

Experienced Lecturers' Reasoning behind Grammar Feedback Practices in EFL Writing Teacher Education

Michel Alexandre Cabot, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences

Abstract

Little is known about feedback practices and the reasoning behind grammar feedback in English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher education. This article presents a study based on the interview data of 12 experienced EFL lecturers in Norway. The analysis suggests that the lecturers predominantly use metalinguistic and indirect feedback, while global, focused, oral and elicitive feedback are used far less. Their strategy choices are influenced by multifaceted personal and contextual factors. The personal factors are negative beliefs about elicitions and positive beliefs about metalanguage and autonomy-promoting strategies. The contextual factors include feedback-providing and feedback-receiving situations, formal and informal contexts and the use of common marking code systems. This study contributes to the discussions about how context-dependent and personal factors can shape and improve grammar feedback practices in teacher education. As such, this study highlights a clear need for best practice recommendations specific to EFL writing teacher education.

Keywords: grammar feedback; teacher beliefs; feedback ecologies; teacher education; EFL

1. Introduction

The use of grammar feedback is much debated in language pedagogy. Experienced lecturers in English as a foreign language (EFL) have diverse views on grammar feedback and, intentionally or unintentionally, follow best practice recommendations to varying degrees (e.g. Ferris 2014). Freeman (2002: 1) suggested that teachers' mental lives represent 'the hidden side of teaching'—that is, teachers' beliefs about what constitutes good grammar feedback influence their feedback practices. The creation of such personal beliefs (Borg 2015), however, does not occur in a vacuum. In fact, it takes place in learning ecologies—a set of contexts 'comprised of a unique configuration of activities, material resources,

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relationships, and the interactions that emerge from them' (Barron 2006: 195). In other words, since context-dependent and personal factors can influence feedback practices, research drawing on context-dependent learning ecologies and personal teacher beliefs can be particularly useful. Given the need for such research, it is therefore surprising that little is known about how and why lecturers make specific grammar feedback decisions (Nassaji & Kartchava 2020). This is particularly interesting in Norwegian EFL teacher education, where lecturers need to know how to adapt their feedback to students who often struggle with poor writing skills (Rødnes, Hellekjær & Vold 2014) despite the generally high level of English proficiency in Norway (EF, 2020).

In this study, grammar feedback consists of written and oral (lecturer–student) comments on inaccuracies that concern both word (e.g. third person 's') and text levels (e.g. tense shift in a paragraph). In fact, corrective feedback (CF) on grammar is particularly important in teacher education because it not only helps student teachers (henceforth called students) to improve their writing but also forms their future teaching and development of feedback practices (Lee 2010). This article examines EFL lecturers' perceptions of such feedback in EFL writing teacher education. More specifically, the aim of the study is to investigate the CF practices of 12 experienced lecturers at six university colleges in Norway, along with the reasoning behind their choices.

2. *Existing Research*

A large body of research (e.g. Ellis 2009; Pawlak 2020) supports the positive impact of corrective grammar feedback—in particular, the provision of written (e.g. Guo 2015; Shintani, Ellis & Suzuki 2014) and negotiated oral feedback in response to written errors (e.g. Bitchener, Young & Cameron 2005; Nassaji 2017). This study used commonly accepted feedback strategies suggested in three different seminal studies (Ellis 2009; Ferris 2014; Lyster & Ranta 1997):

- global (correcting grammar above the sentence level)
- focused (correcting fewer than five error categories)
- oral (using teacher-student conferences)
- indirect (making no corrections—that is, only indicating the existence of an error)
- metalinguistic (the frequent use of metalanguage)

- elicitive (allowing the student to fill in the blank, asking a question to elicit knowledge or asking the student to reformulate)

Few studies (e.g. Miller 2005; Thoms 2014) have examined how EFL lecturers apply these six feedback strategies from contextual perspectives (e.g. time constraints and curriculum goals), whereas the literature on personal perspectives (such as research on beliefs about teacher grammar feedback practices—framed as EFL lecturers' beliefs in the present study) is more extensive (e.g. Borg 2015; Ferris 2014).

Several international studies on second language (L2) teaching in tertiary education have provided relevant findings on personal beliefs and practices of the aforementioned feedback modes and types. First, many teachers believe in the corrective force of oral feedback in response to writing because such feedback becomes predominantly student-centred and facilitates clarifications and scaffolding (e.g. Nassaji 2017; Yeh 2016). Second, teachers seem to provide more feedback on local, rather than global, issues (e.g. Junqueira & Payant 2015; Montgomery & Baker 2007). Third, teachers do not act upon their beliefs about fluency but tend to favour accuracy, which can explain a more frequent use of unfocused feedback (e.g. Diab 2005; Schulz 2001). Fourth, positive and negative experiences in the past can emerge as contributing factors to emphasise or not emphasise metalinguistic feedback (e.g. Borg 1999; Johnston & Goettsch 2000). Fifth, the use of indirect feedback can be a result of one's own negative experiences of being corrected as a learner (e.g. Golombek 1998). In addition, some teachers mistakenly believe they provide direct feedback extensively while providing more indirect feedback in practice (e.g. Mao & Crosthwaite 2019). Other teachers use indirect feedback less because it is sometimes difficult to only point out mistakes without correcting them (e.g. Diab 2005). Numerous teachers, however, agree that indirect feedback should vary according to students' L2 proficiency (e.g. Alshahrani & Storch 2014). Last, many teachers strongly believe that elicitions efficiently promote discovery learning because such tactics require students to find the correct forms themselves (e.g. Lyster & Ranta 1997; Nassaji 2017).

