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TEACHER FEEDBACK AND STUDENT REVISION:
A STUDY ON WRITTEN FEEDBACK FROM A SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

In the last few decades, the area of written feedback in the field of second language writing has attracted the attention of numerous scholars. A significant area of research is the relationship between teacher’s feedback and students’ revision (Truscott, 1996; Ferris, 1995; Chandler, 2003; Hyland & Hyland 2006; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009). In this area of study, a majority of scholars have considered the type and the source of feedback as predictors of students’ revisions and not focused on other factors, such as students’ individual writing competencies and cultural backgrounds. The present study investigates whether teachers provide different types and amounts of feedback depending on students’ writing competencies. In addressing this question, the study explores the myriad factors that influence teachers’ feedback and students’ response to such feedback.

The theoretical framework for this study is Sociocultural Theory. The participants are undergraduate students from Asian, South American, and Middle Eastern backgrounds, enrolled in two different academic writing ESL courses offered at the Pennsylvania State University. Although the study included seven subjects, four of them were treated as focal participants. The instructor selected the students for the researcher, based on her perception of the students’ writing abilities. The data collected include copies of all the writings students did, the teacher’s written feedback on them, audio recordings of writing conferences with the instructor, interviews with the selected students, and one-on-one interviews with the instructor.
The findings of the study, however, were counterintuitive. The instructor did not adjust her feedback based on her perception of their writing levels. In addition, the present study revealed that various factors, such as modality of feedback and error type impact the type of feedback provided. Similarly, the revision process of the students is influenced by multiple individual factors, such as comprehension of the feedback and motives in writing. The study concludes by urging teachers and educators to reexamine their institutional goals and feedback practices and investigate learners’ strategies of using feedback for correction and improvement.

*Keywords:* Writing instruction, Corrective Feedback, revision strategies
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I finally end by returning to what had triggered my interest in language in the first place:

“And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colours. Verily, in that are indeed signs for men of sound knowledge”.

Sūrat Ar-Rûm, Ayah 22
Chapter 1

Introduction

The area of written feedback in the field of second language (L2) writing has attracted the attention of numerous scholars in the last couple of decades. Specifically, the relationship between teacher feedback and student revisions has been the focus of many L2 writing researchers, such as Dana Ferris (1995, 1997a, 1999), Ken Hyland and Fiona Hyland (2006a, 2006b, 2006c), and Vivian Zamel (1985), as well as others. It is quite clear from previous studies (Ferris, 1997b; Conrad & Goldstein, 1999), that there is a relationship between teacher feedback and student revisions. However, the majority of studies on written feedback have the tendency to only consider the type and the source of feedback as the predictors of student revisions ignoring other factors, such as institutional settings, students’ individual writing competencies, and the type of feedback most appropriate for each learner (e.g. Chandler, 2003).

Previous research on Corrective Feedback (CF) observed CF as static —it neglects writer’s individual learning skills, challenges, and proficiencies. To some, CF incorporates the stimulus-response model where it is assumed that for every comment made by the teacher, there is a response from the students incorporating the teacher’s comments in later versions of the essay. With other factors, such as students’ writing competencies, influencing the process, this is clearly not the case. The debate over the efficacy of CF has centered around the type and source of feedback to the detriment of learner individual differences, which has also been found to play a major role in students’ uptake of feedback (Milne, 1998; Conrad & Goldstein, 1999). Another factor that had not
received much attention in the literature is how teachers perceive the needs of their students and how their perception influences the type of feedback they provide. The present project aims to fill the gap through considering diverse factors involving corrective written feedback.

This study is motivated by the contradictory findings and unanswered questions in the research on feedback in L2 composition studies. The study seeks to investigate whether instructors provide different feedback as a result of how they construct and perceive their students. The findings for this question will provide us with multiple insights. Firstly, it will contribute to our understanding of the rationale behind different feedback patterns that teachers produce. Secondly, the study will reveal factors impacting the process of providing feedback. In addition, the question of whether one type of feedback is better than the other would be resolved by analyzing the relationship between teacher’s mediation depending on students’ needs and students’ internalization of feedback. A student at a particular level may internalize the feedback that is appropriate for his/her language level. The expectation then is that teachers do adjust their feedback depending on how they see their students’ writing skills. If teachers do give diverse pattern of feedback to students in terms of their writing competencies, how does context shape their feedback? Additionally, how do learners’ react to the diverse pattern of feedback? As the next chapter reveals, there are a number of gaps in the literature on feedback –mostly created by the debate of which feedback is more effective. Lack of research on feedback patterns for students of different writing competencies illustrates an oversight in the field. Thus, this study will shed light on these concerns and on these under-researched factors.
The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What type and quantity of feedback does the instructor provide for each learner depending on their writing competencies?

2. How does the instructor adjust her/his feedback based on his/her perception on students’ writing skills (i.e. writing competencies)?

3. To what extent is the instructor sensitive to the institution’s goals and expectations when giving feedback to students with diverse writing competencies?

4. To what extent do the participants accept or reject the feedback and why?
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The relationship between feedback and revision only became important after scholars emphasized the process approach over the product approach to writing. Zamel (1982) states the “the whole notion of how writers write—where ideas come from, how they are formulated and developed, what the various stages of composing entail—was ignored” (p. 195). When educators replaced the product model with the process model in which students produce multiple drafts and revise after receiving responses from their instructors, researchers became interested in investigating the aspects within the process model. Since the late 1960s, teacher feedback has been an area of interest for numerous scholars from diverse fields (Elbow, 1969; Garrison, 1974; Wolter, 1975). Empirical as well as theoretical studies have emerged since the 1980s in the field of L2 writing on the topic of different types of feedback, such as Corrective Feedback (CF) and Content Based Feedback (CB), and different sources of feedback, such as peer feedback and self-feedback (Cohen & Robbins, 1976; Zamel, 1985; Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Lamberg, 1980). Other sets of studies, such as Zhang (1995) and Lee (2008a) focused on students’ perceptions of different types of feedback.
2.1. Defining Feedback

As stated earlier, feedback has been the topic of discussion for a couple of decades. Thus, isolating a single definition of feedback becomes a challenge since nearly every theory and writing approach has its own definitions. According to the English Oxford Dictionary (1989), feedback is “the modification, adjustment, or control of a process” or a “response” (Feedback, 1989). Olds (1970), Brethower (1970), and Smith (1976) define feedback as “any information on a performance which affects subsequent performance (cited in Lamberg, 1980, p. 63). Elaborating on this definition, Lamberg (1980) offers the following redefinition: “feedback is information on performance which affects subsequent performance by influencing students’ attention to particular matters so that those matters undergo a change in the subsequent performance” (p. 66; also cited in Zhang, 1985, p. 4). Feedback is provided in various forms: written, oral, and electronic. Feedback comes from various sources, such as teachers, peers, or self. In addition, there are a number of feedback types, such as form-focused (e.g. Ferris 2003) and content-focused (e.g. Zamel, 1985) that evolved over the years.

Within sociocultural theory, feedback has its own definition. Vygotsky (1978) argues that internalization requires an extended sequence of “developmental processes resulting in the radical alteration of the nature of psychological activity on the basis of sign mediation” (p. 57; cited in Villamil & de Guerrero, 2006, p. 24). Thus, as students engage in dialogue with the instructor or with their peers, they engage in activities that may lead to internalization. Social activities such as feedback are vital to the “internalization of external action” (p. 24). From these definitions, it is fair to state that
the meaning of feedback has been altered over the years to the definition we have today. Corrective Feedback in this study is defined as “any reaction of the teacher which clearly transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demands improvement of the learner utterance” (Chaudron, 1977, p. 31). Although this definition of CF comes from a non-L2 writing study, it is the definition the researcher found most suitable.

2.2. Institutional Context as a Factor Influencing Teacher’s Feedback

Hyland and Hyland (2006) and Johnson (2009) argue that the institutional context in which teachers practice their teachings shapes their instruction. This notion of macro-structure-affect goes in line with Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory in which “human activity is always embedded in particular cultural, historical, and institutional settings” (Villamil & de Guerrero, 2006, p. 26). Therefore, teacher’s feedback is influenced by the institutional settings, course goals, and course objectives. For example, if the department’s main goal for students is to acquire the form of argumentative essay, then the type of feedback given by the instructor will, most likely, be focused on acquiring that form. Teacher’s feedback practices, Lee (2008b) argues, are “socially and politically situated, shaped by unequal power relations and complex interactions among the stakeholders” (p. 81)

In her study involving 26 secondary school teachers in Hong Kong, Lee (2008b) found that the types of feedback provided was inconsistent with the feedback guidelines provided by Education Bureau in Hong Kong (EDB). According to Lee (2008b), EDB guidelines follows the recommendations advocated in the literature (see Lee, 2008b).
Nonetheless, EDB does not necessarily reflect the policies of certain schools or the beliefs reflected in the society. For instance, in one of the schools, giving a codeless indirect feedback [see explanation below] was prohibited (Lee, 2008b, p. 78). When a teacher made the effort to provide the feedback that she believed to be beneficial to one of her students, she received a negative evaluation along with a letter stating that she had not “fulfilled the fundamental duty” as an educator simply because her feedback was incongruent with the school’s policy (Lee, 2008b, p. 79). Ironically, her feedback was consistent with the EDB recommendations. As a result, teachers “felt disempowered to act against the system” or give the feedback they saw fitting (Lee, 2008b, p. 79). Four themes emerged from the interview with the teachers in relation to their experience with this issue: teacher’s accountability; teacher’s values, the society’s perception of exams, and lack of teacher training (Lee, 2008b, p. 91). Although the teachers were inconsistent with EDB’s recommendations, they were often consistent with their schools’ own policies.

This was not the case in another study conducted by Montgomery and Baker (2007). In their study, the researchers found a great discrepancy between the type and quantity of feedback teachers gave and the type and quantity of feedback the institution advocated for. Although previous studies have argued that the institutional context would influence the type of feedback given to students (Hyland & Hyland, 2006a), in Montgomery and Baker’s study, the teachers’ beliefs overpowered the institution’s recommendations. This is not to say that teachers’ choice of feedback was appropriate. Montgomery and Baker (2007) concluded that while some feedback was appropriate, others were not. However, this study illustrates that teachers themselves were not aware
of the fact that the feedback they were giving was inconsistent with the feedback advocated by the institution. The instructors preferred grammar-related over content-related feedback. When interviewed about the types of feedback they gave, the instructors stated that they tended to focus more on content related issues, which was the opposite of what they actually did. The contradicting findings between Lee (2008b) and Montgomery and Baker (2007) motivated the development of the present study, especially since the context of the present study is English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in an English as a Second Language (ESL) context, a context unexplored by the two authors. Thus, investigating whether institutional forces influence the process of providing feedback will contribute to our understanding of feedback in L2 writing classroom.

2.3. Quantity and Types of Feedback in Relation to Students’ Abilities

With regard to the type and quantity of feedback given, Montgomery and Baker (2007) found that teachers did not provide the same quantity of feedback to each student. The researchers argue that there was no relationship between the amount of feedback and students’ levels of ability. Montgomery and Baker (2007) were not able to identify the factors behind this variation. However, it seems that there are a number of flaws in the study that need to be noted. The teachers had to respond to only one questionnaire after the end of the semester instead of being debriefed immediately after commenting on their students’ papers. Debriefing the teachers shortly after the completion of the task may allow us to tap into what they were thinking about as they responded to students’ writings. It would also allow us to see the challenges and the beliefs they have in relation
to this task. In addition, teachers’ responses were based on their feedback to all students of diverse writing competencies. Montgomery and Baker did not ask the teachers for their feedback on specific individuals. Thus, drawing a conclusion on the varied amount of feedback without having the instructor justify her/his pattern of feedback is one of the weaknesses of the study. The present study will attempt to overcome these limitations by involving the instructors in an interview after they complete giving feedback to specific students (of different levels of writing competencies), which will allow us to see the relationship between teacher’s feedback and teacher’s perception of students’ proficiencies.

2.4. Teacher’s Response to “Error”

A significant part of this study looks at the type of responses teachers provide to their students. The debate on the effective means of responding to students produced a large number of studies aiming to find an answer for this question. CF, in particular, has sparked a heated debate in the academic community especially with the advocates of content-focused feedback. Truscott’s (1996) state-of-the-art article challenges the efficacy of CF in L2 writing pointing to the lack of evidence showing that CF aids writers when it comes to new pieces of writing. He also argues that “when students are corrected on a point for which they are not yet ready, the correction is not likely to have much value” (Truscott, 1996, p. 344). Others supported Truscott’s claims stating that CF has no long term effect on students’ grammatical accuracy (Chaudron, 1984). According to Hamps-Lyons (2006), if teachers provide more form focused feedback, it indirectly
informs the students that the teacher values the final product over the process of writing (as cited in Montgomery & Baker, 2007). On the contrary, others — most notably Ferris (1995, 1999) — have argued for the efficacy of CF. Ferris (1995, 1999) argued that CF does improve students’ writing skills. Similar studies also illustrated that CF actually assists learners in acquiring English grammatical features (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Sheen, 2007; Ellis et al, 2008). In a ten-month longitudinal study of the effect of written CF, Bitchener and Knoch (2010) found that the treatment groups that received some aspects of CF outperformed the control group. Master (1995), for instance, found that CF becomes much more effective when it is incorporated into class dialogues and discussions. Previous studies on CF concluded with mixed results. Nonetheless, to my knowledge none of them with exception to Ferris, Pezone, Tade, and Tinti (1997) explored what type of feedback is more appropriate for an advanced, intermediate, or beginner ESL learner. Learners are seen as a monolithic group that either accepts one type of feedback or rejects the other.

