that if they have a relationship with same sex, they feel confident because they have a same feel and they also have same sex like they can understand each other. So, they decided to choose a man as a couple for their ~~(gay)~~ life. Maybe, for the first time they will feel strange but after that they will get use to, because they have a good feeling with same sex. As I know, Indonesia is never have a gay marriage but if gay in Indonesia want to married, they must go to Australia to married in there.

(8) (9) art (10) N (11) ?  
Somebody will have a trauma to have a relationship with opposite sex because they (gay) don't want to ^broken heart again and they think that if they have a relationship with same sex, they feel confident because they have a same feel and they also have same sex like they can understand each other. So, they decided to choose a man as a couple for their ~~(gay)~~ life. Maybe, for the first time they will feel strange but after that they will get use to, because they have a good feeling with same sex. As I know, Indonesia is never have a gay marriage but if gay in Indonesia want to married, they must go to Australia to married in there.

(12) vt  
have same sex like they can understand each other. So, they decided to choose a man as a couple for their ~~(gay)~~ life. Maybe, for the first time they will feel strange but after that they will get use to, because they have a good feeling with same sex. As I know, Indonesia is never have a gay marriage but if gay in Indonesia want to married, they must go to Australia to married in there.

(13) (14) ? (15) vf  
because they have a good feeling with same sex. As I know, Indonesia is never have a gay marriage but if gay in Indonesia want to married, they must go to Australia to married in there.

Figure 5. A Sample of Students Writings: Student No. 2, Draft 2

The word of “gay” (1) **is has** a bad influence for our culture in every country and looks strange because the meaning of gay is a relationship that they like same sex. Some people agree with that, and some people disagree with that. However, (2) **I agree** with that because everybody (3) **deserves** their own mate. We don’t need to judge them because it’s a human right. They don’t make other people suffer with their action. It (4) **means** that they just care with theirself without noticing with what other people said because they (gay) know that those people (5) **judges** them from the cover or we can say that those people are very selfish and don’t want to know the problem in (6) **the past time**.

(7) **Many reasons why they doing that, because they had experience traumatic situation before with opposite sex because in reality I know it from internet, from television, and from the people around me.** For example, many couples have affair with another person or we can say that they are unfaithfull with their relationship. Somebody will have a trauma to have a relationship with opposite sex because they (gay) don’t want to (8) **be** broken heart again and they think that if they have a relationship with same sex, they feel confident because they have (9) (10) (11) **same feels**. So, they (12) **decide** to choose a man as a couple for their (13) **life**. Maybe, for the first time they will feel strange but after that they will get use to, because they have a good feeling with same (14) (15) **gay is didn’t have a gay marriage but if gay in Indonesia** want to married, they must go to Australia to married in there.

**Figure 6. Sample of Students’ Writings: Student No. 2, Revised Draft**

errors and they made some ideas confusing. Therefore, the score was 18 out of 25, falling under the category of *fair to poor* in the rating scale.

It was also found that the student did not revise the parts which had not been coded. For example, in the 1<sup>st</sup> sentence of paragraph 1, the pronoun *they* did not have a clear referent. Another pronoun error, using *theirself* instead of *themselves* (paragraph 1, line 5) was not corrected, maybe due to the absence of the correction symbol.

All the revised drafts were scored by the teacher-researcher. After the scoring phase completed, it was found that 2 essays (14.3%) fell under the category of *excellent to very good*, 10 essays (71.4%) were categorized into *good to average*, and 2 (14.3%) were scored as *fair to poor*. Encouragingly, none of the essays fell under the category of very poor language use. The mean score of the writings is 20.86. The inter-rater reliability scoring demonstrated high consistency ( $r=0.76$ ;  $0.83$ ). The frequency of the students’ scores is presented in Table 3.

This finding showed that there were some improvements in the quality of students’ writings in the aspect of language use. Twelve students (85.7%) were able to produce effective sentence construc-

tions in their essays. Mistakes were present but they did not interfere with the communication of ideas the students delivered.