In the Nordic EFL teaching context, two recent studies are particularly interesting. First, Baldwin and Apelgren (2018) showed the importance of teacher beliefs when introducing the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR) in Swedish tertiary education. In this

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case, the teacher educators refrained from adopting the CEFR descriptors because they believed this would lead to insufficient attention being paid to grammatical accuracy. Second, Bøhn and Tsagari (2021) suggested that assessment-specific competence (e.g. knowing what should be assessed) and personal beliefs/attitudes (e.g. preconceptions) are important for the development of English teacher educators' knowledge and skills needed to carry out effective feedback practices in Norway.

In terms of sampling, some recent research (e.g. Foltz 2018) has chosen participants of varying experience, while some other studies only revolve around novice EFL teacher educators (e.g. Junqueira & Payant 2015)—even though the level of EFL teacher educators' experience, in addition to contextual factors, seems to be strong factors in the application of teacher knowledge (e.g. Wei & Cao 2020). This is confirmed by researchers such as Basturkmen (2012), who found that correspondences between stated beliefs and practices are reported mainly in situations involving experienced teachers. Thus, research on experienced teachers, as in the present study, is of particular interest.

Despite this large body of international and Nordic research, many researchers (e.g. Crusan, Plakans & Gebril 2016; Lee 2010; Nassaji & Kartchava 2020) agree that little is known about how personal feedback beliefs and practices relate to contextual factors in EFL writing teacher education. To investigate this issue, the present study therefore combines the concept of context-dependent learning ecologies (e.g. Van Lier 2004) with personal teacher beliefs (e.g. Borg 2015).

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 An ecological approach to grammar feedback

Feedback practices are created intentionally or unintentionally, and researchers do not know enough about it (Miller 2005; Thoms 2014). The concept of learning ecologies (e.g. Barron 2006; Van Lier 2004) can help analyse the multitude of ever-changing contextual factors (e.g. workload and digital versus nondigital environments) that influence CF strategy choices of lecturers who learn to provide good grammar feedback in multiple settings. This concept is an approach that is always 'contextualized or situative, focusing on relationships in the setting' (Van Lier 2004: 193). In other words, the interaction and interdependencies between different contexts are under scrutiny. This framework becomes particularly interesting when juxtaposing it with Bronfenbrenner's (1979:

26) ‘ecological transitions’, which seem easier to operationalise. Bronfenbrenner (1979) used this term to describe crucial moments of a learner’s trajectory. When the learners—framed as experienced lecturers in the present study—move from one setting to another, they need to adapt the feedback to new settings. In other words, changing contexts can create essential learning moments in a lecturer’s feedback career. These can help researchers to analyse and understand EFL lecturers’ feedback practices and the reasoning behind their feedback decisions.

3.2 A teacher-belief approach to grammar feedback

In addition to the contextual influences described, personal factors affect lecturers’ decisions related to providing CF. For example, prior educational and professional experiences may influence lecturers’ current feedback practices. Borg (2015: 54) used the term *teacher cognition* to describe what teachers ‘think, know or believe in relation to any aspect of their work’. This umbrella term, however, does not clearly distinguish between ‘beliefs’ and ‘knowledge’. Beliefs, unlike knowledge, do not require a consensus regarding validity and appropriateness. They are thus, by their very nature, disputable and complex (e.g. Feryok 2010; Green 1998), even though they can be of particular interest. Indeed, they can inform lecturers’ engagement with feedback (e.g. Strijbos & Müller 2014), which is under scrutiny in this study.

In this context, Phipps and Borg (2009) make an interesting distinction between core and peripheral beliefs. Core beliefs are essential convictions that are apparently stable—at least in the case of experienced teachers (Basturkmen 2012)—and seem to be influential in shaping these educators’ instructional decisions. Green (1998: 46) describes these beliefs as psychologically central because they are strongly held onto. Unlike core beliefs, peripheral beliefs are unimplemented ideals that, ‘though theoretically embraced, will not be held with the same level of conviction’ as core beliefs (Phipps & Borg 2009: 388). Hence, lecturers who are not strongly convinced of the advantages of certain feedback strategies may use some feedback types less often. In sum, both peripheral and core beliefs are relevant to understanding the multifaceted nature of grammar feedback provision.

However, in contrast to Pajares (1992) and Phipps and Borg (2009), this study does not consider beliefs as ‘basically unchanging’. In fact, researchers have given little attention to examining how personal

lecturers' beliefs can change in EFL teacher education and combine with context-related concepts of learning ecologies. Considering this, I address the issue by asking, *What are lecturers' feedback practices and the reasons behind their choices?* More specifically, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Which feedback types and modes are used by the lecturers?
2. What factors influence their decisions to employ these feedback practices?

4. Design and Methods

4.1 Design and procedures

This study used a qualitative research design. As recommended by Silverman (2014), quantifications were only used to confirm the findings or as the first step of qualitative content analysis to answer 'what' before 'why' and 'how' questions. The data were obtained from 1 pilot interview, 12 semi-structured face-to-face in-depth interviews and 4 member check interviews, during which 12 EFL lecturers reflected on their use of feedback strategies and discussed possible explanations for choosing these practices. Ten interviews were conducted in the interviewees' mother tongues (nine in Norwegian and one in English) and two in English for lecturers without a Norwegian first language background. The interviews were conducted via Skype or in person and lasted from 31 to 79 minutes. They were audio recorded and transcribed in full.

4.2 Participants

Norwegian Social Science Data Services gave permission to carry out this study (NSD 49709). Participation occurred with informed consent. All information was treated confidentially. The informants were selected from three university colleges in eastern and south-eastern Norway and three university colleges in western and north-western Norway, all of which offer EFL courses for preservice teachers. They were recruited in person, by mail or through Skype. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants.