Within CF, researchers centered their studies on the question of how to provide effective CF to ESL learners. In order to address this question, various types of CF have developed over time: Direct CF (e.g. Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986) or Indirect CF (e.g. Robb et al. 1986; Chandler, 2003), and Unfocused (e.g. Chandler, 2003) or Focused (e.g. Ellis, 2008b). Direct feedback is claimed to give the writer input for “further language learning” and illustrate to the language user the type of errors he/she made (Ferris, 2003, p 143). Direct CF is considered simple, straightforward, and uncomplicated because teachers use “substitution, insertion, deletion, or reformulation to provide the correct form or structure to the student writer” (Ferris, 2003, p. 143). Indirect Feedback, on the
other hand, is claimed to be effective as well. It is argued that it forces language learners to examine their errors closely and investigate the error that they made for possible solutions (Ferris, 2003). Reid (1998) argues that Indirect Feedback does not only improve an essay, but it makes the language learner a “better writer” as it develops the writer’s “knowledge and skills” of the written English language (p. 131). In this type of Corrective Feedback, a teacher indicates “that an error exists but does not provide the corrections” for that error (Ellis, 2008b, p. 99). A common illustration of this type of feedback is underlining the error or merely pointing to an error in a sentence without indicating where in the sentence that error is (Ellis, 2008b). A form of feedback popular among many instructors is coded CF, where the instructor indicate the problem using a list of codes the refer to linguistic errors (Ferris, 2006). However, Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) state that indirect feedback may not be suitable for low-level students as they have not fully acquired the language and might, thus, find the task of correcting the error challenging. Nevertheless, their argument was not based on adequate empirical findings. Robb et al (1986) suggest that when it comes to the debate of explicit versus implicit feedback, there is an insignificant difference between the two in terms of long-term accuracy. Interestingly, Ferris (2006) found that indirect feedback overpowers direct Feedback as it facilitates “student writing improvement over time” (p. 98). With regards to the concept of focused or unfocused CF, focused refers to the teacher’s option of correcting one or two grammatical issues while unfocused means the correction of the majority or all errors in a piece of writing (Ellis, 2008). Clearly, most of these studies strive to find the best form of CF. Concerning this “hunt,” Ellis (2008) states that “[t]he search for the ‘best’ way to do written CF may in fact be fundamentally mistaken if it is
accepted that CF needs to take account of the specific institutional, classroom, and task contexts” (p.106). Ellis’s statement goes in line with the perspective that present study emerged from because if we do believe in individual differences, than what may work for one learner may not work for the other (Hyland & Hyland, 2006a).

2.5. Types of Errors

Prior research on writing has identified two sets of students’ writing errors. The first set develops a comparison between global and local errors (e.g. Hendrickson, 1980). Global errors are “errors that will interfere with the intended reader's understanding of the text” (Harris & Silva, 1993, p. 525). Local errors, on the other hand, are errors that do not affect one’s understanding of the text (Ferris, 2003). Silva and Harris (1993) argue that feedback should focus on global errors and address them prior to addressing the local errors. The other set of errors distinguishes between treatable and untreatable errors. Ferris (1999) states that such errors as fragment sentences, subject-verb agreement, and articles are treatable because they “occur in a patterned, rule-governed way” (p. 6). Untreatable errors, on the other hand, are errors that deal with “idiomatic or idiosyncratic structures,” which includes prepositions and word choice (Ferris, 2003, p. 51). In Ferris’s (2006) study involving 92 ESL students and three instructors, Ferris notes that instructors used indirect corrective feedback when responding to treatable errors. On the contrary, they used direct corrective feedback in responding to untreatable types of error. Nonetheless, it can be argued that using indirect corrective feedback to untreatable errors
would be beneficial as learners would have to learn how to correct untreatable error in the long run.

2.6. Measuring the Effectiveness of Feedback

Research has measured students’ learning in relation to CF through five measures, four of which are best described in Sheen (2004, p. 266):

1) Uptake and learner repair (e.g., Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Panova & Lyster, 2002; Ellis et al., 2001; Mackey et al., 2003);
2) Immediate post-tests (Carroll & Swain, 1993; Long et al., 1998);
3) Delayed post-tests (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Han, 2002; Mackey & Philp, 1998; van den Branden, 1997);
4) Learner perception/noticing of CF by means of (stimulated) recall (Mackey et al., 2000; Roberts, 1995; Philp, 2003).

The fifth option is the concept of internalization through imitation. For this study, uptake, a term with a long background in the area of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), and Internalization, a major concept in sociocultural theory, were the selected desired options.

In SLA, uptake had triggered various controversies especially with regard to defining the term. Some saw uptake as an indication of learning while others observed it as an evidence of learning. In this section I draw from the literature on oral as well as written feedback in regard to uptake. Similarly, the literature on internalization complicated the concept of uptake through associating it with mastery and achievement. In this section,
both concepts are explored in order to distill the differences and select the most appropriate concept for the purposes of this study.

Lyster and Ranta (1997) define uptake as “a student’s utterance that immediately follows the teacher’s feedback and that constitutes a reaction in some way to the teacher’s intention to draw attention to some aspect of the student’s initial utterance” (1997, p. 49). Based on that definition, which the authors used for their study on oral feedback, Lyster and Ranta (1997, p. 49) describe two types of uptake. One being the “uptake that results in ‘repair’ of the error on which the feedback focused” and, secondly, an “uptake that results in an utterance that still needs repair”. Nevertheless, with this definition, repair does not refer to or assure acquisition. Allwright (1984), on the other hand, defines uptake as what learners claim to have learned. To Allwright (1987), uptake “may be more directly related to the learning opportunities than to the teaching points that arise during the lesson” (p. 97; as paraphrased in Kebede, 1999, p. 262). In Slimani’s (1992) study, for instance, learners were given uptake charts after a lesson and were asked to record the points that were covered in the lesson. The students were then asked to highlight what they learned the most from what they indicated in their uptake charts. Slimani analyzed these claims along with evidence in the lesson recordings and the interview. Thus, uptake is the knowledge participants claim to have learned (Slimani, 1992, p. 200). Nevertheless, the question remains whether uptake is an indication of learning or evidence of learning. Although Mackey, Oliver, and Leeman (2003) argue that student uptake indicates that the student comprehended the reason behind the feedback and the error specified, they later state that “[e]ven though there may a direct correlation between modified output and L2 development, this has not been demonstrated empirically” (p. 48).
Internalization comes from a Vygotskian perspective where social activities and relations inspire all higher mental functions (Vygotsky 1981, p. 163). Winegar (1997, p. 31) defines internalization as:

[A] negotiated process of development that is co-constructed both intra- and interpersonally. As such, it is a process of reorganization of the person–environment relationship that itself emerges with person–environment relationships. Through this process, immediate person–environment relationships are reorganized, and some aspects of this reorganization may carry forward to contribute to future reorganization. At least for humans, this process always is socially mediated whether or not other persons are physically present. Some patterns of previous and later person–environment relationships we experience as continuity.

The positive aspect of internalization concerns the outcome of internalization process. Internalizing feedback on a particular writing error does not solely mean the prevention of producing such error in the future without the actual guidance from the expert but also producing a rather creative piece of writing along with it. Vygotsky argues that “internalization was not a transmission process whereby the internal is merely a duplicate of the external” because, if that was the case, there would be no development of higher mental functions and the process would simply be meaningless (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p.155). Thus, the expectation that learners will only avoid the errors that their teacher indicated in her feedback on their writing should not be the ultimate goal. Rather, further development in the learners’ writings should be valued. In addition, similar to other aspects of learning, internalization is not an easy and straightforward process with expected outcomes because development can shift “in fits and spurts” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 157). Internalization, furthermore, occurs through a process called imitation. Imitation, according to Vygotsky, is constructed by the transformative process discussed earlier. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) state that imitation is “an intentional, complex…"
process” that goes beyond “mindless copying activity” (p. 176). Imitation was further explored by Baldwin (1895; 1915) and Tomasello (1999; 2003) whose definition of imitation went beyond viewing imitation as a precise copying. Baldwin states that “imitation to the intelligent and earnest imitator is never slavish, never mere repetition; it is, on the contrary, a means for further ends, a method of absorbing what is present in others and of making it over in forms peculiar to one’s own temper and valuable to one’s own genius” (as cited in Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 166; also cited in Valsiner & van der Veer, 2000, p. 153)

Although imitation as defined by others may produce responses closely similar to the model produced by the teacher, imitation, depending on the learner, may be a rather creative and bold as stated earlier in the discussion regarding internalization (Speidel & Nelson, 1989 p. 17). According to Lantolf and Thorne (2006), such creativeness illustrates the “transformative potential of imitation argued for by Baldwin, Vygotsky, and others such as Newman and Holzman (1993: 152) who see imitation as the ‘revolutionary activity’ of development” (p. 171). In Ohta’s (2001) study, for instance, the participants’ private speech was not only an imitation, “but also creation with language” (p. 65; also cited in Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 171). Using this Vygotskian concept, development in the student writing is seen as an uptake of the feedback as well as creative takes on behalf of the learner in his/her writing. Students who take risks in their writing and present a rather creative piece of writing achieve a higher level of success or understanding of the feedback given to them because this is a consequence of imitation. This outcome is constructed by the transformative understanding of the process as construed by Vygotsky, Baldwin (1895/1915), and Tomasello (1999; 2003) (for
further discussion on imitation and internalization, refer to Chapters 6 and 7 of Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Based on the research summarized earlier comparing uptake to internalization, Vygotsky’s concept of internalization will be used when referring to learning or student uptake in the present study. Throughout the paper, the term uptake will be used. However, it will be used as a reference to internalization as defined here in this section.

2.7. Students’ Responses

According to Ferris (1995) and Straub (1997), students are “frustrated by, and even resentful of, teacher commentary that is cryptic, vague, and unclear” (as cited in Ferris, 2003). Nevertheless, anyone would resent vague and unclear feedback because it may not be helpful, especially if it cannot be understood. As stated earlier, findings of previous studies were based generally on teacher’s type of feedback and which form was more effective in promoting a change in the following drafts—or in Truscott’s case, in subsequent essays (Truscott, 1996). What these studies failed to consider is whether the success of certain types of feedback is due to students’ diverse writing competencies. For instance, Ferris (2001) looked at feedback type as a main variable that has an effect on whether there would be positive revisions on students’ papers. For example, she reached the conclusion that students responded better to feedback on grammar, imperatives, and informative questions than feedback that questioned student’s stance in the paper (Ferris, 2001). However, students’ writing competencies were not considered as an explanation for students’ reaction to these forms of feedback. However, what may be the reason for
this reaction besides whether indirect or direct feedback was used? Would the goals set forth by the institution influence the types of feedback that the instructors give? Would students’ preferences and writing competencies play a significant role in the uptake of certain feedback?

Conrad and Goldstein (1999) consider Individual Differences (ID) as a factor affecting the revision process. They argued that a student’s perspective of his or her role, the student’s perspective of a teacher’s role, and knowledge about the content, students’ “strong —held beliefs,” motivation, and the “pressure of other commitments” influence the amount of revisions produced by the students (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999, p. 147). However, Conrad and Goldstein (1999) have not considered the relationship between student’s ID and specific types of feedback. Instead they have looked at feedback in general in relation to the individual factors mentioned earlier. Some learners, depending on their ID, may respond to certain types of feedback better than others form of feedback.

Lee (2008b) notes that there are far less studies that examine “the ways teachers’ feedback practices reflect their personal belief systems” (p. 73). In addition, a number of studies look at the patterns of teacher feedback as whole. However, none of these studies consider the pattern of teacher’s feedback in relation to students’ writing competencies. Montgomery and Baker (2007) advocate for more studies on the reasons behind the variation between the amount and the type of feedback given. The present study will attempt to fill this gap in literature and contribute to our knowledge of teachers’ perception of their students’ needs as well as the effective form of feedback for students of mixed writing competencies.
Based on the review of literature presented it is clear that there are numerous studies on written feedback. However, prior studies lead to contradictory findings and unanswered questions in the field of L2 composition studies. Thus, the hope is that the present study will shed the light of some of these issues. For instance, Sommers (1982) finds teachers’ feedback to be generally “arbitrary and idiosyncratic” (p. 374). Nevertheless, can this imply that feedback is unsystematic throughout? Concerning CF, Truscott (1996) argues that there is no evidence illustrating that CF aids writers when it comes to new pieces of writing. Chaudron (1984), in his support, claims that CF has no long term influence on grammatical accuracy. Ferris (1995, 1999), on the other hand, argues for the efficacy of CF stating that it does improve students’ writing skills. In addition, studies on individual differences or students’ cultural backgrounds as contributors to students’ uptake of feedback are non-existent.

There are, nevertheless, few studies that closely investigate individual students’ background, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and revisions in responses to their instructor’s feedback, as well as the instructor’s reasoning behind using specific forms of feedback (e.g. Ferris et al, 1997; Conrad & Goldstein, 1999). Based on Sociocultural Theory (SCT) as a framework, the present study examines the cultural and individual aspects as factors that play a major role in the success or failure of student’s uptake of the instructor’s written feedback.
Chapter 3
Methodology

As stated in the previous chapter, the present study takes into account factors, such as individual differences, that Conrad and Goldstein (1999), Lee (2008b), and Montgomery and Baker (2007) consider significant and that prior research on L2 feedback lacked. Thus, this chapter outlines the procedures and the analytical methods used to fill this void. The research questions below guide this investigation.

1. What type and quantity of feedback does the instructor provide for each learner depending on their level?
2. How does the instructor adjust her/his feedback based on his/her perception on students’ writing skills (i.e. writing competencies)?
3. To what extent is the instructor sensitive to the institution’s goals and expectations when giving feedback to students with diverse writing competencies?
4. To what extent do the participants accept or reject the feedback, and why?

First, this chapter provides a descriptive account of the participants, including their cultural and educational background and the academic composition courses they were taking. Secondly, the data collection procedures are addressed to answer the research questions. Last, the analytical procedures utilized in this study are presented.
3.1. The Framework

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) was introduced by Vygotsky as a part of what is known today as Sociocultural Theory or Cultural-Historical Activity theory (CHAT). Vygotsky (1978) defines ZPD as the “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). Thus, each learner is at a particular level in development and, with successful mediation, he or she can achieve a higher stage of cognitive function. Thus, the “difference between the level of development already obtained and the cognitive functions compromising the proximal next stage” can be anticipated from having the learner collaborate with others, such as peers and teachers (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 20). The collaboration or the “intervention” that would assist the learner in reaching his/her next stage of development is referred to as mediation. Mediation is “the use of some intervening instrument or tool between stimulus and response” (Van der Veer & Van IJzendoom, 1999, p. 382). Mediation, however, is not always successful. There are various mediating tools that do not benefit the learner or lead to self regulation or less dependency on that tool. The hope is that internalization would take place as a result of mediation. In this study, social activities such as feedback are vital to the “internalization of external action[s]” (Villamil & de Guerrero, 2006, p. 24). Ellis (2008), nevertheless, questions the use of SCT as a framework stating that “a sociocultural perspective on CF would emphasize the need to adjust the type of feedback offered to learners to suit their stage of development although how this can be achieved
practically remains unclear in the case of written CF where there is often limited opportunity to negotiate the feedback with individual learners” (p. 106). In the present study, this can be achieved through the teacher’s examination of students’ writings earlier in the semester and adjusting the feedback according to their needs. Although Ellis is correct in regard to the limited negotiation, the learner, however, can negotiate meaning with the instructor through following drafts.

