Error Perceptions of Native and Nonnative English-speaking Writing Teachers

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This study investigated the degree to which differences existed in the evaluation and identification of errors in a Korean EFL writing sample between native (NS) and nonnative (NNS) writing teachers of English. It furthermore examined their beliefs about error correction practices. The participants comprised 7 teachers each group. A 150 word narrative writing text was used as a material for error evaluation and correction tasks. Data also collected from a questionnaire about general perceptions about error correction in EFL writing. The results indicated that in teachers’ beliefs, both groups displayed relatively similar perspectives on error correction tasks, while they differed considerably in terms of the importance of error correction, the need of training in error correction, and students’ peer-correction. In error identification and holistic evaluation of the writing sample, NS and NNS groups differed significantly. NS teachers identified significantly more errors and they relied more on intelligibility in evaluating error seriousness, while NNS teachers assigned higher scores to the writing sample and they tended to evaluate errors based on the rule violation criterion. The study, however, indicated that the validation of both groups’ holistic evaluation of the writing sample was not substantiated by their follow-up error correction practices.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the early work of Selinker (1972) and Corder (1974), the field of error analysis has expanded considerably concentrating on the investigation of what errors display in the process of learning and using an L2. Nonetheless, whether instructors should correct students’ written errors or not and how they should give feedback on the errors are topics of constant interest and debate among researchers, teachers, and students. A great deal of error correction research, though inconclusive, has focused on the effects of grammar
correction in improving the accuracy and fluency of L2 writing.\textsuperscript{1} There is research evidence showing that L2 students believe that they benefit from error correction (Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 1999, 2006; Hyland, 1998; Lee, 2004; Leki, 1991; Myles, 2002), while there are studies providing that error correction is not only ineffective but potentially harmful to improvement L2 students’ writing (Lee, 2005; Semke, 1984; Sheppard, 1992; Truscott, 1996). The one implicit point of agreement in both perspectives was that responding to student errors is one of the enduring and difficult tasks for L2 writing teachers.

In the meantime, some studies attempted comparative studies between native-speaking (NS) teachers and nonnative-speaking (NNS) teachers to investigate the degree to which differences exist in identifying, correcting, and assessing L2 students’ writing. The studies have found differences in both NS and NNS teachers’ evaluations of errors in terms of severity (Davies, 1983; Hughes & Lascaratou, 1982; Hyland & Anan, 2006; Porte, 1999; Song & Caruso, 1996), error categories (Jolivet, 1997), students’ linguistic and ethnic backgrounds (Janopoulos, 2002; Rubin & Williams-James, 1997), accuracy of corrected errors (Kobayashi, 1992), error seriousness (Hyland & Anan, 2006; James, 1977; Sheorey, 1986), and even teachers’ training or experiences in L2 writing evaluation (Brown, 1991; Santos, 1988; Sweedler-Brown, 1993). While a number of studies have examined and compared how different teachers recognize and assess different kinds of errors in L2 compositions, the majority of writing samples used in the research were written by EFL Japanese or ESL students in the U.S. Furthermore, the issue of differences in evaluations of errors between NS and NNS teachers of English has received relatively less attention in EFL learning context in Korea. Instead, studies carried out in the Korean EFL context have primarily focused on identifying common types of written errors (Kyung-Ae Cha, 2004; Woo-hyun Jung, 2006; Jie-Young Kim, 1998; Byung-Je Park, 1995) and spoken errors (Cheongsook Chin, 2001). However, recent changes to university English programs that hiring NS teachers to provide students with more authentic L2 learning experiences has been a marked trend in many Korean colleges, have highlighted the need for a study investigating both NS and NNS instructors’ reactions to the academic performance of EFL college students. Possible perceived inconsistency in evaluation of L2 writing between NS and NNS instructors might lead L2 writing teachers to confusion in the importance of error correction and the definition of successful EFL writing.

The purpose of this study was to examine differences in NS and NNS English teachers’ perceptions about error correction. The study focused on whether data would reveal any differences in error correction of a second-year college student’s composition, including

\textsuperscript{1} In this paper, the terms ‘error correction’ and ‘error feedback’ are used interchangeably to refer to the teacher providing both direct correction (e.g., giving correct forms or structures for students’ faulty sentences) and indirect error feedback (e.g., providing feedback on student errors without giving correct forms) (Hendrickson, 1980).
total marked errors in relation to error tolerance and error seriousness. The present study also investigated if teachers’ ratings of the writing sample may reflect their actual correction behaviors. It was assumed that the more severe are their ratings, the more accurately writing teachers should identify errors (Kobayashi, 1992). It was further hoped that the findings of the study would provide more information to establish a more precise consensus on the issues of error tolerance and seriousness between NS and NNS instructors in EFL college student writing. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What are NS and NNS English writing teachers’ perceptions of error correction?
2. How does NS English teachers’ error correction practice compare to those of NNS teachers?
3. What are relationships between evaluation scores assigned to the written text and the number of errors identified and corrected?