Table 1. Profile of study participants

Lecturers	12 experienced lecturers (4 males/8 females) with the pseudonyms Brad, Dennis, Eva, Faith, Grace, Ken, Meg, Nancy, Pauline, Ruth, Tom and Viviane
Teaching experience	Each had more than 15 years of EFL teaching experience in teacher education, especially in writing instruction related to literature, civilisation or didactics
Lecturers' L1	Norwegian (9); English (1); Other (2)
Academic qualifications	5 associate professors, 5 assistant professors, 1 professor and 1 research fellow

As Table 1 illustrates, the selection of participants can be qualified as either typical sampling or criterion sampling. On the one hand, the selection is a typical sampling because each participant had more than 15 years of EFL teaching experience in teacher education. On the other hand, the selection is a criterion-based sampling because I excluded lecturers who did not integrate grammar feedback into their teaching of literature, civilisation or didactics.

4.3 Semi-structured interview guide

When developing the semi-structured interviews, I drew upon commonly accepted feedback strategies in three different seminal studies (Ellis 2009; Ferris 2014; Lyster & Ranta 1997). I asked the informants about their perceptions of the following feedback dichotomies: global versus local, focused versus unfocused, oral versus written, direct versus indirect, metalinguistic versus non-metalinguistic and elicitive versus non-elicitive (see Appendix A). These questions comprise the first section of my interview guide (see Appendix D). The second section included questions designed to elicit their reasons for choosing their feedback approaches. The informants received the interview guide by mail one week in advance, along with examples and explanations on possible feedback strategies.

4.4 Analysis

For data analysis, I developed a qualitative codebook using NVivo12. Regarding coding procedures, I used deductive, inductive and iterative methods to analyse the data. The use of taxonomies (e.g. Ellis 2009; Lyster

& Ranta 1997) qualified the coding as theory-driven. For example, I considered feedback elicitive only when the informants could report on Lyster and Ranta's (1997) three feedback strategies: elicit completion moves, elicitive questions or reformulation requests (see Appendix A). However, the codes relating to research question 2 were added more inductively, as they emerged directly from the data (see Tables 3 and 4). Codes such as 'supervision', 'peer reviews' or 'marking code systems' (see Table 4) were based on in vivo coding, which refers to the actual language in the transcriptions. Care was taken, as Silverman (2014) recommended, to avoid either imposing prior categories of analysis or prematurely forming such categories. The analysis of research question 1 informed the subsequent stage of the analysis of research question 2 and vice versa. To extract real teacher beliefs, I frequently used 'why' questions and prompts (e.g. tables on distributions of feedback modes and types (see Cabot & Kaldestad 2019).

4.5 Reliability and validity

This study collected at least two feedback samples (e.g. essays in literature, civilisation or didactics) from 9 of the 12 informants. The samples were used to confirm the validity of the self-reported feedback practices. For example, the samples confirmed the self-reported frequent use of metalinguistic and indirect feedback and the less frequent use of global and elicitive feedback. In addition to these feedback samples, I carried out member check interviews with four interviewees whose feedback practices and reasoning behind feedback choices were difficult to interpret. Responses to a questionnaire were used as prompts for the member check interviews (see Appendix E). Moreover, an assistant researcher was asked to peer-check the validity of the codes related to research question two. In addition, three raters rescored the findings related to research question 1 (see Table 2). The interrater reliability scores went from 0.70 Cohen's kappa for global feedback to 0.82 Cohen's kappa for metalinguistic elicitive feedback. To determine intrarater reliability, I rescored all 12 interviews, obtaining results between 0.79 for elicitive feedback and 1.00 Cohen's kappa for oral feedback. Thus, satisfactory scores were obtained for both inter- and intrarater reliability.

5. Findings

Using illustrative examples, this section presents some interviewees' reflections on their feedback practices and the reasons behind their feedback choices. The first part elaborates on the lecturers' distribution of different feedback strategies (research question 1). The second part describes possible factors influencing the lecturers' feedback practices (research question 2).

5.1 Distribution of feedback practices

The findings pertaining to research question 1 revealed that all the lecturers of this study predominantly used metalinguistic, indirect, local and unfocused feedback in response to written errors. Few provided oral and elicitative feedback extensively. Table 2 provides a more detailed overview of the interviewees' self-reported feedback practices.

Table 2. Participants' self-reported use of feedback types based on Ferris's (2014) recommendations

	Global feedback	Focused feedback	Oral feedback	Indirect feedback	Metalinguistic feedback	Elicitative feedback
High use	1	4	2	8	8	2
Medium use	5	2	6	4	4	2
Low use	6	6	4	0	0	8

Note. The interviewees' self-perceived estimates were based on dichotomies. For example, high use of global feedback indicates low use of local feedback and vice versa, while medium use indicates that the informant reported providing approximately equal amounts of both feedback types.

As displayed in Table 2, the lecturers used metalinguistic and indirect feedback in a similar way. In contrast, the findings highlight variations in the participants' use of all other stated feedback strategies. The following illustrative snippets from five informant interviews explain these distinctions in more detail.

As can be seen in Table 2, many lecturers reported they only rarely provided feedback on global issues. Tom was the exception, reporting that he provided more global than local feedback. He described his approach as follows:

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I often write in the margin, 'Consider using more linking words like "however", "moreover" etc.' ... or when I know the paper was written by a very good student, I note, ... 'Please, stick to one tense in your paragraph'. It depends on the essays, but I am generally not interested in local issues. They can correct these on their own.