**ZPD**

![Figure 3-1. Conceptualizing Sociocultural Theory](image)

### 3.2. Participants

Participants in this study were international undergraduate students enrolled in an ESL academic composition course for non-native speakers of English at Penn State University (ESL015). The particular class in which the researcher gathered data met twice a week for seventy-five minutes each. The class was an intermediate/advanced
composition course for non-native speakers of English that aims to develop reading and writing strategies in American academic discourse (Penn State, 2001). The students were expected to be familiar with the writing process and, according to the objectives of the institution, “be able to use what they have learned in this course to successfully participate in academic reading and writing tasks throughout their university experience in the United States” (Penn State, 2001).

The university has an increasing number of international students. As Table 3-1 illustrates, the number of international undergraduate students in 1990 barely reached 227 students. In 2004, it became 1,019. Four years later, the number increased to 1,532 students. The number of academic composition classes for international students increased in a similar fashion as the demand for language instruction also grew.
The participants of this study enjoyed a strong support system. With an increasing number of international students, the university has established resources for the majority of the students to feel comfortable to learn and socialize in the American academic setting.

At the time of the study the participants were enrolled in two sections of ESL 015 taught by the same instructor using the same materials. The course required students to complete bi-weekly journals (ten total) and three formal written assignments: A summary and critique essay, a compare and contrast essay, and an argumentative research essay.
For each formal assignment, the students submitted a draft and a revised, final version. However, the teacher did not provide feedback on the earlier drafts of the first two major assignments unless the student requested otherwise. There were a total of three drafts, one for each formal assignment. The feedback on the draft for the final formal assignment was optional. Nevertheless, the teacher provided feedback on all journals and final drafts of all the papers. In this study, the researcher used the last two essays and the journals to examine whether the student had accepted or rejected the instructor’s feedback. It is important to note that journals also served as drafts to some of the major papers but the teacher and the students referred to these tasks as journals instead of drafts. Hence, for the present student only journals and final two essays were analyzed in this report.

3.2.1. The Selection Process

The students’ cultural backgrounds were South Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese, Turkish, Qatari, Saudi Arabian, and Bangladeshi. The majority had arrived to the United States just a couple of days prior to the first day of classes. In addition, the age range of the students was from age 17 to 20. Of the total 36 students enrolled in both sections of ESL 015, six focal participants were selected after an interview with the instructor. The selection criteria and process for the six students are as follows. The researcher asked the instructor to list the names of all the students under three language level categories: advanced, intermediate, or beginner. No further instructions were given to the instructor. The instructor made her decision based on two writing diagnostics given during the first
week of classes and minor writing assignments given during the second and third week. Thus, the placements of these students were based on their writing competencies as perceived by the instructor. The researcher, then, asked the instructor to select two from each category that she strongly believed to be in those levels (See Appendix A). The researcher interviewed the selected six students once or twice throughout the semester depending on their agreement. The researcher also collected written data from all the participants including the six focal participants.

The present study primarily focuses its findings based on the data of four of the focal six participants for the purpose of providing a comprehensive understanding of feedback. The data from three other participants were used as well. The following section introduces the participants and provides a detailed account of the four focal participants.

3.2.2. Participants’ Profiles

The study uses data from seven total students. The general information about these students is presented in Table 3-2. However, this study focuses primarily on four students: beginner, transition, intermediate, and advance.

| Table 3-2. General information of the students whose data is used in this study |
|---------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
|                                | Name          | Nationality   | College Year |
| Beginner Participants          | Ali           | Turkish       | First Year   |
|                                | Jasim         | Chinese       | First Year   |
| Intermediate Participants      | Norah         | Chinese       | First Year   |
| Transition Participant         | Kareem        | Korean        | Fourth Year  |
| Advance Participants           | Maram         | Venezuelan    | First Year   |
The beginner learner is Ali. He is a student that Lena recommended to go to a lower level class. Ali is a nineteen year old freshman from Turkey. Ali is a diligent student pursuing a Bachelors of Science degree in Industrial Engineering. He can speak and write in three languages: Turkish, French, and English. French was the medium of instruction for five years when he was in school. He studied English for four years in high school where he had 120 minutes of English instruction per week. However, Ali states that he did not find it effective. Thus, he turned to tutoring where he studied English everyday for one hour for a year and a half. In addition, he found reading English books such as *The Lord of the Rings* and memorizing vocabulary as two of the best tools that assisted him in learning English. He finds his English learning experience to be a positive one yet required him study hard – especially in passing language exams such as the TOEFL and the SAT. Ali’s overall grade for this class was 92%.

The transition beginner-to-intermediate learner is Kareem. Kareem was a student that Lena placed as a beginner earlier in the semester. However, when discussing the placement during the middle of the semester, she classified Kareem as an intermediate triggering curiosity if whether being in a transitioning level may influence the feedback given. Thus, the researcher included him among the four focal participants. Kareem is a twenty-seven Korean male student in his final year of study pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree in Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Management (HRIM). He transferred last year from a Korean university where he used to study economics. He
speaks Korean, English, and Spanish. According to him, he started learning English about four years ago. He had a one-year study abroad experience at an Intensive English Program (IEP) in New York. He believes that the more he learns English, the harder it becomes. Kareem’s overall grade for this class was 99.9%.

The intermediate learner is Norah. Norah is a twenty-year old freshman from China. She speaks two languages – English and Mandarin. She learned English while she was in grade school from EFL classes (3rd grade to 12 grades), tutoring, and a study abroad experience in an English speaking country. Unlike Kareem who finds his previous experience learning English as a negative one, Norah states that she had a positive learning experience. Norah is a dedicated, serious student who sees herself as a good student in her language classes stating “I was a good student, doing homework on time and listening to classes carefully, and I did not get bad grades” (Norah, Biographical Information) Hence, Norah also engaged in extra credit assignments giving her an overall grade of 107% for the class.

The advanced learner is Maram. Although Lena recommended Maram to enroll in a regular composition class due to her high writing skills, Maram opted to stay in ESL 015. Maram is a Venezuelan twenty-year old freshman pursuing a Bachelors of Science degree in Bioengineering. She is fluent in Spanish and English and knows little Italian. She has been learning English for 12 years. She studied English at school starting in the 1st grade until 11th grade. She also had private tutoring throughout the years. She was also enrolled in summer camps where she was exposed to English as well. She finds her language learning experience to be a positive one. However, she is very conscious about her non-nativeness stating that one of her needs and concerns as a language learner is for
others, as she puts it, not to find out that “English is not my first language” (Maram, Biographical Information). Maram believes that a good instructor “has to motivate students and try to make them believe that what they are learning matters, and is not some random knowledge that needs to be learned. Also encouraging the students to always become better at what they are trying to learn” (Maram, Biographical Information). Maram’s overall grade for this class was 105%.

3.2.3. The Teacher

The instructor of the course is a twenty-two year old female American graduate student pursuing her Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) at the Pennsylvania State University. As an undergraduate, she dual-majored in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and English Literature at a Midwestern American university. She has no prior teaching experience. The ESL writing classes in which the data was collected were Lena’s first teaching assignments. When asked about her teaching philosophy, Lena hesitantly stated that she had not developed one yet.

3.3. Data Collection

The researcher collected the following data: students’ writings, teacher’s written feedback, teacher’s oral feedback, interviews with the students, interviews with the instructor, stimulated recall interviews with both students and the instructor, and
curriculum documents. For the purposes of this study, only students’ writings, teacher’s written feedback, students’ interviews, and teacher’s interviews are reported.

3.3.1. Students’ Writing

In order to identify the students’ writing issues in form and in content as well as their development in writing over the semester in relation to feedback, the researcher collected all students’ writing (refer to the discussion on internalization and imitation in chapter two). Linguistic development is treated as the accuracy and language maturity in the student’s writing as a result of the teacher’s instruction and feedback. Initially, the researcher planned to adopt the language error categories developed in Chandler (2003) and track development through closely examining the writing of students in those specific areas. These areas, then, would turn to be the writing issues indicated at the beginning of this section. However, since this study examines feedback, development in writing needs to be connected to the feedback provided. Hence, instead of adopting a set of language error categories developed by another researcher, the researcher opted to look at development of issues that the instructor focuses on when providing feedback. In addition, development as well as feedback is not solely concerned with language errors -- a learner’s organization of ideas, voice as a writer, as well as the learner’s resistance, negotiation, and creativity in writing were considered when evaluating his or her development. The questions presented in Figure 3-2 serve as a guide for this aspect of development.
3.3.2. Teacher’s Written Feedback and Oral Feedback during Conferences

The researcher collected the instructor’s written and oral feedback. The written feedback includes both electronic and hand-written comments. The instructor provided feedback on the final draft of three formal assignments as well as the bi-weekly journals. In addition, the researcher recorded oral feedback during teacher-students conferences, which occurred at least once a semester. Certain students such as Norah, Kareem, and Ali met with Lena more than once. The researcher also transcribed the interaction between the instructor and students in these conferences. Nevertheless, only written and electronic feedback was analyzed in this report.
3.3.3. Students’ Survey

To gather biographical and demographical information about the students, the researcher asked the students in the ESL class to complete a survey. The purpose of the survey was to gather basic information about the students, such as their age, field of study, and nationality. Some of the questions addressed in this survey also appear in the first interview with the students (See Appendix L).

3.3.4. Interviews

3.3.4.1. Students’ and Instructor’s Biographical Interview

In order to compare the students’ responses to the demographic survey, the researcher conducted an interview with the selected participants, asking each participant similar questions (See Appendix D). These interviews assist in understanding the myriad factors influencing feedback and the revision process. For instance, learner’s goals and motives may explain his/her response to the feedback given. In addition, in order to understand the cultural, social, and historical factors influencing the students’ response to the instructor’s feedback, an interview was conducted during the semester, following the student’s submission of the second or the final formal paper (See Appendix D).

To identify and be familiar with the instructor’s teaching beliefs as well as her views toward language and writing, an interview between the instructor and the researcher took place during the fourth week of the semester. During the interview, the
researcher asked the instructor to convey and describe her learning experience and her attitudes toward her students (See Appendix C).

3.3.4.2. Students’ and Instructor’s Interview Regarding the Class

In order to understand the students’ reasoning for accepting or rejecting their instructor’s feedback and their attitudes towards feedback they receive from the teacher, the researcher interviewed the participants about their opinion of the teacher’s feedback, and the reasoning behind their decisions or accepting or rejecting the instructor’s feedback. The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with some open-ended questions and some questions specifically based on essays and teacher feedback. During the interview, the researcher showed the participant the essay with feedback and asked about their response. While going through the text, the researcher asked the student to articulate his/her reasoning behind accepting or rejecting some or all of his/her instructor’s feedback. The researcher also asked the learners to express their feelings and thoughts as they revised their essay. The researcher conducted at least one interview with each participant following the submission of the final version of a formal paper. The interviews were audio recorded.

To gain an in-depth understanding of the instructor’s reasoning for giving specific type(s) of feedback as well as frequency of each feedback type, the researcher interviewed the instructor. As the researcher went through the written feedback with the instructor, the instructor expressed her thoughts during her reading of the essays. The interview took place as soon as the instructor had completed her task of giving feedback.
The interview questions were limited to the feedback given to the six selected students. The researcher also questioned the teacher about her expectations of each assignment (See Appendix B). The researcher audio recorded and transcribed the interview with the instructor for analysis.

3.3.5. The Teacher’s Instructional Documents

In order to comprehend the contextual and the institutional influences on students’ writing development and the instructor’s teaching practices (most importantly feedback), the researcher collected the instructor’s instructional documents and curriculum documents. Instructional documents refer to the instructor’s lessons (i.e. presentations, handouts), the materials she used for developing her lessons, and course syllabi (See Appendix I for the course syllabi). The curriculum documents, on the other hand, refer to the guidelines the instructor received for structuring the class. These documents include course objective and required textbooks. The goal for analyzing the curriculum documents was to determine the institution’s as well as the instructor’s expectations of the students and in the contextualization of the main data. Although the instructor was interviewed about her expectations of the students for each formal paper, the researcher utilized these documents to examine whether the expectations were met through the curriculum, the researcher also examined if the instructor addressed the students’ needs in the instructional documents.
3.4. Data Analysis

This is a mix-method study. The methods of analysis are explained in detail below.

3.4.1. Quantitative Analysis

The researcher originally categorized written feedback for each student based on the categories set forth in the literature (e.g. Robb et al, 1986; Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 2003). Ellis (2008b), nevertheless, provides a detailed description of some of the common CF types. Although Ellis documents a number of these types, several forms of written feedback that were found in the data were not documented in the article. The initial effort of using established categories from the feedback literature – particularly CF—did not account for the various comments that were found essential in providing a holistic perspective of feedback. Although the CF literature distinguishes between explicit and implicit feedbacks, some of Lena’s feedback did not seem to completely fit either of these types of feedback. This ambiguity – of where a particular response belongs – was the catalyst for the idea of feedback as a continuum instead of belonging to an implicit or explicit category. Thus, it became in the best interest of the study to let the data itself suggest the categories. Thus, for this study, the researcher read through the feedback given and developed more categories in order for each teacher response to get a fair representation. These categories are then placed from least explicit to most explicit. For this study, however, twelve types that emerged from the data. These types are the following:
A. Various Forms of Corrective Feedback

a. Underlining, circling, or placing a question mark next to or under the error. In the literature, this type of feedback is typically referred to as *implicit feedback* where learners are expected to figure out the problem and fix it on their own. This type is coded as IF. Refer to Figure 3-3, 3-4, and 3-5 for examples of IF.

![Figure 3-3. A screenshot exemplifying corrective feedback via circling](image)

![Figure 3-4. A screenshot exemplifying corrective feedback via electronic highlighting](image)

![Figure 3-5. A screenshot showing corrective feedback via underlining](image)

b. Another form or implicit feedback is the *coded feedback* where the teacher underlines or circles errors and use symbols as a reference the error type. Lena, however, did not give coded feedback as much. This type is coded as CO (See Figure 3-6).
the same field, have similar goals and developing the community. So, it can be easy to say that SABIC and ARAMCO are completing each other and leading the Saudi oil production to be

Figure 3-6. A screenshot demonstrating corrective coded feedback

c. The next type occurs when the teacher identifies the error and provides an explanation of why it is an error. The teacher, however, does not correct the error. It is a variation of explicit feedback and is coded as EE (See Figure 3-7, Figure 3-8, and Figure 3-9).