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Student errors at the word and sentence levels were the important components for teachers to rate L2 writing holistically (Homburg, 1984). L2 writing teachers’ error correction activity in the classrooms involves a threefold process of identification, correction, and evaluation of errors (Sheorey, 1986). The threefold process might be expected to be comparatively variable depending on teachers’ knowledge about language (Andrews, 2003), interpretations of erroneousness, and tolerance of errors (Brown, 1991; Porte, 1999). While NS English teachers can rate the acceptability in written English by intuition with implicit knowledge, NNS teachers depend relatively on their explicit knowledge of English grammar and use (Kobayashi, 1992). While studies on teachers’ subject-matter knowledge in relation to error correction are scarce, Borg (2003) found significant gaps in NS and NNS teachers’ grammatical competence. In terms of grammatical competence, both NS and NNS teachers’ error correction activity can be shown a remarkable disparity. James (1977), in his seminal study on the contrasts between evaluations by NS and NNS teachers, found that NS teachers marked errors more leniently than NNS teachers. Later, Hughes and Lascaratou (1982) and Davies (1983) provided more evidence of the tendency of NS teachers to be more lenient in error correction than NNS teachers. The leniency of NS teachers may be attributed their superior knowledge about the language and the wide variety of acceptable expressions. NS teachers’ grammatical knowledge might enable themselves to understand suitably an expression which might be ungrammatical, unacceptable, and unnatural to NNS teachers. This finding
that NS teachers tolerate L2 writing errors to a greater extent than do their NNS counterparts was confirmed by many other researchers (Brown, 1991; Hyland & Anan, 2006; Porte, 1999; Sheorey, 1986; Song & Caruso, 1996).

Meanwhile, some L2 writing scholars have turned their attention to the frequently identified error features between NS and NNS teachers. The findings of the studies, however, have reported mixed and confusing results concerning the differences between NS and NNS teachers in their error perceptions. Kobayashi (1992), reporting the findings of a comparative study of Japanese-speaking and English NS groups of their reactions to L2 writing, found that English NS groups provided more corrections and corrected errors more accurately in terms of grammaticality, while they were more generous in the evaluation of clarity of meaning and organization than were Japanese speakers. However, no significant mean differences were found in the overall ratings in an ESL college context (Brown, 1991) although NS teachers placed emphasis on cohesion and syntax, while NNS teachers paid more attention to organization. Song and Caruso (1996) investigated differences in the rating of rhetorical (e.g., clarity, organization, naturalness, effort to engage readers) and language (e.g., syntax, grammar, vocabulary, fluency) features written by two ESL students. They found that NS and NNS teachers were not significantly different in their rating of the categorized features. Jolivet (1997) also reported no significant differences in the number of corrections, indicating that both French native and nonnative speakers attended carefully to all error categories (e.g., verb, noun, spelling, and pronoun).