### Reflection of the Cycle

The findings during the teaching-learning process were recorded and analyzed. After that, the following reflections were made: (1) the students’ language use in their essay improved since most of them (85.7%) could revise their writings so that they met the standard of *good to average* category in the rating scale adapted from Boardman and Frydenberg (2002) and Jacobs *et al* (1981, in Weigle: 2002), with the mean score of 21, so the criterion of success was achieved and the action was finished in one cycle; (2) the lesson plans were followed and in order; and (3) the students’ responses towards the application of the strategy were generally positive. However, two students failed the desired level of performance. This might be due to fact that these students’ writings belonged to the category of *fair to poor* in the preliminary study, which may indicate that these students were among the low achievers. As for symbols to use in coded feedback, some were used more frequently as the related errors were often present in many of the students’ writings such as verb-related errors, missing words (including transitions, which are essential in maintaining the cohesiveness of the ideas, which is why a missing transition was then marked with (<sup>trans</sup> ^), and confusing structure. The “✓” was given on parts

**Table 3. Categorization of the Students’ Essay Based on the Rating Scale**

| Level                  | Number of Essay (N=14) | Percentage |
|------------------------|------------------------|------------|
| Excellent to very good | 2                      | 14.3 %     |
| Good to average        | 10                     | 71.4%      |
| Fair to poor           | 2                      | 14.3 %     |
| Very poor              | 0                      | 0%         |

where the students use English appropriately, as positive feedback to boost their confidence.

### Descriptions of Students' Responses in the Questionnaire

The students' responses were observed in the post-study questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. Eight questions were designed using close-ended scale, the next four questions were so arranged that the students could choose more than one answer and/or provide their own answers, and the last was an open-ended questions on the strengths, weaknesses and room for improvement in using coded feedback in writing. The results of the questionnaire are presented in Table 4 and 5.

In the questionnaire, some students also wrote comments and/or suggestions concerning the strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvements of applying this strategy. Some of the comments are: coded feedback was good because the student could correct the writing more easily and not repeat the same mistakes; the most useful codes were sv, vf, art, and ss; and codes should be designed and used in review on ideas.

### DISCUSSION

The findings show that that after one cycle, the study has successfully achieved its objective. This is evident from the students' language use in the revised drafts. The average scores of the students' writings have met the requirement in the criterion of success, that the majority of the students have been able to write essay in communicative English using appropriate constructions. The errors that may be still present in their writings are considered acceptable, as they are not recurring or hampering the communication of ideas of the students as a writer. This suggests that feedback is useful in activating the students' "monitor", "the part of learner's internal system that appears to be responsible for conscious linguistics processing." (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen, 1982: 58) As they put it, the extent to which a learner functions depends on "the learner's age", and "the nature and focus required by the verbal task being performed" (59). Coded feedback on language use sets that the writing assignment will focus on the language aspect of writing. The subject of this research was university students taking an advanced writing class, which means they were adult.

Therefore, coded feedback is considered an appropriate treatment to improve the students' ability to use English appropriately.

Next, in this research, several codes were used more often than the others, either in one draft or in several drafts by different students. The codes that were frequently used were, among others, vt (mistake in verb tense, vf (mistake in verb form), ^ (missing word(s), usually missing auxiliary verbs), frag (fragment), ss (ill-formed sentence structure), and ? (confusing words/sentence; errors that are difficult to classify). The errors are of both global and local errors. From the perspective of second language acquisition, the errors can be seen as interference errors, which happen as learners use their L1 competence to perform in a foreign language (Richards, 1971, cited in Karra, 2006). Taking the example of the missing auxiliaries, it is possible that in Indonesian there are no such verbs. So when learners write *some people against homosexuality* into *beberapa orang menentang homoseksualitas*. It is a foreign concept for them that *against* is an adjective in English, so the nominal sentence needs the auxiliary verb *are* preceding the adjective. Errors in verb tenses show a similar case. In there are no time-bound verbs in Indonesian, so the students may not be aware that "*everybody were created equal* should be written as *everybody is created equal* the first time they write it. These errors can also be developmental errors because they have limited experience in English and writing in English. It is possible that the language use is language perfection in the making (Richards, 1971 cited in Karra, 2006). The more proficient English learners they are, the better their language use in writing will be. However, this action research was limited in one cycle, in which the students produced one essay, so it cannot show whether and how the students develop their English proficiency and whether it has an effect on their writing skills, especially the language use over a longer period.