Figure 3-7. A screenshot revealing type EE of corrective feedback

Figure 3-8. A second screenshot exemplifying type EE of corrective feedback

Figure 3-9. A third screenshot demonstrating type EE of corrective feedback

d. A more explicit feedback than the one previously discussed occurs when the expert identifies the error and illustrates or states how to correct it but does not provide an explanation as to why what being marked is an error
nor does it provide a correction. This type is coded as EI. An example of this type includes “move this comma here.” Another example is illustrated in Figure 3-10.

Figure 3-10. A screenshot portraying type EI of corrective feedback

e. Error identification along with explanation and correction. This type is coded as DF for Direct Feedback. For an example, refer to Figure 3-11.

Figure 3-11. A screenshot exemplifying direct feedback

f. The final type of CF occurs when the teacher identifies the error and corrects it without providing any explanation. Ellis (2008) categorized this as direct feedback. However, this type and the types preceding it are also explicit. However, they range in their explicitness. This type is coded as EC (See Figure 3-12 and Figure 3-13).

Figure 3-12. A screenshot demonstrating EC type of corrective feedback
B. Other Forms of Feedback:

a. Evaluative (EV): Evaluative feedback primarily deals with the content and the ideas presented in the essay. The form of feedback is very direct and is in a question format. An example of evaluative feedback is illustrated in Figure 3-14.

b. Motivational (MO): Motivational feedback does not aim in improving student’s writing. The aim of this feedback is to convey to the learner that the teacher cares. For the teacher, this feedback simply makes the learner feel more confident about his or her writing. In many cases, this feedback is not personalized or unique. Examples of this feedback include “Good,” “great job,” and “excellent work” (See Figure 3-15).
c. Supportive (SP): Unlike motivational feedback, supportive feedback aims to both raise the student’s confidence in him/herself by informing them that he or she has done an exemplary job as well as to encourage the learner to move forward (See Figure 3-16).

![Figure 3-16. A screenshot portraying Supportive type of feedback](image)

d. Authoritative (AU): Authoritative feedback deals mostly with content. However, in some occasions, it also deals with form. This feedback informs the student what he or she needs to do but does not contribute to understanding the reasons behind doing so. When conveying a response, this feedback uses modals such as “should” and “must” and the verb “need” (See Figure 3-17).

![Figure 3-17. A screenshot revealing an example of Authoritative Feedback](image)

e. Suggestive (SU): known in the literature as mitigated feedback or indirect form or commentary, this type of feedback encourages the learner to expand his/her ideas as well as guide him or her on how to do so. Unlike
the authoritative, this type of feedback does not force itself on the learner. Instead, the teacher uses language that informs the learner that he/she has the right to accept or reject the feedback (See Figure 3-18).

Figure 3-18. A screenshot exemplifying Reflective Feedback

f. Reflective (RF): Reflective Response reflects on the content of the assignment. It, however, does not provide negative or positive response nor does it improve the learner’s writing. The purpose of the feedback as seen from Lena’s is to illustrate to the learner the dialogue he or she can have with the reader (See Figure 3-19 and Figure 3-20).

Figure 3-19. A screenshot illustrating Reflective Feedback

Figure 3-20. A second screenshot portraying Reflective Feedback
Besides to the categories of feedback discussed above, the feedback was also classified based on whether it was a response to the form or the content. However, there were occasions where the feedback was quite vague that it was not clear whether the feedback was on form or the content. For instance, among all the responses that she gave that focused on form, the teacher writes “This is a great critique!” as seen in Figure 3-21.

Figure 3-21. “This is a great critique!” is a response that can refer to form and/or content.

Similarly, this response also appears in the writing of another student, Ali, as seen in Figure 3.4. The learner may not know which improvement the teacher is referring to as it can refer to form, content, or grade, especially since this comment appeared in the grading rubric. In both cases, it is not clear whether the instructor is referring to the ideas discussed in the critique or the accuracy of form of the critique. For the learner, this might contribute to further confusion because in Norah’s case, all the feedback she received from the teacher on that assignment was solely on form. Thus, thinking otherwise would be unlikely. In regarding to the coding aspect when faced by these responses, the research determined whether the feedback was a feedback on content or form depending on the surrounding comments. If, for example, the surrounding feedback was on form, then these responses were counted as form.
Figure 3-22. A screenshot exemplifying the confusion between feedback on form and feedback on content

The researcher calculated the frequency of each feedback type for each participant per assignment as well as the total frequency of a particular type throughout the semester for each participant. Some of the comments also included more than one of the types discussed earlier. Thus, if a single comment contained more than one type, each of these types was counted in the tables presented in the following chapter. However, the comment would only be counted once when counting the overall number of feedback in a particular assignment.

Following the development of the categories, the feedback—electronic and handwritten—were coded using these categories. The researcher obtained frequency counts per assignment for every type/category for every assignment. The researcher then summed the count per each type for each student in order to perform the comparison between the participants.

3.4.2. Qualitative Analysis

Because qualitative methods were found to compliment the quantitative analysis, the researcher also adopted qualitative research methods in examining the research
questions set forth in this study. The researcher performed a grounded content analysis on all the interviews. Krippendorff (2004) defines content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inference from texts… to the contexts of their use” (p. 18). Weber (1990) defines content analysis as “a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text. These inferences are about the senders(s) of the message, the message itself, or the audience of the message” (p. 9). Through the use of this method, the researcher is able to reduce the data to a manageable amount as themes emerge. The procedure of content analysis “involves coding, categorizing (creating meaningful categories into which the units of analysis – words, phrases, sentences etc. – can be placed), comparing (categories and making links between them), and… drawing theoretical conclusions from the text” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 476). In this process, the researcher read thoroughly the interview data of every participant—treating each case individually—and coding repetitive statements or words. Content analysis demands “a systematic reading of a body of texts, images, and symbolic matter” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 3). As the pattern become noticeable, it led to themes, which then became the conceptual categories of the present study. Grounded content analysis helped in illustrating the instructor’s and the students’ perceptions and experiences within their context.
Chapter 4

Results

In this chapter, I analyze the data revealing the complexity of feedback in a second language classroom and the major factors influencing the teacher feedback and the student revision process. This section will begin by discussing the frequency of each type of feedback mentioned in the previous chapter. I, then, reveal the pattern of feedback observed. Following this discussion, I explore the aspects influencing the instructor’s feedback.

4.1. Writing Competencies and Feedback

I analyzed the data from the four primary learners to examine whether teachers adjust their feedback based on how they perceive their students’ writing proficiencies. The findings, however, were counterintuitive as illustrated in Table 4.1 and Chart 4.1. Table 4.1 shows the type of feedback each participant received throughout the semester. When examining the various forms of feedback across the four learners, we can see that all students received the same type of feedback and that the instructor did not provide specific types of feedback to a particular student over others. Ali, however, did not receive any Supportive Feedback (SF). Upon comparing the number of SF each learner received, no significant differences emerged (Kareem received two while Maram received three instances of SF). With regard to frequency, on the other hand, there is a significant difference in the use of EC (see EC in Appendix E, F, G, and H for detailed count of the feedback for each participant). Lena provided Maram, the advanced learner, 38.6% more EC than Ali, the beginner learner. However, this can be attributed to one primary reason. Unlike
the other three students, Maram does not request additional conferences where Lena would be able to guide her through the errors. The other three participants, on the other hand, met with the instructor at least three times during the semester to discuss the major assignments.

Table 4-1. The frequency and type of feedback each participant received on the assignments used for this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback Category</th>
<th>Ali</th>
<th>Kareem</th>
<th>Norah</th>
<th>Maram</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IF</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EI</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DF</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative (MO)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive (SP)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritative (AU)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestive (SU)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feedback on
### Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>19</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>35</th>
<th>29</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### Feedback on Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>149</th>
<th>132</th>
<th>168</th>
<th>237</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Feedback

![Bar chart showing the frequency and type of feedback each participant received on the assignments used for this study.](image)

**Figure 4-1.** The frequency and type of feedback each participant received on the assignments used for this study.
To confirm this finding, I compared the feedback Maram received at one of the major assignments with the feedback another advanced student received on the same assignment and found that the frequency of certain types of feedback are different, as illustrated in Table 4.2. Although we may expect that the instructor would be consistent with her feedback within a particular group, in this case the advanced group, this was not the case. Marm had five times (80.4%) more feedback on that assignment than Fatima, who belongs to the same advanced level.

Table 4.2: The frequency and type of feedback for two advanced students on one assignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback Category</th>
<th>Fatima</th>
<th>Maram</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IF</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EI</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DF</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational (MO)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback Type</td>
<td>Maram</td>
<td>Fatima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestive</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feedback on Form

| Total | 8    | 13    |

Feedback on Content

| Total | 19   | 97    |

By examining screenshots of written feedback three advanced students received on the same assignment, we are able to have a better illustration of the diverse feedback provided to learners of the same level, as perceived by the teacher (see Figure 4-2). Figure 4-2 portrays the actual feedback Maram and Fatima received on the same assignment. Although both students received similar type of feedback, the frequency was different in the same paragraph. It is important to note that these paragraphs are all the introductory paragraphs of the same assignment (~the first ten lines). While Maram received twenty-one corrections or comments on that paragraph alone—sixteen of which are EC, two EI, two EE—Fatima only received eleven—five of which are EC, two DF, and one MO. When examining both examples to the feedback a third advanced student—Saleem—received, a larger difference was observed not only in
frequency but also in type. Saleem received a total of twenty-five comments fourteen of which are EC, three EI, four EV, two EE, one IF, and one DF. While neither Saleem nor Maram received any praise or motivational feedback, Fatima did (e.g. “good parallelism!”). In addition, when examining the content, Lena writes more in her feedback to Saleem than to Fatima and Maram combined. Examples of these comments include: “Why do you use the correct punctuation here and not there?” and “From your intro, I have no idea that you are compare/contrasting the articles.” The comparison completed here refutes the widespread assumption in the field that teachers differentiate their feedback depending on the students’ writing competencies. In addition, the difference within a group further contests such claims.
These days parents often discuss how their children’s music affects their behavior and thinking patterns. In “Eminem is right,” by Mary Eberstadt, she explains how music—especially hip-hop and heavy metal genres—affects American society. She relates the abandoned and dysfunctional childhood of famous music artists focusing on Eminem—with what is interesting for teenagers. Following the same idea is Raquel Z. Rivera, who explains in her article “Juventud, sexo y sexismo” (“Youth, Sex and Sexism”) how parents believe that the sexual knowledge that their children have is being influenced by the information that hip-hop and reggaeton music provides. Even though they differ in their style presentation and research method, overall both writers agree over one matter: young Americans are listening to music with heavy sexual and harsh content, that are often believed by their parents to be the source of their children’s attitudes.

Controversy Associated With Same Sex Marriage

In recent days same sex marriage has become a controversial issue. Many authors have researched the argument and presented the world about their own opinions. The essay “What Are We Fighting For” by Ralph Wedgwood and the article “Same Sex Marriage Should Not Be Allowed” by Donald DeMarco talk about same sex marriage rights. Both of the authors accept homosexuality but have different views for legalizing the homosexual marriage. Wedgwood stands in favor whereas DeMarco stands against same sex marriage. They have three crucial points which they use to argue and to establish their stances regarding gay marriage: the general definition of marriage, the relation of procreation to marriage, and the result of not accepting or accepting same sex marriage.

Figure 4-2. The first image represents the feedback that Maram received. The second image illustrates the feedback Fatima, another advanced student, received.
4.2. Factors Influencing Lena’s Feedback

When examining the feedback Lena gave throughout the semester to the students, five factors were found to be influencing her feedback. These factors include the medium of delivering feedback, the assignment type, error types, the instructor’s development as an instructor, and institutional goals (see Figure 4-4). More than one factor influenced the feedback. Thus, stating that one factor solely contributed to
the change would be unwise simply because in a natural environment multiple variables play a role. The aim from revealing these different factors is to illustrate that feedback cannot be separated or studied alone without actually looking at the process as a whole.

4.2.1. First Factor: Medium of Delivering Feedback

Through the rigorous process of data analysis, I found that the medium of giving feedback influenced the feedback produced. Lena gave feedback using three different mediums: Written, typed, and oral. Although previous studies believe that the “majority of teacher response is likely to be of the pen-and-paper variety,” I did not find that true in the case of Lena (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 196). On all assignments used in this study, only two contained hand-written feedback, while the rest was typed. Like other instructors, “convenience and the availability of technology” determined the medium of feedback Lena gave (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 196). On all assignments she typically gives feedback electronically with exception to the final drafts of major assignments where she gives handwritten feedback. Lena states that she provides written feedback on those assignments due to her work schedule and position where she does not have access to the computer. Thus, having hard copies of the papers permits her to use her breaks to work on the papers. In electronic feedback, Lena’s feedback tends to contain atypical symbols, such as smiley faces (see Figure 4-5). Although she uses symbols, such as “➔” and “X” in her handwritten feedback, representations of facial expressions are non-existent in her written feedback. Another difference is identified in the length or completeness of comments she provides when using the two mediums. I found that Lena generally provides complete sentences in electronic feedback where she usually produces incomplete or short sentences in handwritten feedback. As seen in Figure 4-7, Lena’s written comments are short and sometimes incomplete
whereas the electronic comment is more detailed. For example, she writes: “I’m confused here by what you mean” and “E Section?” When comparing these comments to electronic comments, as portrayed in Figure 4-7, we see a significant difference. Unlike the hasty handwritten comments, in electronic comments, Lena attempts to clarify fully the error that the learner made.

