

# When Machines Teach Writers: Reflecting on GenAI's Role in Giving Corrective Feedback on Linguistic CAF Facets

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## Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), including ChatGPT, has transformed written corrective feedback (WCF) in L2 writing—shifting it from a uniquely human practice to an interactive process between learners and AI. This reflection explores GenAI's impact on learners' linguistic development, focusing on complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF). Drawing on the extant literature and the author's own work, it highlights that meaningful learner engagement is key to preserving writers' autonomy when using AI feedback. It concludes by advocating a dynamic perspective and longitudinal research to trace the co-evolution of GenAI and learners' CAF progress, arguing GenAI's value lies in teachers and learners collaboratively redefining feedback practices in this human–machine ecosystem.

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“No one has ever been modern. Modernity has never begun. There has never been a modern world.”

— Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (2012, p. 47)

## A Moment of Reflection: Writing, Feedback, and GenAI

GenAI has introduced new possibilities into language education, particularly in writing instruction. Yet, as Latour suggested, such changes may be less revolutionary than they first appear. The boundaries between human and machine, teacher and tool, feedback provider and receiver have never been entirely fixed. In writing classrooms, where feedback has been viewed as a deeply human pedagogical practice, tools such

as ChatGPT now participate more actively in the feedback process (Dong, 2024a). Instead of functioning as passive instruments, these tools increasingly shape how learners interpret, revise, and produce language (Barrot, 2024). From this perspective, AI feedback is not a complete break from earlier practices, but a continuation of the longstanding entanglement between humans, technologies, and knowledge-making.

Recent studies have also examined how AI-generated evaluation aligns with conventional assessment practices, particularly in terms of reliability and consistency (Koraishi, 2024). Compared with earlier automated feedback tools, GenAI tools such as ChatGPT enable a more interactive form of engagement by generating context-sensitive responses and adaptive feedback (Al-khresheh, 2024). Meanwhile, questions remain regarding tools' influence on the development of higher-order writing abilities, as well as its ethical and motivational implications in educational settings (Zhou et al., 2024).

As GenAI becomes more integrated into writing instruction, it presents both opportunities and challenges for students and educators. ChatGPT may improve feedback efficiency and expand access to linguistic support, but its use in L2 classrooms also requires careful pedagogical consideration (Barrot, 2024). Overreliance on AI-generated feedback may weaken learner autonomy or encourage superficial revision practices if used uncritically. Even so, its capacity to provide timely and accessible feedback may help address limitations in traditional writing instruction (Dong, 2024b).

This changing relationship between human and machine also invites renewed reflection on the role of feedback in writing classrooms. Although AI may reshape how feedback is delivered and negotiated, human judgment remains central to writing instruction (Mohebbi & Wang, 2023). How educators balance technological affordances with pedagogical expertise will likely shape the future of AI-mediated writing education (Mohebbi & Panahi, 2026).

### **Pause to Reposition AI: A CAF Perspective**

When ChatGPT evaluates writing, their written corrective feedback (WCF) often operates along dimensions central to second language (L2) writing research: complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF), yet the ways GenAI interprets and reinforces these dimensions reveal both its potential and its limitations (Dong, 2024a). More broadly, WCF research has consistently shown that feedback is not simply a mechanism for error correction, but a multidimensional pedagogical practice shaped by learners' feedback literacy, engagement, individual differences, and contextual conditions (Mohebbi & Panahi, 2026; Reinders & Mohebbi, 2018). In this sense, GenAI does more than correct language; instead, it may shape learners' understandings of what counts as effective writing. By directing attention toward particular CAF dimensions, these systems may influence writing development in ways that remain insufficiently understood (Dong, 2024c). This issue becomes increasingly

important in technology-mediated writing contexts, where digital tools are playing a growing role in how writing is taught, revised, and evaluated (Mohebbi & Panahi, 2026).