On the other hand, Sheorey (1986) examined error seriousness in written English of ESL college students and found contrasts in NS and NNS teachers’ perceptions of errors, although both teachers considered tense, subject-verb agreement, and question formations as more serious than other errors. Takashima (1987) also noted marked differences in error features and number between NNS Japanese and NS teachers in correcting a Japanese college student’s composition. Japanese teachers revealed difficulty in the modification of articles, word choice, and sentence formation although they corrected as many errors as did the NS teachers. Furthermore, Porte (1999) found significant differences in the perceived seriousness of specific errors between NS and EFL writing instructors; NS teachers regarded “subject-verb agreement” as the most serious error, whereas NNS faculty considered “tense” as the most serious one. Song and Caruso (1996) suggested that NS faculty seemed to give greater weight to the overall content and quality of the rhetorical features, while NNS faculty tended to focus on grammatical accuracy in rating student writing. This is so because grammatical accuracy remains an important goal of instruction in many ESL/EFL writing classrooms. Hyland and Anan (2006) also found that Japanese EFL teachers placed more emphasis on rule violation rather than intelligibility in assessing seriousness of errors, while English NS teachers stressed unintelligibility in their
Given the review of the literature, it seems reasonable to presume that NNS teachers are generally more severe in assessing errors although both groups showed somewhat different perspectives in the reactions to specific error categories. These differences in identification and evaluation of errors between NS and NNS teachers might be affected by different viewpoints both groups of teachers employ when they encounter student errors (Davies, 1983). For example, some studies found that NS teachers used intelligibility as a criterion for their error correction activity much more frequently than did the NNS teachers (Davies, 1983; Hughes & Laskaratou, 1982; Hyland & Anan, 2006). Intelligibility criterion, according to Hyland and Anan, was employed to refer to sentences involving ambiguity, flow hindrance, confusion, and fluency. NS teachers with the intelligibility criterion, as noted earlier, may consider grammatically erroneous words or sentences intelligible and acceptable, and appear to be more lenient with error feedback. NNS teachers, however, employed the criterion of rule violation more often in rating error seriousness than did NS counterparts (Hughes & Laskaratou, 1982; Hyland & Anan, 2006). The rule violation was used to indicate sentences involving grammatical errors such as agreement, word forms, and tense. NNS teachers’ emphasis on rule violation, as noted earlier, may reflect their teaching practices in L2 writing classes. NNS teachers may develop a stronger awareness of sentence-level errors because they are more likely to be in frequent contact with poor grammar. Subsequently, NNS teachers have a tendency to emphasize grammaticality more frequently than their NS counterparts (Porte, 1999; Sheorey, 1986; Song & Caruso, 1996). For that reason, the different perceptions about error correction across NS and NNS teachers could be attributed to differences in error criteria to which each group attaches importance.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

1. Participants

Two groups of 7 writing teachers each participated in this study: English NS and Korean-speaking teachers worked with Korean EFL students at three universities. Among the 7 NS teachers (six male and one female), there were an Australian and a Canadian English speakers, and the rest of them were U.S. English speakers. Their average age was 37.8, ranging from 30 to 64. The amount of English teaching experiences in Korea ranged from 2 to 7 years, with an average of about 4.7 years. All these teachers had a master’s degree in English literature, TESOL, English and drama, and curriculum studies from their home countries.
A group of NNS teachers were all seven Korean women, with age ranges between 32 and 42. Their amount of university teaching experience ranged from 2 to 8 years, with an average of 5.3 years. Five had been educated to doctorate degrees in English literature, English linguistics, and English education, while two teachers were doctoral students in English education.

Five of NS teachers have taught writing classes from beginning to advanced levels and two NS taught business writing classes. All NNS taught writing classes for either beginner or intermediate levels. When asked to indicate preferences for error correction as English writing teachers, an NS teacher responded that he marked all students’ errors in writing, while all NNS teachers showed that they marked errors selectively. As Table 1 displays, most teachers in both groups preferred to correct errors based on their discretion about students’ needs. The majority of teachers (N=12) thought that their error correction had little or some effect on their students’ progress in grammatical accuracy in writing, while only two NS teachers perceived that their students had benefits from error correction and improved in writing. Four NNS teachers responded that they went through students’ common errors in class after they marked students’ writing, while six NS usually held a conference with each or some students. One teacher from each group indicated that they did not any follow-up activities after they corrected students’ writing errors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1</th>
<th>NS and NNS Teachers’ Opinions on Error Correction in English Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factors influencing error correction</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ requests</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My perception of students’ needs</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of time I have</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness of error correction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little progress</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some progress</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good progress</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities after error correction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did nothing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Held a conference with students</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went through common errors in class</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Instruments and Procedures

The studies conducted by Hughes and Lascaratou (1982) and Hyland and Anan (2006) were the stimulus to investigate the present study and shared with the general line of examination such as correction tasks and the contrastive analyses of two participant groups. However, this study differed from the two studies: first, in the selection of participants from writing teachers; second, in the use of the EFL context; third, in the inclusion of general perceptions about error correction activity; and, finally, in the nationality of the
English sample text writer.

A 150 word text about the topic of ‘a special time in my life’ written by an EFL Korean second year student was used as a material for error evaluation and correction (see the Appendix). The student writer, 21-year-old female, native Korean speaker, was enrolled in an introductory English writing class at a university. The narrative writing rather than isolated sentences was presented to provide the participants with an authentic text and integrative marking tasks. The text was selected from 29 texts on the same topic in the same writing class on the basis of the length of the writing and the number of errors contained that were common to EFL students in the class. A single text was used not to impose burdens on the participants by asking to correct lengthy EFL compositions and to facilitate comparisons between NS and NNS teachers’ reactions. The handwritten original composition was kept unmodified but typed double-spaced for the sake of clarity. Furthermore, the writing sample was proofread to be sure that it matched its handwritten version. The text contained 19 errors from the following 8 broad categories: vocabulary, comparative/superlative, subject-verb agreement, article, verb form, spelling, word order, and tense.