Written and electronic feedbacks were examined and the findings are summarized in Table 4-3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written Feedback</th>
<th>Electronic Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interlinear feedback contains IF and EC type of feedback</td>
<td>The feedback was Multimodal where the teacher uses symbols such as 😊 and ☹️ when responding to students’ writing (see Figure 4-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments are short phrases or incomplete sentences (see Figure 4-7)</td>
<td>Comments are mostly incomplete sentences or phrases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some comments are indecipherable or unintelligible (see Figure 4-6)</td>
<td>Comments are more detailed (see Figure 4-7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clear and comprehensible (see Figure 4-7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contains more motivational interlinear feedback (see Figure 4-)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4-5. Example of a multimodal comment

Figure 4-6. Examples of incomprehensible feedback

Figure 4-7. Examples of cursory handwritten feedback and detailed typed feedback
4.2.2. Second Factor: Error Type

An interesting finding concerns Lena’s reaction to the pattern of errors that learners produce, where a pattern can be observed. On some occasions she corrects all the similar errors. Yet, on other occasions she does not. For instance, in Maram’s Essay 2, Lena capitalizes the header and title in the cover page and writes “title is capitalized like this unless in reference page-then it’s the way you had it originally.” However, she does not correct the header in the following pages. On the other hand, she corrects Maram’s use of “in” and “on” throughout the essay. This can be understood by examining the two errors. While the first error can be explained to the learner in one sentence, the second error cannot be explained in that simple manner due to the metaphorical aspect of prepositions. The first error is an error from a stylistic perspective and the explanation is “when following APA style, titles located in the cover page has to be in capital letters. The second error, however, cannot be explained in one sentence because prepositions – in as well as on – are used in various ways depending on the context. Hence, it would be easier for Lena to merely correct it instead of giving a rather long explanation. This finding triggers the question of how much CF can explain. Lena freely uses various forms of explicit corrective feedback – yet in some areas corrective feedback may not be the best tool in correcting or explaining an error. Class activities or personal exercises on the topic of prepositions using, perhaps, the Functional Approach to grammar, seems to be a more effective tool than feedback. In addition, this may also provide a glimpse of the teacher’s knowledge, a point also made in Zamel (1985). The following chapter will elaborate on the two findings further.
4.2.3. Third Factor: Institutional Goals

When summing up all the feedback Lena gave to the four students, it is quite apparent that the focus is on form. When comparing the feedback on form to the feedback on content, the total feedback on form was 582 where as the total feedback on content was 99. This can be understood in two manners: firstly, the institutional goals, and secondly, the assignment type.

The objectives of the course state the following:

1. Identify how writers convey their purpose for a particular audience in readings
2. Identify and evaluate methods of argument, persuasion and evidence used by others and implement them in your own writing
3. Identify and evaluate how language shapes a writer’s credibility and persuasive appeals
4. Enhance your ability to organize and develop ideas in a coherent and unified way
5. Revise and reshape your writing to improve ideas, organization, language use, vocabulary and mechanics
6. Identify and correct structural and grammatical errors within your written texts
7. Select sources, take notes and cite sources to support ideas
8. Use the library to conduct library research
9. Become better readers and writers in preparation for their college career

The objectives above encourage both the development of form and content as well as other skills that are associated with writing, such as research and reading skills. It seems that Lena is influenced by some of these objectives more than others; particularly number six, five, seven, and two. In addition, the class was structured around three different genres: summary and critique, comparison and contrast, and argumentative. Thus, what to Lena distinguished one from the other was primarily the form in which it was written. She relied on Keys for Writers in her lessons and classroom presentations. The department required all students enrolled in these classes to use Keys for Writers. This policy was implemented the semester in which the data was collected. With a text that emphasizes form, and with course seen as three separate units, Lena’s feedback is largely influenced by such factors. Lena clearly stated that she focused on topics that
were covered in the class. Topics covered in the class included paraphrasing and critiquing, citation, parallelism, commas, and paragraphs. For a list of topics covered in class, please see Appendix I. The explanation, then, is that due to Lena’s belief that these subjects – which primarily deal with form—along with the objectives highlighted earlier, she focused her feedback on what the institution saw as important.

To the question of what errors she focused on, Lena replied: “Specific errors we talked about in class, or specific areas a student would need help individually, something that would not be covered in the course of the semester.” When she was asked to indicate the aspects that she provides feedback on, she stated: “Comma/punctuation errors, APA formatting errors, informal writing errors (i.e., using ‘you’), sometimes I would leave feedback on word choice.” This last response summarizes Lena’s feedback on form. In a later question, she states a similar response: “I believe in hindsight that I gave an overwhelming amount of feedback—stylistic, organizational, formatting, grammatical, mechanical.” Thus, institutional power serves as a factor influencing feedback, a phenomenon Lee (2008) discusses.

4.2.4. Fourth Factor: Assignment Type

Assignment type serves as another factor influencing Lena’s feedback. When comparing the feedback the four students received on what is labeled as Journals five and eight with the feedback the students received on other journals, we observe an increase in Reflective Feedback and a decrease in all forms of CF. Unlike the other assignments, which, in comparison, were quite specific in asking the students to perform formal writing, these assignments, were reflective. In the instructions for journal eight, for instance, the instructor states:
Write a reflection journal of your presentation…informal writing is fine. Some things you may want to think about to reflect on (ideas. You can use these or not): How were you feeling before the presentation? Nervous, excited, etc? How did you feel standing in front of the class? Did everything go as planned? Why/why not? Did you forget something? Why? Compare/contrast to any other experience you have had with public speaking. Talk about the grade you received. Do you [wish] …there were more chances for presentations or do you wish you wouldn’t have had to do this one? if you didn’t like it, do you have suggestions for future classes? There is a lot you can write about! Be careful and fill me in on your experience! (Journal Eight, Question 8)

Reflective feedback on the two journals alone exceeded all other assignments (Refer to Appendix E, F, G, and H). This change in the feedback—from feedback on APA, punctuation, and mechanics to feedback on content on those two assignments demonstrates that assignment type is also among the factors influencing the instructor’s feedback.

4.2.5. Fifth Factor: Teacher’s Development

Initially, Lena’s written feedback was authoritative where she asked her students to change an aspect of their writing using the modal should and the verb need. Toward the end of the semester, Lena’s tone changed to a more negotiable one. By the sixth week of the semester, the instructor began producing feedback that can be characterized as detailed content based feedback. In addition, a shift in the tone of some of the feedback from authoritative to suggestive occurred later in the semester. For instance, when comparing Lena’s responses to Norah’s use of the PIE structure at two points in the semester we are able to see the change. Earlier in the semester, Lena writes: “Remember, I section is for examples, so E section should be your own words, you [sic] own conclusion of how the P and I relate. You are missing E section in this paragraph. Put your page number in the correct place.” Later in the semester, on the contrary, Lena states (Note: the capitalized letters refer to the PIE structure):
I think you need a bit more to this refute. I’m not seeing the connection between cost of education to the number of faculty and venues. Maybe you need more E section, more explaining the connection? Maybe you need to bring back your other points too. IE: “not only are there extensive faculty and facilities available to students to make their college experience memorable, but there are many opportunities to learn from extensive libraries, to studying abroad, to learning from a multicultural society.” Then relate back to the P section—the opponent’s point. “So, while school in America may be expensive, the opportunities and benefits students receive far outweigh the cost.” (Lena, FB, Essay three, Draft one)

This is also seen across participants. For instance, when trying to have Maram articulate her point in an assignment submitted earlier in the semester, Lena writes: “You stopped at I….I’m wondering “what’s your point? So what?” That means you are missing the E section. Remember that E section should relate the P and the I to each other, in your own words. It concludes the paragraph and tells the reader the point you want to make, not letting them assume what your point is” (Maram, Journal two). Several weeks later, Maram also had a similar issue to which Lena writes:

Okay, I’m not sure what your point is in this paragraph. Perhaps you can use the 2 great quotes you have as proof in other paragraphs? I don’t think this is a strong point and it doesn’t seem to be different than the points mentioned before it. Or maybe you just need to define it more clearly with a strong P section (Lena, FB, Essay three, Draft one)

The change in the manner and tone of giving feedback is clear in both examples. There is a less use of directive or authoritative feedback. This is not to say that Lena stops giving authoritative feedback. She actually continues giving authoritative feedback – but she shifts from authoritative feedback to suggestive feedback. In some cases, she mixes authoritative along with suggestive feedback as seen in the following example:

Great logos evidence here! Now you need some ethos/pathos support. Can you find a story of an international student who went to Tsinghua and transferred to Harvard? Or any story of an international student who talks about the difference between their country’s university and the US university? Or maybe your own story? Or a friend of yours? Try looking on Internet forums. Even if it’s just a sentence or two, it will add strength to your argument. (Norah, Essay Three, Draft One).
We find that suggestive feedback and detailed comments took over as Lena increasingly used suggestive terms such as “maybe,” “perhaps,” and “possible.” In regard to the concept of change, Lena states “After the first essay, I had to make some chan[g]es in how I was leaving feedback—ie: timing myself, only leaving feedback for specific problem.” Lena found giving feedback to be a time consuming process (see Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). In addition, considering that she never received any instruction on how to give feedback, she had to learn it by herself by reflecting on her previous feedback. Thus, after she went through the first few weeks of giving feedback, the experience motivated her to reflect on her feedback and transform her feedback.

4.3. The Question of Uptake

The final question proposed in this study examines whether participants reject or accept feedback and why. This question needs to be examined from two perspectives. The first perspective merely inspects if students with various writing competencies differ in changing their written product due to feedback. The second perspective is to identify the factors that influence the revision process. I identified three prominent factors to be contributors to uptake from treating each participant individually: Methods of receiving feedback, students’ comprehension, and students’ learning strategies and motives.

4.3.1. Acceptance and Rejection of Feedback

Through the analysis of the data, I found different ranges of acceptance and rejection of feedback across the four participants. Since the majority of feedback is on form as illustrated in
Table 4-4, I was restricted in my analysis to mostly form even though I found it to be contradicting to my definition of development. If the instructor provided more feedback on the content where we can observe change or development in student’s voice, for instance, then doing so would have been possible. Thus, the analysis in this section focuses largely on aspects of form that Lena focused on when providing feedback.

Table 4-4. The frequency of feedback given to form and content across the four participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback Category</th>
<th>Ali</th>
<th>Kareem</th>
<th>Norah</th>
<th>Maram</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Form</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Content</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When it comes to Norah, she continuously revised her writing throughout the semester stating in our interview that since Lena is the instructor, she has to accept all the changes. This can also be observed in her writing. In an earlier draft of the first essay, Norah received detailed direct feedback on her summary (Figure 4-8). She then took the feedback and rewrote an entirely new summary using a different article (Figure 4-9). In an interview with Norah, I found that Norah devised her own tools in understanding the feedback enabling her to produce successful revisions
throughout the semester, a discovery that I discuss later in this chapter.

Figure 4-8. Norah’s Summary along with Lena’s feedback

Figure 4-9. Norah’s Revision of the Summary

Kareem represents an interesting case. In an interview, he stated that he only valued the feedback he received on major assignments and ignored the feedback he received on other assignments, such as journals because they are considered minor assignments in the class. In addition, unlike the formal papers where the student is graded based on a rubric, journals were assessed based on whether the student failed or passed in completing the task. On the contrary, when it comes to revising major papers where he received written feedback, he accepts all recommendations stating “because …my teacher [unclear] me I’m just learner I have to follow follow my teacher said.” He adds to his reasoning behind always agreeing with Lena stating “I always okay okay that’s my fault” and then goes ahead correcting the errors. Similar to Norah, Kareem also valued oral feedback. Thus, he scheduled multiple conferences with Lena throughout the semester to discuss the major assignments. Nevertheless, revisions from oral
feedback are not always successful for Kareem. In a response to a later version of a critique following the conference, Lena writes:

What happened to the critiques you showed me in my office? They seemed much better than this. It seemed that you understood when you came to my office, so what happened? I don’t think you understand how to use a paraphrase, or how to make one. Also, I think you need to review P-I-E. ALL of your paragraphs are missing E section. [+] (Kareem, Journal Twelve)

Thus, Kareem accepts all the feedback when the assignments are weighted. Nevertheless, he does not accept them on occasions where the grade does not change or when he is unable to understand the feedback.

Ali, in addition, accepts and rejects changes. For instance, Figure 4-10 illustrates the feedback Ali received on the final draft of the second essay where he was instructed to indent his references. On the following paper, he avoids producing the same error as seen in Figure 4-11.

Figure 4-10. Feedback Ali received on the second essay
Nevertheless, there are occasions where Ali does not accept or internalize the corrections. An example of this finding appears in Ali’s use of in-text citations. In an essay where Ali produced correct and incorrect in-text citations, Ali received feedback on the misuse where Lena wrote “citation?” as seen in Figure 4-12. Although he also produced correct citations as seen in Figure 4-13, Ali does not receive praise or motivational feedback on his accomplishment. In a later formal paper, Ali creates more errors with in-text citations as seen in Figure 4-14. Concerning his decisions of accepting or rejecting feedback, Ali states “I try to make all of them [changes] as I understand… but I don’t think [I reject]” because “she is the professor” and “I have to do whatever she wants … she is the boss.” Ali does not consciously or intentionally reject the instructor’s feedback. Even with the feedback Ali received from Lena, he continued making errors – sometimes errors that he did not initially have. I identify Ali’s comprehension of feedback as a factor that limits his revision process. I further elaborate on the comprehension factor in this chapter.
Maram, on the contrary, rejects and accepts feedback consciously due to factors, such as grades, Venezuelan pride, and time. Maram states “I mostly do [accept changes] because she [Lena] is the one who is gonna grade it but some of the feedback I thought that was like too much into details like she is almost like wants like and there were feedback I was like that’s my idea I don’t want to change that you know what I mean.” She then elaborates stating “It’s my way of speaking,” which illustrates her pride of the Venezuelan English that she produces. Regardless of what Maram states in the interview, she does indeed accept Lena’s feedback, especially on assignments of multiple drafts (see Appendix J and Appendix K for an example). She may not, however, avoid producing the same error as seen in Figure 4-15 and Figure 4-16. When Maram is explicitly informed of errors in a particular assignment, she does correct them. Maram states:
Yeah I actually did [accept the feedback that I did not agree with] I try to change it so because like I feel like if she [Lena] took the time to point it out and it was eight pages and she pointed out like a lot of stuff it would be just mean just to ignore that fact after she you know … I should and there was some feedback like I just like deleted the whole paragraph and like I am not dealing with this feedback … [because] it was too hard to make it better … just delete [the entire paragraph] (Maram, Interview Two)

Maram understood that by leaving the paragraph underdeveloped she would lose more points. Hence, she removed the entire section. Due to time constraints, Maram found herself incapable of revising her essay to the degree that Lena aimed to see.