Thus, in the current personal reflection, I focus on the consistent and ongoing discussions surrounding GenAI and its influence on CAF-related dimensions of writing. It first outlines the broader landscape of GenAI-generated WCF before examining how GenAI interprets and responds to CAF-related features in learner writing. Drawing on extant literature and the author's own works, it also highlights the role of writer engagement in mediating the effects of GenAI feedback. Finally, it calls for more longitudinal research capable of capturing the co-development of GenAI systems and learners' CAF development over time, as well as providing actionable practices for writing pedagogy. Such a perspective aligns with the field calls for writing research that connects theoretical insight with classroom practice in increasingly technology-mediated learning environments (Mohebbi & Wang, 2023).

### **Mapping the Landscape of GenAI-generated Corrective Feedback on Writing**

WCF has long occupied a central role in writing pedagogy. More than error correction, it functions as a dialogic process through which learners interpret language norms, negotiate meaning, and gradually develop effective language use (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2007). Research has also emphasized the importance of contextual and pedagogical factors, including feedback timing, learner noticing, teacher beliefs, and curricular alignment (Leow, 2023; Reynolds, 2023). Studies on learner engagement further show that responses to feedback are shaped by learners' beliefs, proficiency, and prior experiences (Han & Hyland, 2015). Learners also tend to value indirect and dialogic feedback that supports reflection and self-regulation rather than simple correction (Rahman, 2025). This body of work provides an important foundation for understanding how learners engage with GenAI-generated feedback.

The emergence of GenAI feedback reflects a broader technological shift in writing instruction. Earlier automated essay scoring and automated writing evaluation systems relied largely on rule-based processing and corpus-driven analysis to generate scores or flag errors, while later tools such as Criterion and Grammarly expanded these functions by providing sentence-level corrections, grammatical explanations, and stylistic suggestions (Koltovskaia, 2020). Reviews of automated written corrective feedback have suggested that such systems may support L2 writers by reducing linguistic barriers and assisting revision (Dong, 2024c; Rastgou, 2023). Large language models such as ChatGPT and DeepSeek extend this development further by generating rewrites and evaluating rhetorical appropriateness (Dong, 2025). In this sense, feedback has shifted from relatively fixed algorithmic responses toward more adaptive and conversational interaction.

This development also reshapes the feedback relationship itself. In traditional classrooms, feedback typically flows from teacher to student, with learners expected to interpret and apply comments independently (Hyland, 2003). GenAI, by contrast, enables a more iterative process in which feedback develops through ongoing prompting, clarification, and revision (Dong, 2025). Learners may question suggestions, request explanations, or selectively accept revisions, positioning themselves more actively within the feedback process. This interactive dimension aligns with calls for more process-oriented and ecologically grounded understandings of WCF that frame revision as negotiation rather than simple uptake (Lee & Mohebbi, 2021; Reynolds, 2023).

Despite its efficiency and responsiveness, GenAI feedback lacks the pedagogical judgment that teachers bring to error correction (Sheen, 2007). Teachers consider learners' developmental readiness, instructional context, and affective needs when deciding what to correct, how to frame comments, and when restraint may better support learner autonomy (Ellis, 2009). Particularly, learners' affective engagement with feedback depends partly on whether feedback aligns with their linguistic and cultural expectations (Saeli et al., 2023). GenAI cannot fully account for these dimensions. Its tendency toward accuracy-oriented correction may improve surface-level language use while narrowing the balance among complexity, accuracy, and fluency that characterizes skilled writing. This issue is particularly important as feedback frequency and delivery conditions may shape CAF development differently (Hartshorn et al., 2023).