The participants were asked to do the following: 1) read the text once; 2) rate the text holistically based on their first impression on a rating scale of 1-10; 3) underline the error if they thought there was one; 4) correct or edit all the identified errors; and 5) select and rank the three most serious errors by assigning a number from 1 to 3. Number 3 meant that the selected error was considered to be most serious, while 1 showed that the error could be excused. In addition, they were asked to provide either rule violation (e.g., agreement, word form, and tense) or intelligibility (e.g., ambiguity, confusion, and fluency) as a reason for their evaluation of certain errors with regard to seriousness. No time limit was specified, although they were instructed to complete the tasks at one sitting in order to obtain data from their normal behavior in marking students’ writing. They were also instructed not to correct errors before rating the writing sample, not to discuss the errors and corrections with others, and not to use any type of dictionaries or reference books.

Following the task, a questionnaire was presented to each participant to gather data regarding their general perceptions about error correction practices in English writing. It consisted of 10 randomly drawn items. The items were developed to assess importance of correct grammar in writing (Item 2), writing teachers’ degree of responsibility for error correction (Items 4-6), error feedback techniques (Item 7), need of training in error correction (Item 8), and students’ peer or self-editing (Items 9 & 10). Two items (1 & 3) were taken from Horwitz’s (1985) Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory and modified to ensure that the items referred only to English NS and NNS teachers’ perceptions of error correction in students’ writing. Participants were given four choices to express their degree of agreement with each statement. The scale used to rate their
responses was coded as follows: strongly disagree=1, disagree=2, agree=3, and strongly agree=4. Ten more items were also included to obtain background information about the participants including general opinions on error correction. All the participants completed questionnaires in English.

3. Data Analyses

Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) were computed for all teacher participants’ responses to the questionnaire items and reactions to the writing text. t-tests were used to examine differences in the identified total number of errors and overall scores marked by NS and NNS teachers. Pearson’s correlations between scores assigned to the written text and the total number of identified and corrected errors were calculated to examine if the EFL teachers’ writing evaluations can be substantiated by their follow-up error correction practices. Since the present study deals with a small sample size, the correlation coefficients and the significance levels will be reported together.

IV. RESULTS

This section reports the results of descriptive summary of perceptions about error correction as well as those of correction tasks including the correlations. The descriptive results such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations of NS and NNS teachers are presented together in tables for easier comparisons.

1. General Perceptions about Error Correction

The NS and NNS teachers displayed to have relatively similar perspectives on some items of the error correction. As Table 2 displays, several points are noteworthy. When asked the relative difficulty of writing and speaking in English, all the 14 teachers believed that writing was more difficult than speaking (Item 1). In addition, all the teachers strongly agreed or agreed that “It is important to write English with correct grammar” (Item 2). Furthermore, both writing teacher groups endorsed the needs of teachers’ various error correcting techniques (Item 7) and students’ learning to correct their own errors (Item 9). In terms of beliefs about their responsibility for error correction, 3 teachers in NS group and 4 in NNS thought that identifying and correcting errors in student writing would be their job, while nearly half of them each disagreed with the idea (Item 4). Subsequently, the majority of teachers from both groups disagreed with the statement “there was no need for them to correct student errors” (Item 5).
Meanwhile, the perceptions about the error correction also varied clearly between the two groups. The clearest differences were found in Items 3, 8, and 10. More NNS teachers (N=4) than NS (N=2) thought that allowing students to make errors in the beginning would lead to difficulties in writing correctly later on (Item 3). Furthermore, all the NNS teachers agreed with Item 8 (“Teachers need any help or special training in error correction in English writing”), while 2 NS teachers produced disagreement. All of NNS teachers thought that students’ learning to correct each other’s errors was important, while NS teachers gave varied responses (Item 10).