4.3.2. Factors Contributing to Revision and Uptake

By examining each case individually we were able to observe how multiple variables are involved in the revision process that may or may not include the feedback. Although the advanced participant was found to be more conscious of her decisions, all participants one way or another saw value in Lena’s feedback. In addition, depending on the variables involved, I found some students to be more successful than others through their revision process. Norah became the student who produced the highest rate with successful revisions – or, in other words, internalized the feedback the most. Upon investigating the reasons that made some students more successful than others in their revision process, I found the following four factors (among other factors) as primary variables influencing the revision process: Method of receiving feedback, comprehension, student’s motives and learning strategies.

4.3.2.1. First Factor: Method of Receiving Feedback

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed how the medium influenced the feedback produced. It was found from interviews with the students that each medium had a different affect. Kareem,
for instance, finds electronic feedback “very weak” when it is on screen “even though the same comment” was given. Kareem elaborates on this observation stating that “Handwriting is better than computer…feedback by handwriting is more impression…but in the computer weird because I am not, my, personally I do just okay okay okay yeah… if by handwriting ohhh I know my my mistake very very strongly.” Similarly, Norah prefers written over electronic feedback, stating: “I prefer the handwritten feedback because I find them more concrete.” According to the students’ responses, electronic feedback is not as powerful as handwritten feedback. Although this is the case for Norah and Kareem, it is not the case for Maram. When examining the revisions on the same error over time, I found that when a handwritten correction and explanation was provided on that error in the second essay (see Figure 4-15), Maram continues making the same error in the third essay (see Figure 4-16). However, when Lena provides her electronic feedback on that same issue in the third essay, and, Maram does revise it (see Figure 4-17). In contrast to Kareem and Norah, Maram did not produce accurate revisions from the handwritten feedback and that can be attributed to individual preferences and motives.

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ESL 15:
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4.3.2.2. Second Factor: Comprehension

In an interview, Ali states that he is occasionally unable to understand Lena’s feedback. When he was asked to elaborate on that, he stated that sometimes the comments are not clear. Ali was one of the students that Lena recommended to enroll in a lower ESL class. In an interview, Ali stated “I try to make all of them[changes] as I understand,” which expresses that sometimes he is unable to make the necessary changes. Lena does not explain her feedback or her expectations for the students after using the feedback to the class. Thus, Ali, who only wrote two essays in his life, may not be able to decipher the feedback he received from Lena because to
him, this is also a new genre. In addition, I find Lena’s expectations of Ali to be troubling. Expecting a learner like Ali who has a limited exposure to writing as well as the concept of feedback to be able to understand without explicit instruction the expectations of his instructor after providing the feedback is erroneous. Ali is not only expected to learn the language but is also expected to learn how to learn the language as well.

4.3.2.3. Third Factor: Motives and Learning Strategies

The third factor influencing uptake is the students’ individual motives and learning strategies, particularly in regard to the use of teaching feedback. Norah, in particular, expects herself to be a “good student” and her formulation of tools that helped her understand the feedback have significantly contributed to her exponential development in writing over time. Norah is detail-oriented and she strives to understand every lesson in class, using various sources from meeting with the instructor during office hours to reflect on her writing after new lessons. Interestingly, relating concepts revealed in class to her writing as well as evaluating her own writing following new lessons significantly helped her. An example of her reevaluation of her writing is illustrated below:

Only today do I find out the reason why sometimes my essays are some kind of boring. I used to use only ethos in my essays, leaving the audience no space to imagine but just telling them what is right and what is wrong directly. In fact, the right use of not only logos but also pathos is very important. On one hand, logos can make the essay more formal and more persuasive, which is especially vital to academic essays. It is because seldom people can argue with the statistics and facts. Maybe we can doubt others’ opinions, but it may be more difficult to doubt the facts and numbers. On the
other hand, the essays will become very vivid once used pathos. I believe even the most rational man cannot resist the strong feeling of emotion. Everyone has love, pity and mercy, which an essay can use to move people. All in all, I should practice more and pay more attention in using the other two appeals in my following essays, learning to use them at the appropriate time (Norah, Journal One)

Norah’s diligence was also noticed by Lena who once wrote to Norah stating “You are always the very first person in all of my classes to turn in their essay. You try very hard to complete the journal task and I want you to know that I appreciate your hard work! You are improving very quickly and I want to see you get a high grade in this course! Keep up the good work and keep coming to me when you need help” (Lena, Journal Four). Clearly, Norah exploits the opportunities that assist her in further development of her writing. In addition, Norah has devised her own mediating tools for understanding Lena’s feedback. Norah uses the feedback on the current assignment and the feedback from previous assignments when revising a new draft or a new assignment. She also “checks-off” Lena’s comments, in addition to commenting on Lena’s comment, to further her understanding. She occasionally uses her first language, as well as English. Figure 4-18 illustrates some of the techniques that Norah uses once she receives the feedback. Regardless of her level as an intermediate, Norah’s tools that she developed for the class and for the feedback was among the major factors influencing her progress in the semester.
For Ali, on the other hand, his personal motives and his desire to understand the feedback and the language itself influenced his revision process. When asked of his opinion of the best quality of a good language teacher, he stated that a teacher “should push the student to learn English. However... it is all up to the student. If the student want he/she can learn English without a teacher” (Ali, Biographical Information). Ali believes that a student’s determination and will is more important than the instructor in learning English. When applying Ali’s belief to his own development in the course, Ali’s motives have influenced his progress throughout the fifteen weeks. Since Lena gives similar feedback types to her students, the widespread belief that perhaps the adjusted feedback helps learner no longer works because feedback was never
regulated to Ali’s level as a beginner. Thus, Ali’s motivation and goals, whether distant or immediate goals, significantly influenced his progress and development as a language learner.

Clearly, multiple variables play a role in L2 writing classrooms. To argue that one factor—such as feedback—solely contributed to development is unfounded. However, to claim that development is innate is problematic as well. Teachers and educators can learn from how students learn, and formulate tools that students can use to understand feedback. The following chapter will elaborate further on the pedagogical implications.

4.4. Summary of Findings

The findings on whether the teachers adjust feedback depending on the students’ writing competencies were counterintuitive. The data illustrated that there is no pattern of feedback type or frequency between as well as within group. Lena, however, did have a pattern when it comes to the errors that she focuses on when providing feedback. These errors are primarily form related errors, such as APA style errors, punctuation errors, and PIE structure related errors. In addition, I found that factors, such as medium of delivering feedback, assignment type, error types, the instructor’s development as a teacher, and intuitional goals to be agents influencing the instructor when giving feedback. These factors influence the type of feedback given as well as the frequency. Concerning the question of revision, on the other hand, I found that intermediate and transition students accepted all feedback while beginner and advance students rejected as well as accepted some of the feedback. Factors, such as the method in which the feedback was received, learner’s comprehension of feedback, learner’s motives, and student’s learning strategies were variables influencing the process of uptake.
Chapter 5
Discussion

In this chapter I return to the literature once again in an attempt to contextualize my findings to the work of others. I begin by discussing and comparing the results of the present study against the context of the widely held belief that teachers adjust their feedback to their perception of learners’ writing skills. I follow the comparison with a discussion on the finding of how certain errors lead to diverse feedback types. Finally, I end by discussing the notion of uptake as observed in the findings.

5.1. Students’ Writing Competencies and Feedback Adjustment

As stated previously, the findings were counterintuitive for the hypothesis that teachers do appropriate their feedback to students writing competencies. The data illustrated that there is no pattern of feedback type or frequency between as well as within group. The findings are similar to the findings of Ferris et al (1997), addressed earlier in Chapter two, where the authors were surprised “to note that the teacher did not show much variety in her feedback according to students’ perceived ability levels” (p. 174). They, however, argued that since there were some variations—though not as significant—across student levels, then students’ writing competencies may serve as a factor influencing teacher’s feedback. Ferris et al (1997) also found that teachers tend to be “collegial and positive towards strong students” while being “directive and mechanical with weaker students”
From examining the feedback within a group of advanced students in the present study, however, a pattern cannot be identified as Lena’s feedback to the three advance students differed both in frequency and type. Hence, although based on a small number of students and feedback provided by one teacher, the results of this study seem to contradict those of Ferris et al (1997). The significance of this finding largely concerns the concept of ZPD. If feedback is no longer individualized, then it would not suit the stage of development of each learner receiving the feedback, which could potentially be less beneficial for individual learners.

5.2. Pattern of Feedback

Although Lena’s feedback can be seen as “arbitrary and idiosyncratic” when it comes to her choices of type and frequency of feedback, she did have a pattern when it comes to the errors she frequently focuses on (Sommers, 1982, p. 374). These errors are primarily form related, such as APA style, punctuation, or PIE structure related. Lena, in addition, revealed her focus on these issues in an interview as well illustrating that she is not completely arbitrary when providing feedback. From this perspective, Lena does not fit the description of teachers in Sommers’s (1982) article.

The findings also revealed that certain errors trigger particular feedback types. Some of the errors covered elicited only corrections without explanation (i.e. EE, IF) while other errors prompted explanation (i.e. SU, AU) along with, or without, corrections. This suggests that some errors are easy to explain while others are not. Ferris (1999) makes a distinction between what she refers to as treatable and untreatable errors.
arguing that types of CF – direct or indirect—deals with certain errors more effectively.

In a later study, Ferris (2006) returns to the discussion of treatable and untreatable errors arguing that teachers differentiate their feedback depending on the error type, in the sense that teachers address treatable errors indirectly while they address untreatable errors directly. Zamel (1985) states that teachers’ feedback is idiosyncratic possibly because “some things catch the teacher's attention while others do not or (that) errors most easily dealt with are the ones identified” (p. 88). For instance, both prepositions and APA formatting were discussed in class. However, while APA is straightforward with regards to its basic guidelines, prepositions are clearly not, as they tend to be more formulaic and carry metaphorical meaning. Consequently, explaining the difference between “on” and “in” in a phrase or a sentence may not enable the learner to understand the difference between the two prepositions, whereas explaining the capitalization of titles in APA in a sentence is feasible. This also illustrates the limitations of written feedback -- particularly corrective feedback -- in explaining the rationale behind a correction. Teachers need to rely on tools other than feedback to explain problems that cannot be solved using feedback. In the case of prepositions, for instance, the instructor can correct and discuss the issue in class, which Master (1995) found to be rather effective. Another option would be to develop a Schema for Complete Orienting Basis of Action (SCOBA) where the teacher can conceptualize the various uses of “on” and “in” to language learners, which may lead the learner to self-regulation in the long run. SCOBAs “represent the materialization of complex abstract knowledge and a way of assisting learners in making informed decisions to deploy this knowledge appropriately” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 310). Negueruela (2003), for instance, presents an exceptional example of SCOBA,
which he used to guide the students in understanding the aspect in Spanish. This finding suggests that instructors can develop alternative methods for dealing with common errors where written corrective feedback might fall short.

5.3. The Question of Feedback Type and Frequency

This study has found that factors, such as medium of delivering feedback, assignment type, error types, the instructor’s development as a teacher, and intuitional goals determine the feedback type and frequency. For instance, the findings of this study concerning motivational, suggestive, and authoritative feedback types contradict Hyland and Hyland’s (2006c) praise, criticism, and suggestion. Hyland and Hyland (2006c) found that feedback that functioned as a praise toward the learner’s writing was more frequent than that of criticism and suggestion arguing that that the “teachers consider the possible interpersonal impact of positive and negative feedback” when they were examining the writings of their students (p. 210). In this study, however, motivation was among the least used type of feedback. The difference in frequency can be attributed to Lena’s development as a teacher and/or assignment types used in these classrooms. In addition, previous studies (e.g. Leki, 1991; Ferris 1995; Lee, 2004) found that not only do students expect to have feedback from their teachers but are also irritated if the opposite scenario occurred. The participants, with exception to Maram—found Lena’s feedback positive even though it was in an authoritative and critical tone. From this finding, I conclude that regardless of the Lena’s tone, the participants were appreciative of the
feedback. Three of the participants report that after concluding their coursework they continue to go to Lena for feedback.

Similar to the findings of previous studies, the instructor was more reluctant to provide feedback on content than that on form (e.g. Hyland & Hyland, 2006c). However, depending on the dynamics of the factors discussed earlier, she occasionally provided feedback on content as well. Nevertheless, the incorporation of content-based feedback also suggested that Lena began viewing students’ work differently. This change appeared during the sixth week of the semester, or, in other words, the mid of the semester. Williams (1981, p. 154) discusses these different ways of looking at student writing stating that:

It is the difference between reading for typographical errors and reading for content. When we read for typos, letters constitute the field of attention; content becomes virtually inaccessible. When we read for content, semantic structures constitute the field of attention; letters-for the most part-recede from our consciousness.

Williams’ two perspectives of looking at students’ work needs to be considered when giving feedback. There are occasions where instructors need to focus their feedback on content rather than form. These occasions, for instance, include earlier drafts of an assignment where learners are exploring the topic or during free-write like assignments where the learner—due to the nature of the assignment—is expected to brainstorm his/her ideas rather than be concerned about producing an error-free text. A number of scholars, such as Zamel (1985) and Krashen (1984), agree that feedback in intermediate stages is best with a focus on meaning. This is not to say that feedback on form is useless. Language carries meaning; hence, without clear language, the content will be insignificant (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). Therefore, it is also important to provide
feedback on both form and content otherwise the message that the writer may want to convey may not come across as he/she wants it to (Hyland, 2003). We need to encourage instructors to provide a combination of form and content oriented feedback, particularly when the learner needs that insight.

5.4. Internalization, Self-Regulation, and Feedback

Intermediate and transition students accepted all feedback while beginner and advanced students rejected as well as accepted some of the feedback. Reasons such as the method in which the feedback was received, learner’s comprehension of feedback, learner’s motives, and student’s learning strategies were variables influencing the process of uptake. Of course, students’ struggle with understanding teacher feedback is not a new finding. Previous studies, such as Cohen (1987), Leki (1990), and Conrad and Goldstein (1999), attributed the inability to produce successful revisions to reasons, such as the learner’s inability to understand teacher symbols and/or their inability to understand the handwritten comments. In this study, however, the beginner participant—Ali—had trouble understanding the intentionality behind some of the teacher comments. Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) state that students with lower English proficiency may struggle with identifying or correcting errors, including those identified by the instructor in her/his feedback. Individual differences, as Conrad and Goldstien (1999) highlighted, may play a role in the students’ revision process. Without discrediting the influence of the form and type of feedback, this finding stresses the importance of taking into account individual differences in uptake. In addition, the process from when the students receive the
feedback to when they submit a newly revised version cannot by any means be explained using cause and affect model or, as Conrad and Goldstein (1999) once stated, “stimulus-response model” (p. 172). Exploring the various factors that influence the revision process is crucial. Hyland and Hyland (2006b) state that “[a]ttempting to establish a direct relationship between corrective feedback and successful acquisition of a form is… over-simplistic and highly problematic” because there are a variety of variables influencing the work of the learner after receiving the feedback (p. 85).
Chapter 6

Conclusion

In this final chapter, I address the pedagogical implications of this study, followed by a discussion of the limitations of this research project as well as suggestions for future research. I then end with a brief reflection on this project.