In one of my earlier studies, learners' attitudes toward automated writing tools were found to be associated with greater writing lexical complexity (Dong, 2024c). Students who viewed both teacher and automated feedback more positively tended to use more advanced vocabulary. These findings suggest that learner engagement mediates how technology influences linguistic development, which also resonates with my recent work (Dong, 2025). In the context of GenAI, factors such as trust, curiosity, and skepticism may similarly shape how learners engage with feedback across CAF dimensions (Dong, 2024c). However, I also find that broader debates in WCF research continue to question the evaluation of feedback effectiveness and the adequacy of current research regarding the extent to which it captures authentic writing development (Lee & Mohebbi, 2021; Reinders & Mohebbi, 2018; Truscott, 2023).

As an L2 writing researcher, I often find myself positioned between fascination and caution. GenAI expands access to feedback and enables new forms of interaction, yet it also unsettles established assumptions about authorship, agency, and writing development. As Dong (2025) argues, the central issue is no longer whether AI can generate accurate feedback, but how its presence reshapes learners' attention, revision practices, and ultimately the language they produce.

### **Examining GenAI's Corrective Feedback through the Lens of CAF**

While GenAI has rapidly entered writing classrooms, writing performance is often conceptualized as multidimensional, involving CAF facets (Johnson, 2017). Evaluating the pedagogical value of GenAI thus requires examining how it relates to each dimension (Skehan, 2009). The following sections reflect this.

#### *Complexity: Between Formulaic Safety and Creative Stretch*

GenAI's influence on syntactic and lexical complexity remains uneven. On the one hand, some studies suggest that AI-supported writing may reduce complexity. For instance, Li and Graesser (2021) found that syntactic complexity often declined following chatbot-supported writing, because learners tended to adopt simpler sentence structures favored by the system. Likewise, Nagata et al. (2020) reported limited gains in complexity in AI-supported writing context.

Furthermore, in my own research (Dong, 2024a), one of the earlier relevant studies in L2 writing research, the quantitative analyses showed a similar picture: ChatGPT use significantly predicted changes in complexity, though not consistently in accuracy or fluency. Still, students frequently used ChatGPT to paraphrase or refine sentences, resulting in longer and more lexically varied texts. Additionally, focus-group data revealed hesitation—students felt that AI suggestions expanded vocabulary while simultaneously encouraging “safe” and overly polished phrasing that discouraged linguistic risk-taking.

This tension reflects a broader paradox. GenAI is trained on large but largely conventional language datasets, and its outputs tend to favor frequency and predictability, often privileging grammatical smoothness. As a result, learners may produce writing that appears more sophisticated on the surface (Thorpe, 2023). Supporting genuine growth in complexity may therefore require repositioning AI from an editing tool to a dialogic resource that students question, adapt, and move beyond rather than simply accept.

#### *Accuracy: Surface Precision and Identity Normalization*

Among the CAF facets, accuracy has received the greatest attention in GenAI-related research. GenAI tools are highly effective at identifying and correcting surface-level issues related to grammar, spelling, as well as word choice. Earlier studies on conversational agents also reported improvements in linguistic accuracy and textual cohesion (Kim, 2018; Nagata et al., 2020), likely because these tools are trained on extensive linguistic data and are sensitive to deviations from standard usage. Recent work on AI-assisted writing further suggests that ChatGPT can support error detection (Seo, 2024).

However, this strength also introduces downsides. In Dong (2024a), students generally saw ChatGPT's grammar feedback as reliable and efficient, yet many also felt that it erased their personal voice by standardizing expression. This supports Chen

(2023), who argued that overreliance on ChatGPT proofreading may push learners toward a uniform, standardized version of English. By prioritizing correctness, GenAI may unintentionally narrow stylistic diversity, particularly when learners begin to equate error-free writing with effective writing (Dong, 2024c, 2025). While AI improves precision, it can also narrow stylistic diversity. Human guidance remains essential to interpreting, accepting, or rejecting AI corrections based on rhetorical purpose.

#### *Fluency: Writing Flow and Temporal Dynamics*

Fluency is often measured by production rate, such as words per minute or clause count, and reflects the smoothness of writing (Johnson, 2017; Ortega, 2003). Research on earlier conversational agents (Nagata et al., 2020) linked them to better fluency partly by reducing cognitive load. With real-time help, students wrote more quickly. In my own study, participants described ChatGPT as helpful for overcoming writer's block (Dong, 2024a). This suggests GenAI supports psychological fluency by lowering barriers to getting started.

