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Instructional Perspectives on Providing Corrective Feedback for Advanced Second Language Writers

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Abstract

Objectives: The purpose of the study was to investigate how tutors approached second language (L2) errors when working with advanced graduate students in structured one-on-one feedback sessions.

Method: The longitudinal, qualitative case study used data from immediate, retrospective tutor reflections and in-session interactions to follow two tutors as they worked with four advanced L2 writers. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.

Results: Three themes emerged: Error identification, error focus, and learner uptake. The treatment of error in advanced L2 writing necessitated negotiation with the students and deviation from the set tutoring protocol to serve student needs. Tutors took varying perspectives on assessment of session efficacy depending on the types of errors addressed.

Conclusions: Tutors' reflections and session data revealed the need to negotiate and maintain flexibility in feedback protocols intended for advanced L2 writers.

Implications for Theory and Practice: Adding to the research literature exploring the teacher variable in corrective feedback, this study supports the notion of feedback as a form of mediation. We encourage flexibility in feedback practices with L2 writers and support the need for tutor training in these perspectives.

Keywords: *second language writing, corrective feedback, English language learning*

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Introduction

Writing is a complex task that requires established linguistic skills in the target language in order to communicate effectively with the intended audience. These skills include a combination of linguistic accuracy (microskills) and content organizational skills (macroskills) (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010; Liu & Yu, 2022). Second language (L2) writing is a term that has been used since the 1950s to describe the diverse and wide field of writing in a language that differs from a first language; the term has been used widely in the past two decades (Sun & Lan, 2023). It is used in representing perspectives from teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) as well as teaching composition, and it is used generally to apply to multilingual writers, who may be writing in their second, third, or any number of additional languages (Hyland, 2019). International students are a subgroup of a larger L2 writing population (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2023).

There is a common paradox in L2 acquisition: Learning another language requires participation in a community, but access to this community and its valued knowledge is often granted only to those who use the language expected by the community (Darvin & Norton, 2023; Norton, 2013). Tutors and mentors play a valuable role in guiding L2 writers as they join the academic writing community, a process that includes feedback from gatekeepers and mentors (Crawford et al., 2016). Indeed, feedback in the development of advanced L2 academic writing is a long-term process that can be called an apprenticeship (Zhang & Hyland, 2021).

Context and Significance of the Study

The current study examines tutors' perspectives on providing corrective feedback (CF) to international student writers during one-on-one sessions at a large southeastern metropolitan university in the United States. The distinction between English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) is not always clear. We use the term ESL here because English language is the primary means of communication at the university and in the local community.

CF is a ubiquitous aspect of instruction for L2 writers. Over two decades of research on CF has demonstrated that teachers offer it, students value it, and the practice can positively impact L2 writers' linguistic accuracy (e.g., Bitchener, 2019; Ferris & Kurzer, 2019). Therefore, rather than exploring the efficacy of feedback through student uptake in writing, this study follows the recommendation by Storch (2018) to investigate feedback from a sociocultural perspective, viewing feedback as scaffolding. A case study approach is used to explore how tutors reflect on the feedback they provide for advanced L2 writers' evolving needs.

Literature Review

Proficiency in academic writing is highly important for international students in an ESL environment, and this proficiency requires both microskills and macroskills. However, instruction in microskills relevant to L2 writers can be unevenly available at the college level: feedback provided by college writing instructors can vary widely (Ferris et al., 2015). University faculty may emphasize the importance of effective academic writing while still feeling unprepared to meet the needs of their linguistically diverse students (Mahalingappa, 2021). University writing centers may offer some support, but tutors in writing centers require specialized training in grammar to address the needs of their L2 writers (Eckstein, 2018). When tutoring is sensitive to L2 writers' needs, one-on-one tutoring generally provides a valuable opportunity for fruitful L2 writer support (Lee, 2022). The following literature review describes challenges in L2 writing and choices tutors make when providing feedback in order to argue that investigating how tutors perceive their feedback choices is a step forward in best practices for teacher training.