**TABLE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>NS 1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4 M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. It is easier to write English than to speak it.</td>
<td>4**</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It is important to write English with correct grammar.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. If introductory students are permitted to make errors in English writing without correction, it will be difficult to write correctly later on.</td>
<td>1 4 1 1 2.28 .95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. It’s the teacher’s job to identify and correct errors in English writing for students.</td>
<td>4 1 2 2.71 .75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. There is no need for teachers to correct student errors in English writing.</td>
<td>2 4 1 1.86 .69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Teachers should correct student errors selectively.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.00 1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Teachers should vary their error feedback techniques according to the type of error.</td>
<td>2 3 2 2.00 .82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Teachers need any help or special training in error correction in English writing.</td>
<td>2 3 2 2.31 1.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Students should learn to identify and correct their own errors in English writing.</td>
<td>4 3 3.43 .53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Students should learn to correct each others’ errors.</td>
<td>2 1 2 2.57 1.27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree.
** Number of teachers responded to the option.

2. Comparisons of Error Evaluation between NS and NNS Teachers

As shown in Table 3, a general comparison of error identification and holistically assigned scores between the two groups of teachers revealed differences. NS teachers identified 121 errors (91% of the target errors) in total, ranging from 13 to 24, while NNS teachers reported 93 errors (70%) with a range between 9 and 18. However, NNS teachers’ mean score of the holistic rating on the sample text (M=7.57) was higher than NS teachers’
These results of total marked errors and holistic scores yielded statistically significant differences in the *t*-tests. The NS teachers made more corrections than the NNS teachers, indicating the NS teachers were more severe markers than were their NNS counterparts. Furthermore, three NS teachers recognized far more errors than 19 target errors.

### TABLE 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NS</th>
<th>NNS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total marked errors</strong></td>
<td>121 (17.28)</td>
<td>93 (13.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Holistic score</strong></td>
<td>47 (6.71)</td>
<td>53 (7.57)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p* <.05 in the *t*-tests.

In order to compare error evaluations, Table 4 summarizes the error features identified by NS and NNS teachers. Eight categories that attracted participants’ attention were shown in the first column. Identified errors column indicates the total number of errors identified by each group. Seriousness column displays the total points given to the category by each group (from 3=most serious error to 1=less serious). Rule violation and Intelligibility columns show the number of times participants gave either rule violation or intelligibility as a reason for their error choices in relation to seriousness.

### TABLE 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified errors</th>
<th>NS</th>
<th>NNS</th>
<th>NS</th>
<th>NNS</th>
<th>NS</th>
<th>NNS</th>
<th>NS</th>
<th>NNS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary (8)*</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article (2)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb form (2)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative/Superlative (2)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tense (2)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject-verb agreement (1)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word order (1)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling (1)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>121</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The number of target errors in each category is shown in parentheses.

The results indicated that there was a range of agreement between the two groups regarding the number of errors identified according to the categories in which errors were divided. As can be seen, both groups of teachers identified a large number of errors in vocabulary use (“there will be many trouble problems,” “I came here with challenged...
mind,” and “to learn fashion design at abroad”), verb form (“when he playing with toys” and “some special happened make me more happy”), and tense (“5 years ago, I’ve got a nephew” and “my personality was very selfish before I have a nephew”). However, both groups of teachers identified considerably fewer errors regarding the vocabulary use than the target errors in the given category. Two groups all reported the target errors in three categories, comparative/superlative forms (“more happy” and “the most lovely”), subject-verb agreement (“his smiles was”), and word order (“I study hard English”). All NS teachers identified one spelling error targeted (“desgin”), while four NNS teachers marked the one as an error. NS teachers marked considerably more errors in article omission than did their NNS counterparts (“for rest of my life”). In the meantime, both groups of participants identified 9 more items as errors than those the present study noted. These non-target error features included dangling modifiers, conjunctions, flow, ambiguity, and prepositions.

In terms of seriousness of errors in the student writing, there was a certain amount of agreement between the groups on what made up the most serious error categories. The two groups agreed that vocabulary, verb form, tense, subject-verb agreement, and word order were the most serious errors. When all 8 error categories were analyzed by points given to each category, clear differences between NS and NNS teachers were found in some categories. NS teachers regarded word order errors as the most serious and scored it far more highly. Similarly, the word order was identified as the second most serious error by NNS teachers. The next most seriously regarded errors for NS teachers was vocabulary (“I think some special happened”) showing nearly three times as high scores as the NNS teachers. Even though NS teachers identified many errors in comparative/superlative, article, and spelling, they did not evaluate them as serious ones. For NNS teachers, however, subject-verb agreement was judged as the most serious error, while verb form (“some special happened make me more happy”) was the third most serious error. Unlike NS teachers, two NNS counterparts indicated that comparative/superlative form was one of the three serious errors. Like in NS teachers’ evaluation, article and spelling errors were considered the least serious for the NNS teachers.