Still, the relationship between GenAI and fluency is paradoxical. Instant corrections speed up revision but may also disrupt cognitive flow and fragment engagement with the text (Thorp, 2023). I call this the “fluency paradox”: a tension between ease of production and genuine engagement. GenAI can make writing faster, but not necessarily more fluent in the deeper sense of meaningful self-expression (Dong, 2024a).

The CAF dimensions also interact. Improvements in one area often come at the cost of another. Greater fluency through AI may lead to less complex or mechanically accurate writing. As Skehan (2009) observed, focusing attention on one dimension often means neglecting another. This pattern appears consistently in emerging research on GenAI.

#### *Meta-Observation: Entanglement, Not Replacement*

Overall, GenAI's contribution to CAF development is unevenly beneficial. It is effective in supporting accuracy, somewhat less consistent in fostering complexity, and variable in its influence on fluency. More importantly, its feedback reflects statistical linguistic patterns instead of pedagogical reasoning. Although GenAI can approximate expert correction, it cannot fully evaluate how language form interacts with meaning, stance, audience, and rhetorical intention.

In the end, as emphasized in Dong (2024a, 2024b), human agency must remain central. Teachers and learners should interpret AI feedback through a pedagogical lens, using its precision without giving up authorship. GenAI does not revolutionize writing so much as reveal its hybrid nature. Writing has become a co-constructed process in which human intention and machine suggestions continually shape one another.

*Writers' Agency in GenAI Feedback on CAF: The Pivotal Role of Engagement*

The adoption of GenAI in writing classrooms requires a reconsideration of feedback. AI can no longer be viewed as a mere source of corrections; instead, it functions as part of a recursive and interactive feedback system (Dong, 2024b). In this, feedback emerges through ongoing exchanges in which writers and AI continuously respond to and reshape one another's contributions (Dong, 2025).

Within this context, learner engagement becomes central to maintaining writer agency. Whether AI feedback contributes to meaningful development or substitutes for independent thinking depends largely on how learners engage with it. As Dong (2025) argues, engagement provides a useful lens for understanding how writers exercise control and decision-making while developing CAF through AI-supported writing.

Building on Dong's (2025) ChatGPT Feedback Engagement Model, six interrelated dimensions help explain how writers negotiate meaning, agency, and learning in AI-mediated feedback environments.

Cognitive engagement refers to students' efforts to interpret, evaluate, and selectively apply AI feedback in relation to task goals, genre expectations, and linguistic norms. This reflective process resembles the reconceptualization stage described in the Writer(s)-Within-Community Model (Graham, 2018). Emotional engagement involves affective responses such as curiosity, confidence, frustration, or anxiety, all of which influence motivation and persistence (Lo et al., 2024). Ethical engagement concerns learners' awareness of authorship, academic integrity, and responsible AI use, reflecting broader debates surrounding authenticity and accountability (Teng, 2024).

Behavioral engagement includes observable revision practices such as rewriting, reorganizing, refining text, and modifying prompts (Zhang & Hyland, 2022). Within this dimension, technical engagement refers to learners' ability to manage interface functions, chat histories, and AI settings to improve feedback quality (Carolus et al., 2023). Prompting engagement captures learners' ability to formulate and refine prompts that elicit useful and contextually relevant AI responses (Koltovskaia et al., 2024).

In Dong's (2025) study, cognitive engagement emerged most strongly, given that students actively interpreted and integrated AI feedback into their writing decisions. Behavioral engagement extended beyond traditional revision practices to include prompt design and technical management. Ethical engagement also emerged as an essential dimension, reflecting heightened student awareness of authenticity and responsibility when working with AI.