Addressing Challenges for L2 Writing

Writing is challenging for several reasons. A sociocultural approach to L2 writing encompasses various dimensions of complexity, including writing at both microskill and macroskill levels, the writing process, and the writers themselves. Feedback is therefore seen as a multifaceted phenomenon that influences the textual, cognitive, and social aspects of learning (Liu & Yu, 2022). A challenge within L2 writing can also be the pressure writers place upon themselves to model their writing after native speakers of the target language. The value placed on the native speaker in a native/nonnative dichotomy has thoughtfully been questioned for many years (Firth & Wagner, 1997; see also Dewaele, 2018; Jain, 2022). Still, it appears that the comparison is present in the minds of L2 writers. While a writer's goals may differ depending on individual needs, there are noted potential differences between L1 and L2 writers, such as language proficiency and intuitions, writer identities, and culture, that may impact written products (Hyland, 2019). Graduate L2 writers have reported experiencing challenges regarding grammar and vocabulary choices in their writing (Liu & Morrison, 2021). Similarly, survey research of U.S. university faculty has reported writing as a common academic challenge for international students (Jin & Schneider, 2019).

Graduate students seeking support in their transition to L2 writing environments may pursue assistance in both organizational norms and linguistic accuracy in their work. This desire for explicit feedback on linguistic accuracy can conflict with tutor training practices in university writing centers. For example, Okuda and Anderson (2018) found that graduate students attending a university writing center were frustrated when their desire for feedback on linguistic accuracy was met with feedback on the organization of ideas and arguments. Tutors may need to deviate from traditional training practices, that save linguistic feedback until a draft is nearly complete, to focus on learner needs as they produce drafts (Yu, 2020). Since writing is a combination of both macroskills and microskills, attention to L2 writers' needs may require special attention to and training in providing feedback for linguistic accuracy.

Choices for Providing Feedback

Various choices must be made when deciding what to address in L2 writing feedback, the first of which is to consider the sociocultural context of the feedback. For example, prescriptive grammar used in an ESL setting may differ from the grammar used in regional and social variations of English employed by users within their speech communities (e.g., Holmes & Wilson, 2022; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). The decision as to which variation to emphasize is not necessarily a simple one. English used as an international language, not linked to a particular cultural context and meant for use in international communication, brought into a classroom or tutoring setting by students, may differ systematically from expected forms of local standard written English (McKay, 2018). Provision of feedback requires acknowledging that the needs of the writers will vary according to context.

When focusing on linguistic accuracy for microskills, understanding the target structure intended by a language learner is not always simple. Effective CF requires alignment between the source of the feedback, such as the teacher, and the learners' intentions, as well as deciding on a labeling strategy (Ferris & Hedgecock, 2023; Hyland, 2019). Considering how to identify errors detected in L2 writing is a meaningful step in student-centered CF.

Another set of decisions must be made for CF when identifying and labeling errors in linguistic accuracy. In a popular description of CF types, Ellis (2009) explained direct, indirect, metalinguistic, and reformulation feedback in the following ways: A direct correction identifies an error and provides the L2 writer with the correction. In contrast, indirect CF indicates that an error is present but invites the L2 writer to determine the correction themselves. Metalinguistic feedback provides an explanation of the type of error to the L2 writer and can include a set of codes referencing a list of explanations. Finally, in reformulation, the L2 writing is rewritten by the teacher or tutor using the target structure and returned to the student for comparison. Ellis

(2009) also noted the distinction between focused feedback, the correction of a limited number of error types, and unfocused feedback, which provides feedback on all errors present.