When asked why he was not interested in local errors, he answered that fluency was much more important than accuracy, even though the limits between both are sometimes blurred. This use of feedback on global issues stands in clear contrast to the predominant use of feedback on local issues described by other participants. For example, Nancy recounted primarily choosing to provide CF on local issues:

Unfortunately, when I read a text, I am so concentrated that I focus much more on details than I should, and my focus becomes more local than global. For example, I comment on all concord errors and, to a lesser extent, on tenses in paragraphs and cohesion.

This extract illustrates how challenging the tension between providing feedback on local and global issues can be. The informants faced a similar challenge when deciding between focused and unfocused feedback. Brad, Eva, Ken, Nancy, Ruth and Viviane provided little focused feedback. Eva described her choice this way:

I correct all the errors in the text ... I believe these students want unfocused feedback because they submit very few drafts. We do not have the resources for providing feedback on multiple drafts.

As Eva illustrates, the need for unfocused feedback becomes understandable when considering the low number of submissions. Focused feedback might be facilitated if teacher education provides additional time to the lecturers.

Concerning the findings on oral feedback, few lecturers provided more oral than written feedback (see Table 2). Pauline and Meg were the only two who provided extensive oral feedback. Pauline puts this as follows:

We discuss students' development in our individual conferences. The advantage is that we can immediately determine by their facial expressions or voice whether they understand terms such as 'concord errors'. If they do not understand, oral feedback provides the opportunity to use other terms they do understand.

Thus, Pauline provided oral feedback to facilitate clarifications and explanations. She was also one of only two lecturers to report using

elicitations extensively. In fact, the key finding from this research is that most lecturers provided little elicitative feedback, except Pauline and Meg. For example, Meg mentioned,

An essential part of my approach consists of initiating dialogic processes. I often use questions in the margin to elicit knowledge. I talk to my students through my feedback. I often ask my students to imagine conversing with me while reading my feedback in the margins.

In contrast to Meg, most interviewees described using questions less frequently than reformulation requests. For example, they recounted using comments such as ‘rephrase’ more often than asking questions. The following section presents the lecturers’ reasoning behind such decisions.

5.2 Possible factors influencing the selection of feedback practices

The main findings indicate that the lecturers’ feedback practices are influenced by multifaceted personal and contextual factors.

First, many participants gave numerous reasons for using metalinguistic and indirect CF extensively: Dennis, Grace, Meg and Tom believed they do so because the metalanguage used in the feedback facilitates self-help and increases language awareness. Grace explained that the students ‘see the concepts, terminology and structures they learn about in application in their own text so that they can then, down the road, do the same things with their pupils’, which is of particular importance in teacher education. In other words, the students need the metalanguage the lecturers write in the margin because it conveys grammatical knowledge they will need when they have to mark essays in the future. However, most lecturers found indirect CF equally important, believing students learn more by discovering the correct answers on their own. For example, when it would be too complicated for Viviane to rewrite a whole sentence, she would combine indirect feedback with metalinguistic comments such as ‘clumsy sentence’. In contrast, few lecturers used elicitative CF. Ken attributed his minimal use of this strategy to the questions sometimes seeming unnatural and being linked to ‘testing’. Table 3 displays some quotations from the informants who tried to explain the main reasons behind their feedback choices.

Table 3. Personal reasons for and against six corrective feedback strategies

	Global CF	Focused CF	Oral CF	Indirect CF	Meta-linguistic CF	Elicitative CF
Reasons for	Tom: 'It helps students think more about coherence, cohesion'.	Dennis: 'Focused feedback is more learner-friendly'.	Meg: 'Their facial expressions reveal whether they understood the feedback'.	Ruth: 'It stimulates students to use their grammar books and dictionaries'.	Grace: 'It gives them an opportunity to see the connection between declarative and procedural knowledge'.	Pauline: 'They learn more when we ask, "Where is your subject?" instead of writing "concord" in the margin'.
Reasons against	Viviane: 'They [students] want us to point at all errors. They want to be able to write an error-free text'.	Eva: 'They [students] want unfocused feedback when they have few opportunities to receive feedback'.	Faith: 'It is too time-consuming and often increases student anxiety'.	Brad: 'They [students] won't be able to find the correct answers—for example, the correct word order'.	Nancy: 'I try to avoid difficult terms such as "antecedent". Meta-language is often too difficult'.	Ken: 'Questions can be linked to "testing the students"'.

Many of the reasons shown in Table 3 were mentioned by several lecturers, only in different words. Interestingly, the lecturers' views on feedback strategies often included both the positive and negative reasons that informed their feedback choices. These reasons qualified as personal factors.

Regarding contextual factors, a variety of other factors were reported as influencing the lecturers' feedback practices. Table 4 provides an overview of these influences.

Table 4. Contextual factors influencing lecturers' feedback decisions (in categories, number of lecturers and coding occurrences)

Main categories	Subcategories	Number of lecturers (N = 12)	Coding occurrences in NVivo
Influences from feedback-providing contexts	Past and present assignments and exam assessments	12	45
	Supervision of students	3	3
Influences from formal and informal forums	Formal: courses on assessment	10	21
	Informal: conversations with colleagues or students	12	16
Influences from feedback-receiving contexts	Peer reviews of scientific articles and doctoral theses	5	12
	Assessment of essays at school or university in the distant past	10	16
Influences from the use of tools	Common use of marking code systems	5	5

As displayed in Table 4, the interviews revolved several times around feedback provision on assignments and exams, as well as student supervision. The lecturers characterised the first factor as mainly beneficial for their feedback development. In fact, past feedback-providing contexts can be especially important in understanding present feedback practices because the lecturers often believed it necessary to adapt feedback to specific contexts. For example, Nancy went from taking a more focused approach as an upper secondary school teacher to taking a more unfocused approach with her university students. She believed they are more proficient and, thus, better able to engage with unfocused feedback. In comparison, Dennis, Faith, Grace, Meg and Tom reported that their feedback development shifted from a more local error treatment

in the past to a more global focus. These lecturers explained that this change was likely due to gaining new insights into student needs. For example, they believed students now struggle more with fluency than accuracy because spelling and grammar checks on word-processing programs detect coherence errors to a lesser extent. Interestingly, when comparing feedback tendencies in the past with those of the present, all lecturers had changed their feedback practices in terms of some specific feedback strategies (see Appendix C).