The research has also found that although the coded feedback identifies the type of errors with the symbols, the students do not always revise the errors based on what the code suggests. For example is the confusing words marked with "?". Some students just dropped the part instead of providing a different form or structure. This is also observed in the students' response that sometimes they think of how to correct a mistake regardless of the code that marks it. This may support the idea that indirect feedback



**Table 4. Students' Opinions on the Use of Coded Feedback in Writing**

| Item No | Questionnaire Item  | Close-ended Scale          |                   |                       |                      |                            |
|---------|---|----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
|         |   | 5<br>(strongly agree)<br>% | 4<br>(agree)<br>% | 3<br>(uncertain)<br>% | 2<br>(disagree)<br>% | 1 (strongly disagree)<br>% |
| 1       | I can understand the meaning of the error codes on the code list I have received in this class.   | 7%                         | 79%               | 14%                   |                      |                            |
| 2       | The examples of error codes given in the class discussions were helpful to understand the meaning of the error codes                              | 29%                        | 57%               | 14%                   |                      |                            |
| 3       | The exercises on <b>identifying the error codes</b> on sample paragraphs were helpful to understand <b>the meaning of the error codes</b> .       | 7%                         | 64%               | 39%                   |                      |                            |
| 4       | The exercises on <b>correcting the coded errors</b> on sample paragraphs were useful to understand <b>how to correct an error</b> .               | 14%                        | 64%               | 14%                   | 14%                  | -                          |
| 5       | The error codes that marked the mistakes in my drafts were easy to understand.  | 29%                        | 50%               | 21%                   | -                    | -                          |
| 6       | The error codes in my drafts were helpful for me as I was revising the drafts.  | 36%                        | 57%               | 7%                    | -                    | -                          |
| 7       | It is easier to revise the language use in my draft based on <b>coded feedback</b> than based on <b>general comments</b> on language in my essay. | 21%                        | 36%               | 43%                   | -                    | -                          |
| 8       | After receiving coded feedback, I am more motivated to write more correctly.  | 36%                        | 64%               | -                     | -                    | -                          |

**Table 5. Students' Responses on the Process of Applying Coded Feedback**

| Item No | Questionnaire Item   | Answers (Frequency)   |
|---------|--|---|
| 1       | If there are many errors in your essay, which errors should your writing teacher code? | 1. All errors (10)<br>2. Errors that confuse ideas (5)<br>3. Repeated errors (1)  |
| 2       | How did you correct a coded error in your essays?                                      | 1. Based on the code that marked it (10)<br>2. In a way I thought would express my ideas better, although the code suggested differently (8)<br>3. Based on the errors I need to revise (1)<br>4. I searched for other errors (1) |
| 3       | When you did not understand how to correct an error, what did you do?                  | 1. Check my grammar books and notes (7)<br>2. Browse for relevant information on the Internet (5)<br>3. Ask friends to explain (5)<br>4. Ask the teacher to explain (2)   |
| 4       | When do you expect your teacher to provide coded feedback?                             | 1. On every draft (9)<br>2. On the 2 <sup>nd</sup> draft (5)<br>3. On the 1 <sup>st</sup> draft (2)   |

engages students in some cognitive process, so providing coded feedback helps students to be aware of their errors and learn how to fix those errors (Ferris, 2004: 49).

The students' attempts to correct the errors can fail, however, resulting in incorrect language use. This can relate to their limited experience in English and their yet-to-be perfect English competence as explained earlier. This is evident with students with lower quality of language use quality. This finding seems to be in line with Ferris (2004), who suggests that direct feedback—providing students with the correct forms of the errors—is usually preferable for students of lower level of L2 proficiency.