When tutors approach an error, they must consider whether or not there is a set rule to explain it. This distinction between treatable and untreatable errors was made by Ferris (1999) and later by Ferris and Roberts (2001), who argued that marking an untreatable error with an indirect code is not equivalently helpful to marking a treatable error with an indirect code. For example, providing the label ART for an article error is not the same as providing WC for word choice. The indirect label ART references a treatable error with an explainable rule, and this provides the L2 writer a place to begin self-correction. In contrast, WC indirectly indicates that something is incorrect, but the next step for this untreatable error may not be clear to the student. In the case of untreatable errors, providing more direct feedback is a logical step toward instructional scaffolding for these microskills.

Many different research studies have compared approaches to providing CF for linguistic accuracy in L2 writing. The level of error studied has varied widely, from a focus on one type of error (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010) to an examination of 23 types of errors (Chandler, 2003). Feedback for errors may be explained to students by grouping types of errors according to the level of impact the errors have on the writing (Kurzer, 2018a; Liu, 2008). Metalanguage explanations may be provided in various ways, including written or spoken forms (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Liu, 2008), or by using lists of labels for types of errors and their explanations (Chandler, 2003; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Kurzer, 2018a). Research has led to a general understanding that CF can be helpful for linguistic accuracy, and meaningful steps forward include asking about conditions under which feedback is most effective (e.g., Ferris & Kurzer, 2019; Ferris & Hedgecock, 2023). From a sociocultural perspective, it has also been argued that indirect feedback is not always clearly defined, and the degree of indirectness in CF should be adjusted to meet the needs of L2 writers as they progress toward self-correction (Storch, 2018).

Training to Provide Feedback

Choices made by teachers in the degree of focus on error types and the level of directness in feedback are important to researchers and practitioners because they impact the relative ease of instructional feedback and the degree of specificity available to L2 writers in interpreting the error labels used. It should be noted that the consistent use of feedback labels for CF is not intuitive. Training is essential for the provision of consistent and accurate feedback to L2 writers (e.g., Guénette & Lyster, 2013). The need for training in CF systems was demonstrated in Ferris' (2006) study with instructors who agreed to engage in a study using labels (coded feedback) to compare direct and indirect feedback but who deviated from the established plan. Instructors who were supposed to use indirect labels did so for only 41.1% of errors and used direct feedback on 45.3% of errors. They also used indirect feedback without labels for 5.6% of errors and unlisted labels for 4.4% of errors. Clearly, there are many options to address when selecting the feedback system to use with L2 writers, and training is needed for consistency.

There is a great deal of variability in the research literature on the types of errors addressed, the level of indirectness used to approach those errors, and the degree of focus on types of errors. Therefore, studying the choices of TESOL graduate students trained as tutors and their reflections as they provide feedback in one-on-one tutorial settings is a meaningful step forward in better understanding the teacher variable within CF research. Tutor perceptions warrant further investigation, considering that different labels can be used when different raters address the same written text for feedback, and even computer-assisted feedback can sometimes fail when it comes to being able to identify errors correctly (Hyland & Anan, 2006; Lavolette et al., 2014; MacDonald, 2016). Indeed, Ferris and Kurzer (2019) encouraged additional research on teacher provision of feedback, stating, "It seems obvious that the 'right conditions' for written CF being beneficial for student writers would begin with the teachers themselves" (p. 120). The current study employed a sociocultural approach to investigation (e.g., Storch, 2018) by focusing on tutor reflections on sessions and

interactions between tutors and students, under the framework that feedback instruction is a form of mediation while student writers learn and work toward autonomy.

Purpose of the Study

This study extended research literature on feedback for L2 writers by investigating the immediate post-session reflections and in-session decision-making processes of graduate students trained as tutors, who provided feedback on their one-on-one tutoring sessions with graduate-level L2 writers (students). Of interest in this study is identifying how tutors prioritized and addressed errors in tutoring sessions. The qualitative case study addressed this primary research question: How did graduate-level TESOL tutors approach L2 written errors in one-on-one sessions?