Regarding the second factor, Table 4 displays the importance some participants assigned to assessment courses. Grace described how such courses have influenced her feedback practices:

These courses influence you indirectly because you use, perhaps, more metalanguage. You have to think of grades and reasons for giving one grade and not another one. ... I didn't think of it before, but somehow, I am now much better at categorising.

This excerpt suggests that courses may help lecturers learn to employ metalanguage more effectively. In contrast to these more formal contexts, Pauline used, for example, chat rooms to converse in writing with her students. In these chat rooms, she used more elicitive questions than in the feedback she generally provided on the students' essays. She described this phenomenon:

I use questions more frequently in the chat rooms on Canvas ... but not really in written feedback. I think that many students are afraid of grammar. Chat rooms are, in this context, a wonderful tool. ... They make it somehow easier to talk about grammar.

Considering this, the use of elicitions might be more frequent in such informal forums because it more closely resembles oral feedback, even though the feedback is written. In all other contexts, especially in written situations, the informants said that they provided little elicitive feedback.

The third contextual factor affecting the participants' selection of feedback strategies is feedback-receiving contexts. Some informants thought that the feedback they had received on peer-reviewed articles (e.g. Tom and the reuse of global feedback) in the recent past or on essays in the distant past may have impacted their practices. Viviane provided an interesting example:

The feedback I received at university was very direct, with very few metalinguistic comments. This may be one of the reasons I now use more metalinguistic and indirect feedback. I compensate somehow.

Viviane's experience aligned with those of other informants, such as Faith and Ken. They can be identified as 'counter-reactions' that help explain present feedback practices.

The last factor is the use of common marking codes. For example, Eva thought it was unfortunate that her English department had not created a common system of marking codes:

The reason for using less metalinguistic feedback at our university is that we do not have this system with symbols. I mean, this system we developed and used together at upper secondary school. I was very happy with it. Every time there was a concord error, I used a symbol ... It was easier to see in the margin which serious errors occurred several times. This made it easier to summarise all errors and use convenient metalanguage in the end comments.

Here, Eva makes an interesting link between the use of common marking codes and the provision of metalinguistic in-text and end comments. Such contextual factors must be observed in combination with personal preferences because not all lecturers favoured the use of codes instead of written-out comments.

In sum, both contextual and personal factors shape lecturers' feedback practices. To further investigate this issue, the next section therefore discusses these findings, considering the concept of context-dependent learning ecologies (e.g. Van Lier 2004) and individual teacher beliefs (e.g. Borg 2015).

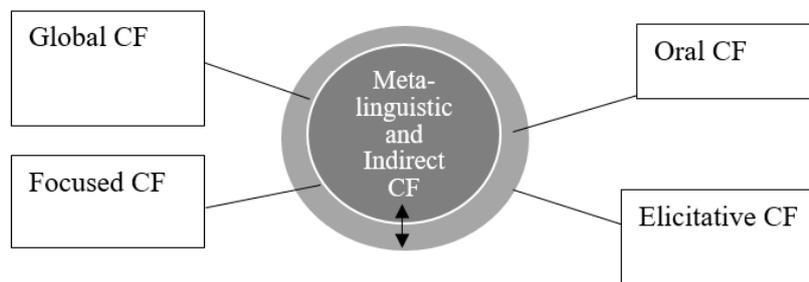
6. Discussion

6.1 Teacher beliefs

The main findings for research question 1 are two-fold: All 12 lecturers reported providing predominantly metalinguistic and indirect feedback. Many lecturers also recounted providing little global and focused error treatment and rarely used elicitative feedback. Research question 2, however, uncovered contextual (e.g. courses on assessment) and personal (e.g. positive beliefs about metalanguage) factors that can explain these feedback strategy selections.

These findings describe teacher beliefs (more specifically, positive beliefs about indirect and metalinguistic feedback and negative beliefs

about elicitative feedback), which may explain why the lecturers used certain feedback strategies to varying degrees (see Table 3). Phipps and Borg's (2009) distinction between core and peripheral beliefs helped to analyse and understand the lecturers' beliefs about feedback practices. Figure 1 illustrates a possible relationship between these belief systems in relation to the feedback practices of this study.



↕ = Possible directions of moving beliefs about feedback.

Figure 1. Core and peripheral feedback beliefs in the study

Based on the data of this study (see Table 2), Figure 1 displays metalinguistic and indirect CF as core beliefs, while global, focused, oral and elicitative CF are peripheral beliefs. The predominant choice of metalinguistic and indirect feedback can be explained by the lecturers' fundamental belief in the corrective force and effectiveness of these two feedback types. Green (1998: 46) described these beliefs as 'those beliefs held with psychological strength ... we are most prone to accept without question'. However, the question arises whether the lecturers overuse metalinguistic feedback because they believe too firmly in the advantages of this feedback strategy. Johnston and Goettsch (2000) indicated it is equally important to provide examples to make grammar comments useful to students. In contrast to metalinguistic feedback, the strong belief in indirect feedback was surprising. Interestingly, the lack of time was not used as a main argument for indirect feedback, but the wish that students should discover the correct answers by themselves. Indirect CF usage may be recommended because it promotes learner autonomy (e.g. Ferris 2014). Conversely, as highlighted by Diab (2005: 33), it is sometimes difficult to

avoid direct CF because some errors (e.g. comma splices) cannot be highlighted without correcting them. In other words, the distinction between indirect and direct feedback may appear too dichotomous.