As can be seen in the Rule violation and Intelligibility columns in Table 4, participants’ responses related to reasons for their error choices in relation to seriousness showed clear differences between the two groups. More NNS teachers (17 times) regarded three most serious errors in 6 categories as rule violation, while more NS teachers (12 times) considered them in 4 categories as the lack of intelligibility. Incorrect word order, which was selected by 4 NS teachers with regard to the impact on intelligibility, received none for frequency from NNS teachers. On the contrary, three out of four NNS teachers believed that the serious error of verb tense (“5 years ago, I’ve got a nephew”) infringed grammaticality of sentences, while none of three NS teachers agreed with the idea. In sum,
the NS group (12 times) made error correction based on the intelligibility criterion 3 times as often as the NNS teachers (4 times), while NNS teachers (17 times) marked errors in terms of the rule violation criterion nearly twice as often as did their NS counterparts (9 times).

3. Relationships between Marked Scores and Error Correction

The present study also compared scores on the writing sample marked according to the participants’ first impression and the total number of identified and corrected errors to examine an assumption that teachers’ ratings on student writing should be valid in relation to their actual error correction behaviors (Kobayashi, 1992). The correlations as presented in Table 5 indicated that there were no statistically significant relationships between the two variables across two groups. The relationship between teachers’ holistic ratings and error correction for the total sample was negative ($r=-.430$, $p=.125$), but not significant. That is, the more lenient seemed the participants’ ratings, the less frequently they identified and corrected writing errors. Similarly, the marked scores for both NS ($r=-.210$) and NNS ($r=-.113$) groups were negatively associated with the total number of marked errors. Although the magnitude of the relationships was small and statistically nonsignificant, it seemed that participant teachers’ holistic ratings on the writing sample reflected their actual error correction practices.

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<th>TABLE 5</th>
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<th>Holistically marked score</th>
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<td>Holistically marked score Total number of marked errors</td>
<td>-0.430 ($p=.125$)</td>
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V. DISCUSSION

The study has sought to compare English NS and NNS writing teachers’ perceptions about error correction in Korean EFL student writing. It compared the NS group’s error identification and correction practices to those of the NNS group on the basis of the total number of errors detected, seriousness of error evaluation, and holistic scores marked by both groups of participants. The study has furthermore examined the association between rating scores and error correction tasks in an effort to test an assumption about the accuracy of EFL writing teachers’ holistic evaluation of the writing text. The data resulting from the 10 items of perceptions about error correction in writing
indicated that NS writing teachers’ perceptions were consistent with those of their NNS counterparts in certain points such as comparable difficulty of English writing to speaking, importance of English writing with correct grammar, teachers’ development of various error feedback techniques, and students’ self-editing. The participant teachers’ opinions related to their responsibility of error correction reflected constant debate on the issue in relation to its effectiveness as evidenced by previous studies (Ferris, 1999; Lee, 2004; Leki, 1991; Semke, 1984; Sheppard, 1992; Truscott, 1996). A fundamental issue that writing teachers are faced with is whether to correct student errors. Half the teachers (N=7) from both groups disagreed with their error correction tasks in writing class (Item 4). It is somewhat troubling that this perception may be based on a belief that error correction does not bring benefits to students’ writing improvement. Indeed, 9 teachers of the total sample noted that their correction practices may not be effective on students’ progress with English writing (See Table 1). The teachers appeared to consider that correcting student errors is not teaching, instead, they might regard it as editing especially in EFL writing context because students tend to be reliant on teachers to correct errors and they fix their written texts mindlessly on the basis of teachers’ correction.

On the other hand, both groups showed strong attachment to grammatical accuracy in English writing (Item 2). More NNS teachers, however, thought that permitting introductory students to make errors would lead to problems later on. It is difficult to develop grammatical intuition for NNS teachers unless they have had sufficient exposure to and experiences from the target language. Accordingly, uniform agreement to the help needed or special training in writing error correction provided was elicited from NNS teachers. In a similar vein, there is some evidence to support teachers’ beliefs regarding the importance of special training or experiences in L2 writing evaluations that experienced and trained writing instructors displayed consistencies of their judgments about the quality of a written text, while those who were not trained in ESL instruction placed emphasis on sentence-level errors (Homburg, 1984; Santos, 1988; Song & Caruso, 1996; Sweedler-Brown, 1993). Coupled with the finding of this study, it could be concluded that writing teachers need more training in error correction to make more effective and beneficial error feedback for L2 students (Ferris, 1999; Lee, 2004).