Methods

Participants

The participants in this study were two graduate-level TESOL students at a large Southeastern university in the United States who served as tutors for international L2 writers enrolled in graduate programs at the university. The tutor for the Spring 2023 semester, identified by the pseudonym Deniz, was enrolled in her first year of a Ph.D. program in education with a focus in TESOL, after completing an MA in TESOL. The second tutor, with the pseudonym Jade, served during the Fall 2023 semester. She was enrolled in her first year of an MA in TESOL. Data from sessions with four L2 writers across two semesters were used. The writers, all enrolled in PhD programs and identified by pseudonyms in this report, required advanced writing support and had diverse first languages, including Chinese, Korean, and Yoruba. All L2 writers were advanced users of English as defined by admittance into their university programs with test scores at or above 80 for the Internet-based Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or 6.5 higher on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). All L2 writers involved in this study voluntarily sought the assistance of the grammar tutoring service and attended regularly due to personal interest.

Context

The current qualitative case study explored how tutors addressed errors found in one-on-one tutoring sessions with advanced L2 writers. These sessions were provided as part of a free Grammar in Writing (GiW) service offered at the university, as part of a larger project that included free language support services for international students learning English. The larger project is an ongoing research digital data repository that houses collected reflections and materials from the free language support sessions. Those who volunteer to register for the free English language services provide informed consent for their sessions to be videoed and for their papers to be de-identified and kept securely in the repository, in accordance with the established project protocol at the university. The current study of GiW tutors involved using a portion of repository data and was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (#0006369).

The GiW service included focus-on-form and focus-on-meaning practices, think-aloud protocol, student-generated writing, and personalized instruction. The GiW protocol was inspired by Ellis (2006) who emphasized the value of instruction on meaning and grammar. The use of focused feedback in GiW aligns with findings suggesting that focused feedback is better for retention than comprehensive feedback (e.g., Rahimi, 2021). The protocol addressed the most problematic grammar errors (focus-on-form) drawn from student-created writing (focus-on-meaning). The purpose of using a think-aloud protocol (Ericsson & Simon, 1993), in which the tutor verbalized concurrent thoughts as they decided on and provided feedback to the student, was for the tutor to transfer their think-aloud to the student, demonstrating the process of finding,

describing, and providing corrections for those selected errors. The students would benefit from access to the tutor's metalinguistic feedback (Sheen, 2007).

At the beginning of the semester, each tutor was trained and instructed to follow the same GiW protocol in each tutoring session. The GiW protocol began with tutors implementing think-aloud protocols while the errors in the first paragraphs of the student writing were identified. This was followed by the tutor choosing a specific error to focus on, based on its prominence in the student's writing. Finally, the tutor invited the student to identify and correct the remaining instances of the targeted error in the paper. Immediately after each session, tutors self-recorded audio reflections, in which they discussed the error they focused on, as well as any challenges they felt within each session.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

We used data from GiW sessions conducted in the spring and fall 2023 semesters. Sessions spanned 10 weeks during a 16-week semester; data for this study included that from the first, fifth, and final weeks of GiW tutoring sessions. To qualify for inclusion, the session data needed to be from an L2 writer who engaged regularly in GiW during the semester, with no more than one absence. The decision to use session data from the beginning, middle, and end of a semester was to bracket potential patterns through time. Fifteen sessions were included in the data analysis for this study, six sessions in the spring semester with Deniz and nine sessions in the fall semester with Jade. Prior to each GiW session, the L2 writers were asked to share a two-page, self-edited writing passage. Each tutoring session lasted 30 minutes and was conducted over video conference call with screensharing enabled. The call was recorded and de-identified in accordance with established repository protocols. The session started with conducting a think-aloud protocol (Bowles, 2010; Ericsson & Simon, 1993), during which the tutors verbalized their thoughts as they identified and labeled errors. Tutors were instructed to find the most prominent, high-priority error in the L2 writer's work and to focus feedback on this error.