Peripheral beliefs (beliefs that are less influential in shaping lecturers' feedback decisions) can help to understand the lack of global feedback shown in the present study and some previous works (e.g. Mao & Crosthwaite 2019; Montgomery & Baker 2007). For example, one reason the lecturers of this study used global feedback (e.g. tense shift in a paragraph) less frequently could be that they were not fully convinced of the advantages of global feedback. In fact, many lecturers expressed a high interest in local feedback (e.g. third person 's')—which is, as highlighted by Amrhein and Nassaji (2010), precisely the kind of feedback students want and expect. Another reason could be that the lecturers knew about best practice recommendations (e.g. Ferris 2014) in relation to global feedback, but it was an unimplemented ideal. For example, Nancy seemed to be apologetic about her use of local feedback. In contrast, Tom mentioned an alignment between his strong belief in the importance of global feedback and his feedback practices.

Moreover, in line with Schulz (2001), the tendency to provide unfocused feedback seems to be a common practice because the lecturers were afraid that students would feel 'cheated' with focused in-text comments when teacher education facilitated only few submissions (see Table 3). In other words, as highlighted by Lee (2010), teacher educators such as EFL lecturers need more time and resources to increase the number of feedback opportunities and thus the possibility of offering focused feedback.

Regarding oral feedback, this study's findings suggest there are two interesting groups of lecturers. The first group of lecturers expressed a well-known mismatch (see, for example, Nassaji 2017) between their strong belief in the effectiveness of teacher-student conferences and their actual feedback practices. According to the interviews, some lecturers favoured teacher-student conferences, but they often did not provide them because they felt that these required too much time (see Table 3). The second group of lecturers basically disliked and avoided teacher-student conferences because they believed that these increase student anxiety. This problem of anxiety was also a major issue in Yeh (2016), although Ferris (2014) indicated that many respondents expressed great enthusiasm for writing conferences.

Lastly, elicitive CF was the type of feedback most unrelated to the core beliefs in this study (see Figure 1) because—in contrast to Nassaji (2007)—it was perceived as something unnatural (see Table 3) and was scarcely used by the informants (see Table 2). For example, Ken believed questions seem contrived and can be linked to ‘testing the students’. Conversely, Meg seemed to follow general feedback recommendations (e.g. Ferris 2014), using terms such as ‘initiating dialogic processes’ to legitimise her frequent use of elicitive questions.

However, as indicated by the bidirectional arrow in Figure 1, the findings also suggest that beliefs can change. This represents a major result of this study, which stands in contrast to Pajares’s (1992) and Phipps and Borg’s (2009) approaches that consider beliefs as basically unchanging. For example, Dennis, Faith, Grace and Meg moved from providing predominantly local feedback to providing global feedback (see Appendix C). This again confirms Green’s (1998: 48) argument that ‘teaching has to do, among other things, with the modification and formation of belief systems’. In other words, if the purpose were to increase core feedback types to improve feedback quality in teacher education, it might be advisable to move certain feedback types from the periphery to the core, as illustrated in Figure 1. However, this would require lecturers to be fully convinced of the advantages of these feedback types.

In sum, these findings on the various feedback strategies raise questions about the specific reasons behind the lecturers’ decisions. Clearly, the distinction between peripheral and core belief systems can help explain the lecturers’ reasoning behind their personal feedback decisions. This can be useful for determining whether certain feedback types are over- or underused—which, in turn, can raise lecturers’ feedback awareness and help to develop specific feedback suggestions for EFL teacher education. Most interestingly, beliefs can change and interact in different contexts, which I discuss next.

6.2 Learning ecologies

Lecturers learn to adapt feedback to different and ever-changing contexts. In other words, this learning takes place in so-called learning ecologies (e.g. Barron 2006; Van Lier 2004). The description of such learning ecologies can help to understand lecturers’ current feedback practices. This is particularly interesting because little is known about how lecturers

learn to provide feedback in L2 writing (Crusan, Plakans & Gebрил 2016; Lee 2010). In this context, Table 4 provides useful data on multifaceted context-dependent factors.

Table 4 mentions first feedback-providing situations, which can change and create new contexts that can prove challenging for lecturers. Moving from one situation to another, ‘ecological transitions’ (Bronfenbrenner 1979: 26) may occur in the lecturers’ feedback careers, which can shape the CF practices they currently employ. Two interesting examples from the data (see Appendix C) illustrate this. First, Nancy considered the transition from teaching at an upper secondary school to teaching at a university a crucial learning moment because she had to adjust to a more unfocused error treatment approach. Second, many years of experience have convinced Dennis, Faith, Grace and Meg of the effectiveness of global, in addition to local, feedback (see Appendices B and C). More specifically, they moved from providing predominantly local feedback (e.g. third person ‘s’) in the past to providing global (e.g. tense shift in a paragraph) feedback in recent years. A valuable reason for this feedback change is that lecturers need to adapt their feedback to student needs and new learning contexts, which might be particularly challenging in Norwegian teacher education (e.g. Rødnes, Hellekjær & Vold 2014). In fact, Dennis reported that students now struggle more with coherence in their texts than with local errors, which the spelling and grammar checkers on word-processing programs detect more easily. Such reflections might be important to improve feedback quality and effectiveness in teacher education.