6.1. Pedagogical Implications for L2 Writing Instructions

One of the major findings in the present study reaffirms that teachers provide an overwhelming amount of feedback. Nevertheless, with the majority of feedback being corrective and authoritative, the students may not have been able to articulate all their ideas through their writing. Instead, the teacher took over the writing of the student. Yancey (2009) states that “through reading, society could control its citizens, whereas through writing, citizens might exercise their own control” (p. 2). Nevertheless, are instructors allowing the student to exercise that control if the feedback given displaces, as Sommers describes, “student’s attention away from their own purposes in writing” and refocuses “that attention on the teachers’ purpose in commenting” (Sommers, 1982, p. 374). Maram, for instance, expressed her displeasure with Lena’s feedback which asked her to change her ideas stating and what she say as her “way of speaking.” Regardless of her feelings toward the change, Maram ended up revising portions of her essay in the manner Lena proposed because Lena was in a position of authority. Ali’s statement “She
is the boss” describes this relationship best. Hence, for the learners, rejecting Lena’s feedback seemed unwise as it may have had an impact on the students overall performance in the course. Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) advise that teachers should not overwhelm students by responding to all errors, and warn teachers against “‘appropriating,’ or taking over, a student’s text” and that “final decisions about content or revisions should be left in the control of the writer” (p. 190). Indubitably, creating such unpleasant atmosphere for writing might hamper student independence and creativity. Instead, the students’ work would be shaped not as they see it, but rather, how they perceive the teacher would see it based on the feedback they receive on similar assignments.

From examining Lena’s situation, I do not find her to be the source of the problem revealed. Rather, I find myself sympathetic toward her since she is a novice instructor. I, nevertheless, hold responsible teacher training programs for not preparing Lena for the type of issues that writing teachers typically face. One wonders if Sommer’s recommendation on teacher feedback in the early eighties informed teacher preparatory programs. Although Lena had an undergraduate degree in TESL and had already completed a year of TESL of her master’s degree, aspects of her feedback fit the description that Sommers provided nearly three decades ago. By educating Lena on the history of feedback – or by merely giving her Hyland and Hyland’s (2006b) article, for instance, it would have been possible to prepare Lena for the seriousness and the complexity of feedback. What is the point of studying feedback if the primary individuals to whom we perform these studies (i.e. teacher) do not benefit from our findings as researchers? It is surprising Lena’s four-year education as an undergraduate majoring in
TESL did not cover feedback, and that she was not prepared by her program prior to teaching the class.

Upon examining the learning strategies that Norah devised, I argue that teachers need to make more explicit to the learners how they can make use of the feedback. Similarly, Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) encourage teachers to explain their feedback and their approaches to feedback to their learners. They argue that “doing so forces teachers to articulate their approaches and attempts to follow them” (p. 195). I also add to the statement that articulating one’s approach will assist the learners in understanding their instructor’s style of commenting and in comprehending the gravity of the errors. By doing so, cases similar to Ali’s, where the learner is unable to understand feedback due to language use, would be avoided. This approach creates more opportunities for the learner to understand the feedback provided.

Since learners are individuals with vast differences among them, we need to develop feedback that suits each individual because, as illustrated in the findings, students develop and respond differently. Chaudron (1984) suggests that the proficiency level of the participants in his study (advanced vs. high-intermediate) may have influenced their response to feedback. This suggestion came about due to his findings that development of advanced learners over time was more significant than what was observed in high-intermediate learners who did not progress as much. As Ferris et al (1997) once stated, there is no “‘one-size-fits-all’ form of teacher commentary” (p. 178). Thus, we need to encourage the use of tools that can help instructors identify the feedback style that will enable self regulation. Self-regulation then is “the capacity to mediate and regulate his or her own activity through culturally organized mediational
means,” which occurs through the internalization process discussed previously (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 69).

Previous literature suggested various options that enable teachers to discern what feedback type is suitable for each learner. Brannon and Knoblauch (1982) introduced a task where teachers ask students to perform an analysis of each paragraph discussing what they as writers were trying to convey followed by another classmate producing an analysis of the same text for the same purpose. The writer, then, can compare whether what he/she intended to convey matched how the reader, the classmate, understood the text. Leki’s (1990, p. 64) questionnaires can also be of use as they inform the teacher of the students’ intentions in multiple areas of the text. In this task, the students respond to a number of questions concerning their text inquiring them about:

[What they liked best in what they have written, whether any part was particularly easy or hard to write, what they feel the least sure of in what they have written, what the most important thing was that they wanted the reader to find out or see from reading the paper, and what they would change in the paper if they had more time]

Goldstein (2004) proposes an innovative strategy for identifying learners’ feedback preferences. The author proposes the use of autobiographies where students are asked to detail “their past experiences as writers, including as complete a description as possible of the types of feedback they have received from previous teachers, what they did and did not like about this feedback, and what they did after they received the feedback” (p. 70). Not only will this strategy allow the instructor to be aware of learner preferences, but it will also allow the student to articulate his/her language learning history, which in turn is also beneficial to the instructor in developing classroom activities and language lessons. A final suggestion for teachers would be to develop an
individualized electronic rubric based on two sources of information from the learners. First the learners are asked to indicate their feedback preferences after being informed of various feedback types. Second the teacher examines the writing of students in earlier assignments and determines individual learner pattern of error. With this electronic rubric, the instructor would be consistent, detailed, and clear with the feedback. In addition, the rubric can be easily adjusted once a student internalized some of the concepts that the instructor covered previously.

6.2. Limitations

Several limitations need to be mentioned for the present study. The first limitation resides in the length of this study. Despite the fact that this is a longitudinal study that lasted fifteen weeks, immediate revisions or the fewer occurrences of certain errors that were marked by feedback cannot always translate into internalization of the concept. In a recent article, Sommers (2008, p. 154) states that progress may not always be present in students’ writing. She states that there are two contradictions in writing development, which are:

[W]riting development is not always visible on the page—students may be able to articulate standards of good writing before being able to put them into practice… [and] writing development involves steps both forward and backward, gains and losses, and requires some amount of ‘bad’ writing while new skills are practiced.

Fifteen weeks of instruction and writing may not necessarily produce the development one may desire. Since Lena did not always provide feedback on students’ earlier drafts of writing, it was difficult to illustrate internalization as defined in this study. Nevertheless,
even with the limited time period in which the data were collected, some aspects of development can be measured based on the feedback given by Lena in the students’ writings.

Due to the small sample size, the findings cannot be generalized. With a larger sample and multiple teachers, we may arrive at a statistically significant answer to the question whether teachers adjust feedback to students’ proficiency level. Influential variables, such as medium of feedback, needs to be controlled to better understand the impact of each variable on the process of giving feedback and students’ revisions. Nevertheless, although controlling for these variables may provide new information, it will make the study unnatural, which adds to the limitations since classroom conditions cannot be altered to suit experimental situations. Nevertheless, a larger sample size would be worthy of examining.

Although the present study examines written feedback, another variable worthy of examining is student-teacher conferences where the instructor also guides the students in developing their writing. Although a number of the conferences were recorded, their content was beyond the purposes of the present study. Nevertheless, the conferences will be analyzed in future studies and the findings will be added to the findings presented in this paper providing a complete perspective of feedback.

A number of participants did not type their name on the final draft of some of the final essays, which may have influenced Lena’s feedback. Nevertheless, in an interview, Lena indicated that since she is familiar with the writing of her students as well as their topics, she knew in most cases which paper belonged to whom.
6.3. Suggestions for Future Research

Besides accounting for the limitations revealed earlier, future studies need to investigate further the rationale behind teachers not adjusting their feedback to their student’s level. Furthermore, researchers need to examine various means by which students devise meditational means for understanding the feedback. The findings for such questions will be of great use to language learners and help teach them how to use feedback. In addition, studies aimed to developing tools that will allow the instructor to produce and develop consistent comprehensible feedback would contribute to the field of teacher education. These tools may serve in avoiding feedback related issues that teachers, particularly novice teachers, face when teaching, such as time management and students’ reactions.

Additional studies need to investigate the role of institutional goals on the production of certain feedback types. Teachers “do not teach in a vacuum” and understanding the context in which they are teaching is crucial not only in understanding feedback (Goldstein, 2004, p. 66), but also the instruction of language in general. Such studies may reaffirm or refute the general understanding of how feedback is not only controlled by the instructor but also by other macro forces. Findings from those studies may encourage teacher supervisors to reexamine their institutional goals and comprehend the impact these goals may have on day-to-day teachers’ activities.

Examining teachers with a range of teaching experience would surely provide insightful findings on the development of teachers as well as the bases behind teachers’ adjustment of their feedback as they develop their subjectivity as language teachers. One
of the findings in the present study illustrated that alteration in teacher’s feedback is attributed to teacher’s development. Hence, investigating teachers with different expertise would of great value to both the field of teacher education and L2 writing.

6.4. Final Remarks

Regardless of these limitations, the present research provides new and useful insights into the field of written feedback in L2 classrooms. With that note, I end my thesis with the hope that this study persuades researchers that there is not a single best type of feedback. In addition, teachers “should consider how” they “can respond as genuine and interested readers rather than as judges and evaluators” (Zamel, 1985, p. 97). By adopting such system, the learner will also develop a positive view toward the writing and the writing process. Furthermore, I reiterate Hyland and Hyland’s (2006c) argument that “interpersonal aspects of response have the potential to construct the kinds of relationship that can either facilitate or undermine a student’s writing development” (p. 209). Thus, through teachers’ feedback a relationship can grow and expand, inspiring a positive impact in the learner toward writing. Educators and program directors need to be not only informed – but also inform other teachers—of feedback as a tool for adjusting the writing of students as well as a tool in aiding the growth of student’s writing.

I also encourage educators and language program supervisors to reevaluate the preparedness of their teachers in fundamental aspects of language teaching. Likewise, I urge teachers to reflect and reexamine their teaching philosophy and methods of
instruction when it comes to feedback to ensure that feedback serves its goal in assisting the learner in developing his or her writing.
References


Appendix A

Interview Questions for Step # 2

Interview questions for step # 2: Interview the instructor about her/his impression of the students’ writing abilities from these assessment tasks after she/he completes assessing their writing.

- How did you assess the students?
- What scale did you use to assess those students?
- What is your impression of the assessment tools?
- Was the task challenging enough?
- Do you think they had enough time to complete the writing diagnostic?
- How did you find the students’ writing in regard to their writing skills?
- Is there a piece of writing that stood out?
- If you would change something in this process (giving the tool, and assessing), what would you change?
Appendix B

Interview Questions for Step # 5

**Interview questions for step #5:** Interview the instructor of her/his expectations of the students for each major writing assignment.

- For this assignment, what is your objective?
- What do you want the students to learn?
- How do you plan to achieve these goals?
- Do you think that this assignment will be benefiting some students more than others? Why?
- Do you have particular expectations for specific students?
Appendix C

Interview Questions for Step # 9

Interview questions for step # 9: Interview the instructor about her/his reasoning behind the feedback given for the six selected students after giving the written feedback to the students.

- When you were providing feedback to the students, what were you looking for?
- Were you focusing on specific errors or mistakes?
- What are these errors?
- Did you find similar errors across other students?
- Were you thinking of specific feedback forms? If so, what are they? How did you come up with these feedback styles?
- Instructions: go with the instructor over the feedback that she/he gave the students on the paper. Ask the following questions:
  - Why did you mark this?
  - Is there a particular reasoning for giving this type of feedback?
- How would you characterize the type of feedback that you give? Do you think that you give similar feedback to all of the students in the class?
Interview questions for step # 10: Interview the six students about their perspectives on the teacher’s feedback, and the reasoning behind accepting and rejecting the feedback given by the instructor.

- Ask the student about the role of the teacher in their culture or previous educational background
  - How was school like back home?
  - Describe the role of the teacher from your previous experience
  - How is it different from the role of your teacher of this class?
  - How about the role of the students in your previous schooling?
  - How is it different from the role of your peers in your classes here at this university?
  - Do you have specific expectations of yourself? How do you see yourself in the next couple of years?
  - What do you think shaped your expectations?
  - Do you think your expectations differ from the expectations of people who do not share the same cultural background?
  - Is there a particular teacher that you like? Did you ever have a teacher that you did not get along with?
  - If you would describe the perfect language teacher, how she or he would be like?
- After reviewing your teacher’s feedback, what is your general impression?
- Is it similar to the type of feedback you have been getting from your previous teachers? How so?
- How did you perceive your teacher’s feedback? Positive or negative? What do you think of the tone of the feedback?
- In your opinion, does it matter whether the tone is positive or negative?
- Do instructors of your first language provide similar feedback? How so?
- In your culture, is teacher’s feedback taken seriously?
- Did you have friends, family members, or others (such as editors) help you with the paper or revising the paper?
- Would you say that you accept all of the changes and recommendations that the teacher provides you with? If yes or no, why and how?
- Was the teacher’s recommendation valued in your previous schooling?
- Instructions: ask the students why they accepted the teacher feedback here (point to it) and not there? Was it due to misunderstanding?
• Would you want your teacher to change her feedback? Would you prefer to receive more feedback or less feedback? Would you prefer to have the teacher focus his/her feedback on content or on form/grammar?
Appendix E

A Detailed Account of Frequency and Type of Feedback Ali Received

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### A Detailed Account of Frequency and Type of Feedback Kareem Received

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Appendix I

Course Syllabus

ESL 015: Academic Writing II
Department of Applied Linguistics
The Pennsylvania State University
Fall 2009

Instructor: Lena
Office Location: Sparks 312

Course Section: ------
Office Hours: ---------

Course Meetings: ------
Office Phone: 814-863-0031

Course Location: ------
Email: xxx@psu.edu

Course Description: This is an undergraduate composition course for intermediate/advanced level non-native speakers of English. You will work through the various stages in genres and develop strategies for reading and writing academic discourse. Overall, you should be able to use what you have learned in this course to participate successfully in academic reading and writing tasks throughout their university experience.