Eleven teachers’ agreement related to students’ peer-correction reflected current trends in English instruction in Korea that students’ active involvement in their learning process is often emphasized (Item 10). However, actual EFL classroom teaching practices can be seen from 3 NS teachers’ disagreement to the item. The NS teachers might acknowledge that writing in English is more difficult than speaking it and their EFL students are reluctant to participate in peer-correction tasks due to their lack of confidence in English writing proficiency. Students’ low proficiency of English writing may hinder themselves from participating actively in such classroom tasks. Furthermore, when student peers’ error
correction is done poorly, the effectiveness of that learning task is questionable and peer correction can be nothing more than a time-consuming task. In spite of it all, the finding about the agreement of peer-correction is encouraging that students’ opinions cited in a study reported that it is mainly students’ job to locate and correct their own errors (Lee, 2004). Clearly, teachers should continue to provide help to students to increase self-awareness of errors and to take control of their own learning.

With regard to the holistic marking and error correction practices, both groups paid scant attention to the punctuation errors, with only one NS teacher correcting punctuation marks. In addition, both groups reported that most frequently occurring error features in the sample writing were vocabulary and verb phrase errors, which supports Kyung-Ae Cha’s (2004) findings. The comparison, however, across NS and NNS teachers showed a considerable disparity in their holistic marking and identification and correction of EFL writing errors. NNS teachers identified and corrected significantly less errors and assigned considerably higher scores to the writing sample than did the NS teachers. The NNS groups’ such tendency was also supported by their response to the questionnaire showing all agreement on selective correction of student errors (Item 6). Therefore, it appeared that the NNS groups were more lenient in assessing errors and further provides empirical evidence of the NNS teachers’ leniency (Kobayashi, 1992; Takashima, 1987), contrasting the general tendency for NS teachers to be more tolerant of variation and to accept non-standard alternatives cited in a considerable amount of research (Davies, 1983; Hughes & Lascaratou, 1982; Hyland & Anan, 2006; James, 1977; Porte, 1999; Sheorey, 1986; Song & Caruso, 1996). This interpretation of the findings, however, must be tentative because the NNS teachers recognized only 70% of the target errors, while the NS group identified 91% of them. The NNS group in this study often failed to detect the target errors such as the article omission, vocabulary use, and verb forms, which might provide evidence for Takashima’s (1987) finding that NNS teachers displayed problems in error correction of articles and word choice. However, clear-cut interpretation regarding the NNS teachers’ leniency in writing error correction seems impossible due to the lack of research to support the current findings in Korean EFL contexts; therefore, more research on the error correction practices is needed to reflect fundamental differences in perceptions about holistic evaluation and marking errors between the NS and NNS groups.

In terms of teachers’ evaluations of error seriousness according to categories, the NS teachers considered incorrect word order and word choice as the most serious errors, while the NNS group regarded subject-verb agreement as the most serious one. The findings provide empirical evidence of significant differences in the perceived error seriousness between NS and NNS teachers (Hyland & Anan, 2006; Porte, 1999; Sheorey, 1986; Takashima, 1987). Furthermore, the NS teachers showed a strong tendency to use intelligibility when they evaluated seriousness of errors, while the NNS counterparts used
rule violation for judgments. The NS teachers who had grammatical intuitions for EFL writing evaluation might judge the quality of the written text based on their implicit knowledge (Hyland & Anan, 2006; Kobayashi, 1992). Consequently, they tended to interpret that identified errors in word order, vocabulary choice, and verb form had a significant impact on the acceptability of English sentences rather than on the violation of grammar rules which are stored in their brains. On the other hand, unless NNS teachers have had sufficient experiences with the target language to develop intuitive linguistic knowledge, they have an inclination to depend considerably on their explicit knowledge of grammar in error correction practices. Accordingly, they considered identified errors in most categories as the violation of English grammar rule, which they emphasized in classroom teaching.