Influences from formal and informal forums seemed equally interesting. As an example of formal contexts, Grace described assessment courses as important learning contexts because these helped her grade essays, categorise errors and use metalanguage more conveniently. Bøhn and Tsagari (2021) emphasised the importance of such assessment-specific competence (e.g. knowing what should be assessed) in the development of knowledge and skills needed to carry out effective feedback practices in Norway. Informal forums, however, involved positive experiences with discussing grammar through chat rooms. One interesting explanation for the facilitated use of elicitive questions in chat rooms might be that these contexts represent a ‘negotiated oral feedback’ (Nassaji 2017: 114) situation governed by a conversational logic. In contrast to chat rooms, writing conferences offer the advantage

of ‘real time consultations’ (Yeh 2016: 51) in which elicitive (and metalinguistic) feedback may be triggered by the students’ facial expressions or voices indicating that they did not understand a term. Clearly, this ‘inquirer role’ (Lee 2010: 153) of lecturers needs to be reinforced in teacher education.

The third category in Table 4 consists of influences from feedback-receiving contexts. For example, Viviane believed that her preferences for metalinguistic and indirect feedback are a counter-reaction: she wanted to compensate for the feedback she did not get as a student at university. Such contexts, labelled as counter-reactions by Borg (1999) and Golombek (1998), can help to analyse and understand some lecturers’ feedback practices. This, in turn, seems to be important, provided that lecturers’ feedback self-awareness can influence feedback quality (e.g. Strijbos & Müller 2014).

The final category in Table 4 illustrates how the use of marking codes—created and used at the institutional level—can facilitate the use of focused and metalinguistic feedback and thus create a more feedback-provider-friendly context for lecturers. On the one hand, Nancy and Eva’s positive experiences are supported by studies such as Johnston and Goettsch (2000). On the other hand, the findings stand in contrast to research showing that error codes help little to achieve greater accuracy in student texts over time (Ellis 2009). However, one convincing argument of the present study might be that marking code systems trigger more focused end comments and make it easier for instructors to distinguish accidental mistakes from systemic errors.

To sum up, the findings of this study elucidate the importance of certain contextual influences that can trigger specific feedback strategies (e.g. Foltz 2018; Miller 2005; Thoms 2014). A discussion of the need to implement feedback recommendations such as Ferris’s (2014) best practice suggestions to improve feedback quality in EFL teacher education should consider such contextual factors, in addition to the aforementioned personal factors.

7. Limitations and Strengths

This study had limitations that affected both the interpretation and the impact upon the generalisability of the findings. First, self-reported data, such as information supplied in interviews, have validity issues because the data may reflect reported rather than actual practices. Second, given

the limited number of participants, the study does not provide an exhaustive picture of EFL lecturers' perceptions in general or in the Norwegian teacher education context.

However, this study also has many strengths. First, the results of this qualitative study are, in principle, generalisable to theoretical propositions—that is, 'the development of a theory of the processes operating in the case studied' (Maxwell 2013: 138). In other words, the theoretical discussion on how to combine teacher beliefs with learning ecologies is novel and can thus be considered a strength. Second, the study sampling facilitated the investigation of teacher beliefs because in the case of experienced lecturers, the alignment between feedback beliefs and practices seems to be relatively high (Basturkmen 2012). Third, inter- and intrarater reliability tests were conducted to check the reliability and validity of the codes (see section 4.5). Last, the findings of this study resonate with other studies about grammar feedback strategies. For example, many studies agree on the positive benefits of indirect (e.g. Ferris 2014), metalinguistic (e.g. Pawlak 2020), global (e.g. Mao & Crosthwaite 2019), oral (e.g. Yeh 2016) and elicitive feedback (e.g. Nassaj 2007, 2017).

8. Conclusion

In the present study, my analysis produced both an overview of current perceptions of feedback practices and (this might be a particularly valuable outcome) a list of possible personal and contextual factors that can shape teachers' feedback beliefs—which are, in principle, difficult to change. Furthermore, the study provides an example of transdisciplinary research that combines theoretical perspectives on teacher beliefs with learning ecologies to explain lecturers' feedback strategies decisions regarding grammar, here used as an inspiring example.

This study's results can be useful in EFL writing teacher education. First, they can stimulate lecturers to reflect on their beliefs in relation to feedback, for example global, oral and elicitive CF (feedback awareness). Second, by focusing more clearly on context-dependent factors, this study broadens the discussion on how to improve the feedback quality in teacher education by, for example, suggesting informal forums such as chat rooms (feedback-enhancing settings).

Concerning new research avenues, it would be interesting to conduct a large-scale survey of EFL lecturers' feedback practices, which could

further analyse the relationship between personal (e.g. culture, gender, cognitive styles) and contextual variables (e.g. curriculum goals, time constraints) in Norway. This can help to develop specific feedback suggestions for EFL teacher education.

Appendices

Appendix A: Feedback strategies used in the study (adapted from Ellis 2009, and Ferris 2011, 2014, and Lyster & Ranta 1997)

Feedback strategy	Description	Examples
Oral	The lecturer provides oral feedback during writing conferences, i.e. individual teacher-student conferences	What is your subject? Is it in the plural or singular?
Written	The lecturer provides either computer-typed or hand-written corrective feedback in end and/or marginal and/or in-text comments.	This is a very good essay. As to the language, I have a few comments: - Avoid incomplete sentences - Avoid heavy/unclear sentences - Be aware of concord
Global	Correcting grammar above the sentence level	You change tense! You must stick to either the present or the past tense.
Local	Correcting grammar under the sentence level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missing apostrophes (e.g., *"the sister behaviour" instead of "the sister's behaviour" • Concord errors (e.g., *"Constantia develop" instead of "Constantia develops")
Focused	Correcting one to two error categories, mostly in end and marginal comments.	'concord' 'run-on sentence'