The students' failures in correcting their errors also suggest that some errors are *treatable* and the others are *untreatable*. The *treatable* errors have a clear pattern that it is easier for the students to correct the errors. They include “verb tense, verb form, subject-verb agreement, run-on sentences, fragments...” (Ferris, 2000, in Hyland and Hyland, 2006: 96). The *untreatable* errors are errors in sentence structure, which is more difficult to identify. This may mean the need to apply different types of feedback regarding the nature of the language errors, which is not investigated in this research yet. In additions, this finding raises a question whether there are too many symbols to use (18 symbols), and that some of them are overlapping with each other. For example, the codes ss,?, , and X refer to problems in sentence structure. This may cause the teacher mark similar errors with different symbols, which may cause problems for the students to identify the mistakes and to correct them. Therefore, it is worth considering that despite so many errors the students make in their writings, the teacher should focus on some codes or areas of improvement (Ferris, 2000, in Hyland and Hyland, 2006: 99).

The analysis of the students' writings also shows that when no coded feedback is given, the students tend to overlook their mistakes. Their response to the questionnaire also suggests that the students that coded feedback is given to all errors. (Only a few say that they will look for other errors.) This finding agrees that feedback is necessary to make students aware of their mistakes, in line with Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982: 63), who say:

Thus, even when students were asked to check their work, they apparently chose to focus on its factual correctness, clarity of ideas, or other non-grammatical aspects of their compositions. Or, perhaps they simply

rested. It appears that the task itself must force the typical learner to focus on form in order to bring the conscious rule knowledge into play.

Considering the student's responses on the training, it is said that students think language use in is important in writing and thus they expect feedback that gives clue of how they can revise their grammatical errors (Diab, 2006; Alghazo et al., 2009). The students in this study showed similar characteristics. The findings suggests that the students agree language use is an important aspect to improve, so they expect feedback on grammar; they think coded feedback is beneficial for their learning—to revise their drafts and to learn about their mistakes in language use. This response may be related to their characteristics as adult learners, that they are concerned with “sounding grammatically correct” (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen, 1982: 59)

## CONCLUSION & SUGGESTION

### Conclusion

The research applied coded feedback, using eighteen codes symbolizing errors in language use that can be found in writings. In the implementation process, the teacher-researcher introduced and trained the students in using coded feedback in two meetings. The students discussed the feedback codes and practiced to identify coded errors, code errors, and correct those errors. In the students' writings, coded feedback was (1) given on the editing stage of a writing process; (2) given on global and high frequency errors; and (3) given with an underline to locate the errors when necessary. After one cycle of treatment, the majority of the students were able to meet the criterion of success, that they were able to use English appropriately in their essay, so the action was terminated.

The study also revealed that the students responded towards the strategy positively. By given coded feedback, the students were facilitated to identify their mistakes or errors and to identify how to fix them. This strategy is also suitable for students who are still dependent on others, i.e. their teachers to identify and correct their writing errors.

There were several limitations in the study. First, writing instructors should consider the findings cautiously given that study has not investigated whether and how this training can improve the students' language use in new writings.

### Suggestion

Further research on the use of coded feedback over a long period will be worth doing. Second, the provision of coded feedback could be more improved, including by focusing on fewer codes and using them more consistently. Next, this study has not employed different types of feedback in responding to the *treatable and untreatable* errors. The students clearly expect that the feedback to be given on all errors, while teachers and researchers think that it should be done selectively. Therefore, writing instructors are expected to be able to identify how much coded feedback should be given to their students' writings, so that the feedback can facilitate the students to be aware of their errors and be able to correct them as well as to maintain their motivation to write. Finally, this study was not set to improve the use of vocabulary in the writings, while some of the correction symbols may be suitable for feedback on content, vocabulary, or mechanics in writing. Further investigation a systematic provision of coded feedback on these aspects can be worth doing.

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