Prerequisite: C or higher in ESL 004 or Placement from diagnostic test

Objectives: Students will participate in a variety of reading and writing tasks that will enable them to:

- Identify how writers convey their purpose for a particular audience in readings
- Identify and evaluate methods of argument, persuasion and evidence used by others and implement them in your own writing
- Identify and evaluate how language shapes a writer's credibility and persuasive appeals
- Enhance your ability to organize and develop ideas in a coherent and unified way
- Revise and reshape your writing to improve ideas, organization, language use, vocabulary and mechanics
- Identify and correct structural and grammatical errors within your written texts
- Select sources, take notes and cite sources to support ideas
- Use the library to conduct library research
- Become better readers and writers in preparation for their college career

Required Texts:
Regular Attendance and Participation: You are expected to come to every class session prepared for the lesson with your readings and any other necessary materials. You should carefully read all assigned readings prior to scheduled class discussion. You are permitted three absences during the course of the semester. This includes absences for illnesses, personal reasons, etc. Per the policies of our department, after three absences, approximately 2 points will be taken off of your final course grade for every additional absence. You are responsible for making up any materials, class instructions, and assignments that you missed.

Tardiness: As of October 22, 2009 the following late rule addition will be applied: If you are 5 or more minutes late to class, this is a Tardy and you lose your attendance points for the day (you will lose 1 of the 2 available points for the day); every time you have 3 Tardys, the third one will count as an absence (remember, after receiving 3 absences, you will lose points from your final grade).

Course Requirements:

Attendance & Participation.............15pts.

Essay 1.................................20pts.

Essay 2.................................20pts.

Essay 3.................................25pts.

Journals.................................10pts

Presentation.............................10pts

Total: 100 Points

A+   97-100   B-   80-83
A    94-96    C+   75-79
A-   90-93    C    70-74
B+   87-89    D    60-69
B    84-86    F    <60
Attendance and Participation (15%) In-class activities will enhance your reading and writing abilities. In-class activities cannot be made up if you miss class. Homework should have few errors and should be well written. It is essential to attend class and complete all assignments on time.

Essay 1: Summary & Critique (20%) Choose an argumentative text from The Blair Reader and write a 1 page summary and 1-2 page critique, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the argument. Rubric will be given closer to due date.*

Essay 2: Comparison/Contrast (20%) Find a scholarly article from the library that is related to the text previously summarized and critiqued. Write the similarities and differences in the arguments of the two articles. You will be responsible for a Draft 1 which will be peer reviewed. Rubric will be given closer to due date.*

Essay 3: Argument (25%) Write an argumentative essay using at least three scholarly articles as support, one article must be from Essay 3. You will be responsible for 2 Drafts, one of which will be peer reviewed. Rubric will be given closer to due date.*

Journals (10%) Journals will be approx. 1 page, weekly records of self-evaluation and reflection. Journals should be submitted online via ANGEL in the appropriate place. Journals are due Tuesday BEFORE class. Journals cannot be made up.

Presentation (10%) Give a ten minute presentation of your argument using a visual device, such as powerpoint.

*Essays must be Double Spaced, size 12 font, 1” margins, using Times New Roman font.

Late Assignments: Late assignments will be penalized half of a letter grade (approx. 5 points) for every day past the due date (2 days late max) unless there are extenuating circumstances (severe illness, a death in the family, etc.) or an extension has been granted by me prior to the due date of the assignment.

ANGEL: Please logon to ANGEL frequently for updates and Journal entries.

Resources: If you would like someone to read your drafts and help you with your thoughts, you will want to make an appointment with a tutor in The Writing Center at 865-1841, 219 Boucke Building. http://www.psu.edu/dept/cew/writingcenter/writingc.htm

You will submit all 3 Essay assignments to me through www.Turnitin.com where they will be checked for plagiarism along with a hard copy turned in to me on the date due. Your classroom ID: 2815700 & Password: section2

Just ask me if you have any questions about an assignment or a concept covered in class. You can talk to me after class, or outside of class time you can send me e-mail messages, come see me during my office hours, or schedule an appointment to meet with me. Communication with the instructor is a key element to having a successful semester!
### Accessibility
The Pennsylvania State University encourages qualified people with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities and is committed to the policy that all people shall have equal access to programs, facilities, and admissions without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by university policy or by state or federal authorities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell me as soon as possible. For additional information, contact the ODS at http://www.equity.psu.edu/ods/. Questions about disability access can be referred to Jennifer Morris at jxm2@psu.edu or (814) 863-5538.

### Academic honesty
The Pennsylvania State University defines academic dishonesty as including, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating of information, or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Students who engage in academic dishonesty will be penalized and may risk failure of this course. Questions about academic integrity can be referred to Ashley Tarbet at aet143@psu.edu or (814) 865-1070.

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**ESL015 Course Overview, Unit 2 subject to change**

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<tr>
<th>UNIT 1 (7 weeks)</th>
<th>*8/25 &amp; 8/27</th>
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<td>Week 02: 9/8 &amp; 9/10</td>
<td>Finding main pts; Summarizing Lesson</td>
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<td>Sentences Lesson</td>
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<td>Starting sentences with…p.477(#s)</td>
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<td>Active vs. Passive voice (p.326)</td>
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<td>Clauses p.328</td>
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<td>Types of sentences p.345-348</td>
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<td>Sentence basics &amp; common errors p.360</td>
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<td>Word order p.513-514, 518-519</td>
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| Week 05: 9/29 & 10/1 | Transitions Lesson  
Plagiarism Lesson |
|---------------------|------------------|
| Week 06: 10/6 & 10/8 | Library visit  
Compare/contrast lesson and practice  
*Summary & Critique Essay 1 Due |
| Week 07: 10/13 & 10/15 | Citation differences, why, etc.  
Citation, focus on MLA or APA, practice |
| **UNIT 2**  
(7 weeks) | Week 08: 10/20 & 10/22 | Revising, proofreading, peer reviewing lesson  
*Keys p.40  
Essay 2 rubric.  
Draft 1 of Essay 2. Peer Review. |
| | Week 09: 10/27 & 10/29 | Parallelism p.376  
Commas Lesson p.439-449, 458-462 |
| | Week 10: 11/3 & 11/5 | Prepositions Lesson p.519-522  
*Comparison/contrast Essay 2 Due 11/3  
Research & sources—evaluating, primary, & secondary |
| | Week 11: 11/10 & 11/12 | How to form arguments & claims  
Arguments (cont.) practice, examples |
| | Week 12: 11/17 & 11/18 | Draft 1--Peer Review in class  
Articles Lesson p.499-506  
*turn in Draft 2--my feedback (online during break) |
| | Week 13: 11/24 & 11/26 | No class--Thanksgiving Holiday |
| Week 14: 12/1 & 12/3 | 12/1 Presentations (6)  
12/3 Presentations (6) |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Week 15: 12/8 & 12/10 | 12/8 Diagnostic. Presentations (2-3)  
12/10 Finish Presentations  
*Argument Essay 3 Due* |
| Week 16: 12/14-17 | Final Exams week--> retrieve grades |

From Writing Samples

- Sentences
- Transitions
- Commas
- Prepositions
- Hedging
- Articles
- Presentation should be about argument essay!
- Vocabulary
- Ambiguous referent? p.414
- Restricted/non-restricted clauses p.431
- Parallelism & agreement. p.391 (tense) p.432 (subject/verb)
Appendix J

Excerpt of Maram’s Essay with Lena’s Feedback

William Shen, a music journalist explained, “If there’s a theme running through rock at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it’s a pervasive sense of hurt. For the past few years, bands like Korn, Linkin Park, Slipknot, Papa Roach, and Disturbed have been thrusting forward their dark accounts of dysfunctional upbringing[s]...”

It is in these types of examples that we can see the real truth—the artist are trying to speak out for all those teenagers that are going through the experience they once suffered... they fully feel resonated by these songs. Many parents are just being blind if they cannot see the reality; they are the reason why their children listen to specific songs with specific lyrics.

Numerous are the artist that say that infinite amount of fans have approached them to tell them that they related to this song or that song. For instance, singer Chad Kroeger of Nickelback reports of a hit song he wrote on his own abandonment by his father at age two, “You should see some people who I meet after shows... They break down weeping, and they’re like, I went through the exact same thing!” Sometimes it’s terrifying how much they relate to it!” (Chachast, 2008)

In the end, this is the main reason why the popularity for these types of songs has risen so spontaneously. In general, many parents believe that the behavior or beliefs of their children resides in what music they listen to and the overall message in the songs, and many teachers agree with them, explaining that students are not as interested as previous generations.

Some teachers explain that many students are “more relaxed” than those from previous generations. This happens because students’ attitudes are changing thanks to the amount that music is being played. Teachers explain that this fact is revealed not only...
Appendix K

Excerpt of Maram’s 3rd Essay after Receiving Lena’s Feedback

Parents explain that most of the language used in these songs is too explicit for their children and that this is the reason why many teenagers either start a sexual relationship in early years of their life or begin with drugs or cigarettes. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention statistics shows that there is a 21% of high school students who are smokers; however this percentage can be explained by many different reasons besides the music influence that students may receive from the lyrics. For example, this is better explained by the reality that students in high school are going to take actions just to fit in with their friends, it is more likely for a high school student to try smoking just because their peer is smoking rather than the fact that he just listened in his favorite song’s lyric. The fact that teenagers are influenced on this high level by music is made on simply assumptions by worried parents. Dr. Miguel A. Munoz, a professor in the Social Sciences in Columbia University explained that after many observations on numerous young adults in night clubs the investigation yielded that there was no link between their decisions related to their sexual activity they had and the music they enjoyed listening (Rivera, 2007). Overall, the idea of teenagers having sex or consuming drugs because they may have received some information on their favorite music’s lyric it is just a myth. The real fact is that young adults in America want to be fully recognized by their parents, they want their parents to be more actively present. William Shaw, a music journalist explains: “If there's a theme running through rock at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it's a pervasive sense of hurt. For the past few years, bands like Korn, Linkin Park, Slip-knot, Papa Roach, and Disturbed have been thrusting forward their dark accounts of dysfunctional upbringing …” (Eberstadt, 2004, pg.250). These types of examples show the reality; countless artist are trying to speak out for all those
teenagers that are going through the experience that the artists once suffered. Teenagers truly feel identified by stories told by lyrics. Many parents are just being blind if they cannot see the reality; they are the reason why their children listen to specific songs with specific lyrics. Numerous are the artist that say that infinite amount of fans have approached them to tell them that they related have related to a specific song. For instance, singer Chad Kroeger of Nickelback reports of a hit song he wrote on his own abandonment by his father at age two "You should see some people who I meet after shows. ... They break down weeping, and they're like, 'I went through the exact same thing!' Sometimes it's terrifying how much they relate to it" (Reyna, & Brandt, 2009). At the end, this is the main reason why the popularity for these types of songs has risen so spontaneously. In general, many parents believe that the behavior of their children resides on what music they listen to and the overall message in the songs, however we can explain this phenomena as teenager relating to the message of many songs. Also several teachers agree with the parents, explaining that students are not as interested on their school subjects as previous generations.
Appendix L

Biographical Information Survey

Name:________________

Dear student, Please take the time to answer the following few questions about yourself:

1. How are you feeling today? 😊 __________
2. What is you major? ______________________________________
3. How old are you? _________________________________________
4. Are you a:
   o Freshmen
   o Sophomore
   o Junior
   o Senior
5. What is your Nationality/nationalities?

6. How many languages do you speak and write with?
   o 2
   o 3
   o 4
   o 5 +
7. What are these languages?

8. How did you learn English? Select all that apply and write the other ways in which you learned English
   o school – from grade ____ to grade _____
   o Tutoring
   o study abroad in an English speaking country
   o Others _____________________________________________________
9. How long have you been learning English?
   o 1-2 years
   o 3-4 years
   o 5-6 years
   o 7-8 years
   o ______ years
10. In few sentences, describe your experience of learning English. How was your relationship with your instructors of English?
11. Was your experience a positive one? Yes   No

12. What are your needs and concerns as an English language learner?

13. Based on your experience and your opinion, what is the most important quality for a good teacher?

Thank you very much,

Have a great day 😊
VITA

Buthainah M. Al Thowaini

B.M.Althowaini@gmail.com

EDUCATION

Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) from the Department of Applied Linguistics May 2010
Schreyer Honors College
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from the Department of English May 2010
Schreyer Honors College
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Academic English Composition Instructor 2009
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

- Exclusively instructed 18 intermediate/advanced level non-native speakers of English in developing strategies for reading and writing American academic discourse

The Stelts / Filippelli Intern 2008-2009
The Pennsylvania State University Libraries, University Park, PA

-Processed Special Collections Library literary manuscripts and archival collections, including The John Updike Buchanan Dying Papers, The Ambit Poetry Magazine Records, and the Reva Kern Bookplate Collection, under the direction of the curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY

PAALC Graduate Student Symposium Reviewer 2010
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

- Reviewed proposals
Co-Chair of the Applied Linguistics’ Social Committee 2009-Present
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

- Organizes events for the Applied Linguistics community

Volunteer as a Tutor of Arabic as a Foreign Language 2009-Present
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

- Teaches Modern Standard Arabic to young adults at the university

Instructor of Arabic and Islamic Studies 2006-Present
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

- Teaches Arabic, Islamic history, and Islamic studies to students from the community at the Islamic School of Central PA

SELECTED HONORS AND AWARDS

Information Literacy Award 2010
University Libraries
The Pennsylvania State University

James Rambeau Award 2010
Lambda Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa
The Pennsylvania State University

Member of Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society 2010

Student Enrichment Awards for Spring 2010 2010
College of the Liberal Arts
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

Liberal Arts APLNG Student Travel Fund 2009
For presenting at AAAL in March 2010

President's Fund for Research for “Teacher Mediation in Writing Acquisition: Constructing Different Proficiencies” 2009
College of the Liberal Arts
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

SELECTED CONFERENCES & PRESENTATIONS

The Status of English in the Islamic World 2010
Poster presented at the 2010 Undergraduate Exhibition.
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
Teacher’s Mediation in Writing Acquisition and Students' Uptake 2010

*Paper presented at the American Association for Applied Linguistics.*
Atlanta, GA

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATION

**Member of the American Association for Applied Linguistics** 2009-Present
- A professional organization whose members engage in research and practice regarding APLNG issues

**Member of Muslim Students Association (MSA)** 2006-Present

*The Pennsylvania State University*, University Park, PA