Mid-focused	Correcting three to five error categories, mostly in end and marginal comments.		‘concord’ ‘run-on sentence’ ‘tense shift’
Unfocused	Correcting more than five error categories, mostly in marginal and in-text comments.		‘concord’ ‘run-on sentence’ ‘tense shift’ ‘incomplete sentence’ ‘word classes’ ‘apostrophes’
Direct	The lecturer provides the student with the correct form.		You have to write “mice”, not “mouses”.
Indirect	The lecturer provides no correction but points at or indicates (e.g. typographically) the error.		We do not say “mouses” in English.
Meta-linguistic	Contains metalanguage regarding errors		“Influence” is a noun. “Influential” is an adjective.
Elicitative	Reformulation requests	Asking the student to reformulate to improve comprehensibility	Can you say this another way?
	Elicitative questions	Asking a question to elicit knowledge	How do we form the present continuous in English?
	Elicit completion moves	Strategic pausing to allow students to “fill in the blank”	No, not that. It’s a...?

Appendix B: Distribution of feedback practices based on feedback strategies

	Global	Focused	Oral	Indirect	Meta- linguistic	Elici- tative
Brad	1	1	2	2	3	2
Dennis	2	3	1	3	3	1
Eva	1	1	2	3	2	1
Faith	2	2	1	2	2	1
Grace	2	3	1	3	3	2
Ken	1	1	2	3	3	1
Meg	2	3	3	3	3	3
Nancy	1	1	2	2	2	1
Pauline	2	3	3	2	2	3
Ruth	1	1	1	3	3	1
Tom	3	2	2	3	3	1
Viviane	1	1	2	3	3	1
Total	3	3333	33	33333333	33333333	33
Score	22222	22	222222	2222	2222	22
	111111	111111	1111			11111111

Note. 3 = high use; 2 = medium use; 1 = low use. The interviewees' self-perceived estimates are based on dichotomies (global vs. local; focused vs. unfocused; oral vs. written; indirect vs. direct, metalinguistic vs. non-metalinguistic; elicitive vs. non-elicitive).

Appendix C: Tendencies in changes of feedback practices in the study

Informants (pseudonyms)	Past Feedback Approach From		Present Feedback Approach To
Eva	metalinguistic		non-metalinguistic
Dennis	local		global
Brad	direct		indirect
Faith	local		global
	direct		indirect
	focused		unfocused
Grace	local		global
	direct		indirect
Ken	non-metalinguistic		metalinguistic
Meg	local		global
	direct		indirect
Nancy	written		oral
	direct		indirect
	focused		unfocused
Pauline	non-metalinguistic		metalinguistic
Ruth	global		local
	direct		indirect
Tom	local		global
	direct		indirect
Viviane	global		local
	direct		indirect
	non-metalinguistic		metalinguistic

Appendix D: Lecturer interview guide (after piloting)

The following questions were used as a starting point:

What kind of feedback do you provide today?

1. How is your grammar feedback today? How is it perceived and used?
2. How would you define good grammar feedback?
3. Which *feedback modes* (written vs. oral) and *feedback types* (e.g. direct vs. indirect, metalinguistic, elicitation) do you use? Where do you write your comments in your written corrective feedback (marginal, in-text and/or end-comments)? Why?
4. Do you favour *focused* or *unfocused CF*? Why?
5. Which kind of grammar feedback is easiest or most difficult? Why?
6. How much do you manage to concentrate on *local* or *global issues*? Why?
7. What do you think of the distinction made between *treatable* and *untreatable errors*?

What are the factors motivating these feedback practices?

1. What are your reasons for providing *oral/written, focused/unfocused, direct/indirect, metalinguistic* or *elicitation-based feedback*? Why do you believe that some of these feedback strategies are better than others?
2. What are your reasons for focusing on *local/global* and/or *treatable/untreatable errors*? Why do you believe that some of these feedback strategies are better than others?
3. How did your feedback develop during the last years? Could you mention some essential moments? How was your feedback at the beginning of your career compared to today?
4. What influences your feedback? (e.g. courses, own experiences from studying, influences from colleagues)? How and why did it change?

Concluding Questions

1. Which feedback types and modes will you provide more or less in the future? Why?
2. How do you want to improve yourself as a *grammar feedback provider*?
3. Do you have any additional comments?

Appendix E: Interview guide for member check interviews

Concluding Questions

1. Which feedback types and modes do you use when you provide grammar feedback?
2. What are the reasons for your feedback choices and practices? What influences or affords your feedback (e.g. courses, personal experiences from studying, influences from colleagues)?

To answer question 1 more precisely, try to assess what kind of feedback you generally provide most (3), least (1) or to an approximately equal amount (2).

The six feedback strategies are explained below:

Feedback types and modes	Feedback on global issues (vs. local)	Focused feedback (vs. unfocused)	Oral feedback (vs. written)	Indirect feedback (vs. direct)	Meta-linguistic feedback (vs. non-meta-linguistic)	Elicitative Feedback (vs. non-elicitative)
Informant						

Note. 3 = high use; 2 = medium use; 1 = low use. Your estimates are based on dichotomies. For example, a high use of global feedback means less use of local feedback and vice versa. Medium use means that you provide an approximately equal amount of both feedback types.

Explanations on feedback modes and types:

- oral vs. written (e.g. writing conferences)
- global vs. local (correcting grammar above or under the sentence level)
- focused vs. unfocused (correcting fewer or more than five error categories)
- direct vs. indirect (providing the correct form or no correction, i.e. only indicating the existence of an error)
- metalinguistic (use of metalanguage or no metalanguage)
- elicitation-based feedback (1. allowing the student to fill in the blank, 2. asking a question to elicit knowledge or 3. asking to reformulate vs. none of these three cases).

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