After the think-aloud protocol, the tutor explained patterns and rules underlying the targeted error, using the student's own writing, and followed this by asking the student to identify and correct the same error in the rest of the passage. The goal of each session was to help the learner identify and self-correct the most prevalent error type in the writing passage.

The primary data source for this study consisted of self-recorded audio reflections recorded by tutors after each GiW lesson and transcribed verbatim for analysis. These reflections provided information on the lesson's error focus and evaluated its success based on the student's ability to identify, explain, and self-correct errors. Video recordings of the lessons served as an additional data source or supplementary evidence for triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tracy, 2010). Furthermore, to enhance triangulation, the error labels used by tutors to mark student writing were noted and incorporated into the analysis.

Data Analysis

We focused on exploring how tutors addressed L2 writers' errors in one-on-one tutoring. The GiW protocol allowed investigation of what happens when tutors are asked to focus feedback narrowly on one primary error pattern. Generic qualitative coding (Saldaña, 2021) was used to analyze the tutors' immediate retrospective self-reflections, allowing the researchers to study underlying mechanisms of tutor choices. The exploration of errors chosen by tutors as the primary focus of each session provided insights into the subjectivity of error analysis in L2 writing, as well as tutor perceptions about errors and learner uptake.

The researchers initially coded the transcripts separately, using generic qualitative coding by employing descriptive codes, in addition to process coding to identify actions, such as negotiation (Saldaña, 2021). During their first meeting, the researchers compared and discussed their codes to achieve simplification and

agree on a codebook (Hemmler et al., 2022). They then returned to a second round of individual coding to apply the agreed-upon codebook and formed categories based on codes (Saldaña, 2021). Table 1 illustrates examples of these descriptive codes, definitions, and examples.

Table 1. *Descriptive Codebook With Definitions and Examples*

Code	Definition	Example
Session protocol	Comments made toward the GiW session protocol as it was followed or if the tutor deviated from the protocol	*And since the number of errors were really low, I also added some stylistic comments because this is such an advanced writer. Sometimes during the lesson, we discuss the grammar and then we have extra time.* (Deniz, session 2 with Abeo)
Error types	Comments made toward the types of errors covered within a session and their descriptions	*Now I labeled some article errors, there were four wrong form errors and a comma splice error in the first paragraph, so I decided to focus on wrong form errors.* (Deniz, session 1 with Huang)
Interaction	Comments describing dialogue between the tutor and the L2 writer beyond one-way tutor explanation	*Sometimes she needed guidance for me, sometimes she asked, "So how would you say this? How would you fix the problem? This is what I mean. But I don't really have a solution"* (Deniz, session 2 with Abeo)
Session evaluation	Comments about the impression of how successful a tutoring session was	*But I believe it was a successful lesson because the student was paying attention. And when she, when it was her turn to correct it.* (Deniz, session 2 with Abeo)

In their next meeting, the researchers used transcripts of tutor reflection data for comparison of codebook application and used their coding decisions to calculate an 80% intercoder agreement at this stage. Figure 1 illustrates the application of the codebook to an excerpt of reflection transcript data from spring 2023. The researchers proceeded to compare their proposed categories derived from the coded transcript data after discussing similarities and differences.

Figure 1. *Excerpt of Codebook Application*

[So in this lesson the student's writing contained minor errors, other than the first sentence (1)] [So the focus of this lesson was mostly on word forms. And in general word choices, we need to focus on vocabulary too (2)], [because there were only really two or three errors, and there wasn't really a pattern. So I focused on them individually (3)]. [And after I explained it, because this is academic writing, and I really need to be familiar with what the student was intending to say. We needed to discuss it and as we discuss it, "So what did you mean here?" The participant corrected some of the sentences by herself. And once I explained, the reason why some sentences are confusing, for example, there was a sentence where she used and when the things she was listing were not parallel, but it was it was more about the vocabulary rather than the grammar (4)].