Together, these six dimensions form a recursive system linking human cognition with AI mediation, and feedback becomes not just corrective, but also cognitive, emotional, social, and technological. Agency lies not in the feedback itself, but in how learners engage with it.

### **Venues for Future Research: Co-evolving Changes in GenAI and CAF — A Call for Longitudinal Research**

Firstly, as GenAI evolves and writing development remains dynamic, future research should adopt a developmental perspective. Writing is an evolving process, shaped by practice, feedback, and so on (Graham, 2018; Hyland, 2003). GenAI systems are also dynamic, updated via new datasets, algorithms, and user interactions (Dong, 2025), so cross-sectional studies offer limited insight into GenAI's impact on CAF development. Learners and AI co-evolve: CAF performance shifts with time, genre, and task as learners adapt to feedback (Ortega, 2003; Skehan, 2009), while AI relies on evolving linguistic data (Barrot, 2024). This interdependence means their relationship should be studied as an ongoing trajectory, not a single outcome. Longitudinal research is critical: future studies should track CAF development across tasks, genres, and time points (with/without GenAI). This could clarify AI's role in sustained writing development and how learners engage with AI feedback (Dong, 2024a, 2025), offering a fuller understanding of AI's impact. Writing research is undergoing major methodological and theoretical change. GenAI's rapid development challenges long-held assumptions about feedback, cognition, and writing development; the key question is now how educators and researchers adapt to hybrid writing and learning.

Secondly, a collaborative research design is highly imperative. Writing across contexts, despite being L2 context in general, vary to a large extent. In a dynamic international environment, which is mediated by GenAI tool use, I suggest a close collaboration between researchers from different L2 writing contexts should be considered. This venue would benefit not only the research findings but also the pedagogy across different countries and regions (Barrot, 2024). For example, a few questions remain: would GenAI function in similar manners for students in different Asian countries? Also, within each country, would the different university ecologies also exert effects on the manifestations of GenAI in students' writing outcomes?

### **Practical Implications**

GenAI should be treated not just as a correction tool, but as a pedagogical resource that requires students' engagement. Students need support to build feedback literacy; this can enable them to evaluate and selectively use AI suggestions instead of accepting them outright (Han & Hyland, 2015; Reinders & Mohebbi, 2018). This matters because GenAI may boost accuracy while encouraging safer, more standardized writing (Chen, 2023; Dong, 2024a).

This study also highlights the need for writing instruction to balance complexity, accuracy, and fluency (Skehan, 2009). Teachers are vital in assisting and guiding learners to interpret AI feedback in line with rhetorical purpose, audience, style, authorship, and genre, not just surface correctness (Ellis, 2009; Sheen, 2007).

Finally, GenAI's interactive nature underscores the value of learner engagement. Cognitive, behavioral, and ethical engagement all exert influence on how learners use AI feedback and whether meaningful development happens (Dong, 2025). As AI becomes more integrated into instruction, discussions of authorship, agency, and responsible AI use should be explicit in writing pedagogy (Teng, 2024).

## **Conclusion**

This reflection explored GenAI's WCF through CAF facets. Based on extant literature and my own reflection, it is shown that while GenAI supports accuracy and some aspects of fluency, its impact on complexity and overall writing development is inconsistent. Moreover, its effects depend not just on feedback quality, but on how learners engage with and interpret AI suggestions. GenAI should not replace human feedback; instead, it reflects writing's growing hybridity, where human judgment and AI mediation interact constantly. Future research must move beyond short-term evaluations to examine how learners and AI co-evolve over time in writing development.

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However, all research design, synthesizing studies, and academic decisions were made by the author.

### **Ethics Declarations**

#### **World Medical Association (WMA) Declaration of Helsinki–Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Participants**

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki. Given the nature of the research (i.e., a personal reflection), the institute did not require formal ethical approval.

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The author declare no competing interests.

### **Data Availability**

Given the nature of the research, there are no associating data.

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