In the meantime, although the relationship between holistic evaluation and correction practices for all the 14 participants were negative ($r=-.430$), its strength was not significant, suggesting that this study did not support the assumption that the more severe are the teachers’ holistic judgments, the more accurately they identify and correct errors. However, negative relationships between the holistic evaluation and the follow-up error correction practice for the total sample, NS ($r=-.210$), and NNS ($r=-.113$) groups indicated that the validation of both groups’ holistic evaluation of the writing sample was substantiated in some fashion, which consistent with Homburg (1984) and Kobayashi’s (1992) findings in this regard. Failure in finding statistically significance in the validating of holistic rating can be explained by the small number of the sample in this study. Unlike English conversation or reading classes, English writing courses are usually offered to only students in English major. Compared with enrollment in English reading and conversation classes, a small number of students are in writing classes. This fact boils down to a limited number of EFL writing teachers available each university. All the 14 NS and NNS participants were EFL writing teachers from three different universities. Therefore, it can be said that the small sample size with large standard deviations is possibly associated with the failure in significant findings. Furthermore, the different institutions may also affect the results of this study.

VI. CONCLUSION

To sum up, it is encouraging that teachers’ beliefs about the importance of students’ self-editing and peer-correction reflected current trends in English teaching and learning, which is a learner-centered approach. However, it is cautionary that this belief may be based on their lack of professional competence or limited opportunities for professional development in teaching EFL writing. The study’s findings, accordingly, lead to implications
for teacher education. In order for teachers’ holistic rating to be more accurate and their error feedback to be made more effective for students, teacher education has to include not only courses that help teachers’ language awareness but also practical training in EFL writing evaluation and error feedback strategies.

The study has also pedagogical implications. The high inconsistency between NS and NNS teachers in error evaluation and identification can be directly related to the lack of reliability of assessment in their classroom practices (Hyland & Anan, 2006). This situation provides negative impacts on students’ learning by virtue of promoting student confusion, frustration, and dissatisfaction. It is recommended that teachers establish objectives of evaluation and norms to determine the acceptability of stylistic and grammatical features, and apply the same rubric across students. Furthermore, students should be informed that an English written text should be both grammatical and intelligible for readers.

There are a number of limitations of this study. Definitive statements between NS and NNS groups concerning the error tolerance and evaluation related to error correction practices must be cautioned due to the task instruction for the participants. Although the participants were asked to rate the sample text holistically first in terms of their reading it and then identify and correct errors as a follow-up task, it was unclear whether they followed the directions exactly or altered order of the tasks in their discretion. If error identification and correction was carried out antecedently, and then followed by holistic evaluation, it may be true for some NNS teachers to have been more lenient in grading errors. The second limitation has to do with the generalizability of the findings due to the characteristics of the sample. Both NS and NNS participants had all lived in Korea for considerable periods of time prior to this study and were all teaching English writing. It could thus be thought that all the participants exposed to English errors regularly in written and oral forms. Consequently, they became less conscious of grammatical deviations including the use of inappropriate vocabulary and regarded them less serious, which might impact their error evaluations comparatively. Finally, a larger group of participants and a different writing sample in length and genre might have an impact on the results of the study.

Given the fact that overall results demonstrated differences in error correction between the two groups yet similarities in certain features, there is a clear indication of follow-up research with a larger sample. It would be interesting to examine how NS and NNS teachers identify and evaluate errors with regard to their backgrounds such as EFL training experiences, teaching subjects, and professional competence. In this respect, the ways to validate teachers’ holistic grading process of EFL writing and factors to be considered important to the reliability should be researched. It is also hoped that future research in this area will be elicited from EFL learners’ standpoints. These studies should consider advantages to be gained from teachers’ error correction practices. It would, for example, be interesting to investigate which error correction techniques learners prefer to improve their
writing ability and how learners’ writing accuracy progresses according to teachers’ use of differing error feedback strategies such as direct correction, indirect feedback, and no feedback. To consider the relationships among error correction practices, effectiveness of error feedback, and classroom instruction fairly, a longitudinal study with combined research design of quantitative and qualitative methodologies is needed.

REFERENCES


**APPENDIX**

A Special Time in My Life (target errors underlined)

I have a happy life now. I think some special happened make me more happy. 5 years ago, I've got a nephew. My old sister got married and had a baby. He was so cute. His smiles was the most lovely. I bought many toys and I was felt happy when he playing with toys. My personality was very selfish before I have a nephew. After that year, I entered an university. So I left my hometown. I came here with challenged mind but living alone was very hard and tired. Now I study hard English to learn fashion desgin at abroad. I know there will be many trouble problems but I am very happy because I have a dream. Because of this, I can feel happy and smile. I'll make a lot of special time for rest of my life.

Applicable levels: college students
Key words: perceptions about error correction in writing, error evaluation, error correction practice

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