Session Protocol (1, 3)
Error Types (2)
Interaction (4)

A detailed examination of the categories and transcript content associated with the codes led to theme identification. For example, the data coded with "Session protocol" revealed multiple instances of decisions to deviate from the narrow feedback protocol in GiW of one error pattern at a time. This difficulty in following the protocol for various reasons, such as a lack of connection between the errors present in a composition, became the subtheme "Connections between errors" within an overall theme of "Error focus" in GiW sessions.

The next stage of the data analysis involved watching the videoed GiW tutorial sessions and taking field notes. Field notes aimed to expand upon the initial categories from the tutor reflection data and to achieve triangulation by using different sources of data to corroborate findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; see also Creswell & Poth, 2018). Care was taken to observe the types of written errors that tutors addressed in the session video recordings. Interaction between the tutors and the L2 writers, as reported by the tutors and triangulated with session recordings, was also noted, since this related to the initial categories in the reflection data, as detailed further in the results section below. During their third meeting, the researchers collaboratively identified themes that uncover the underlying and apparent meanings revealed from both tutor reflections and session recordings (Saldaña, 2021).

Trustworthiness

Qualitative inquiry uses four classic criteria to establish trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility in this study was addressed using triangulation and member-checking (Tracy, 2010). Tutor reflection data were triangulated with GiW session video recording data and tutor notes that listed the feedback labels provided to each L2 writer during each session. Since both tutors were still involved with GiW (either as the repository research assistant or the current GiW tutor), the researchers were able to conduct member-checking for validation of themes in the results. Thick description of the results with detailed excerpts of data was used for transferability. Intercoder agreement was calculated as part of the data coding process and reached a satisfactory 80% (Saldaña, 2021). The use of multiple steps, starting with independent coding by researchers, followed by consolidation and simplification of codes, and culminating in discussion sessions to reach an agreement aligns with measures taken to ensure trustworthiness (Hemmler et al., 2022). Furthermore, during the data analysis process, both tutors conducted critical reflective exercises before data analysis to assess their pre-existing beliefs about addressing written errors, in order to notice, address, and bracket them (QR Collective et al., 2023).

Results

Three themes emerged underlying the tutor approach to L2 writers' errors in a one-on-one tutorial setting. These are (a) error identification, with sub-themes of negotiation, discipline-specific writing, and intended meaning; (b) error focus, with underlying sub-themes of connection between errors and treatable versus untreatable errors; and (c) learner uptake, presenting itself as a focus on metalanguage use and application.

Error Identification

All GiW sessions began with the identification of errors present in the students' L2 writing. Session data revealed ten feedback labels used for the identification of errors including Word choice (WC), wrong form (WF), word order (WO), missing article (ART-), extra article (ART+), extra comma (C+), wrong preposition (PrepW), agreement in number (AGR#), remove (X), and insert (^). Identification of errors, however, presented challenges, as the choice of what to label an error often required a better understanding of discipline-specific writing and intended meaning.

In multiple instances, negotiation between the tutor and the student occurred as they worked to determine whether an error was present in the case of field-specific terminology. This was especially common for article

errors that required the tutor to know the countability and specificity of the field-specific term. The need to fine-tune and negotiate led to rich dialogues. In a reflection for one of the sessions, Jade addressed how she needed clarification on mathematical terms to address article errors:

> The student is able to identify and correct article errors in the writing, as well as explain mathematical terminology to me, in order to find a correct article usage on their own or together, to justify their correct usage, or to correct incorrect usages, as well, showing a strong understanding of the rules regarding article usage. (Jade, fall '23, session 2 with Lian, reflection)

This need for fine-tuning was observed within the sessions as well. When the tutor was not sure about the grammatical nature of a term, the discussion would often be initiated by the tutor. Sometimes, the student would react to corrective feedback by explaining the concept to the tutor, as the expert in their own field. In the session referenced in the reflection above, the tutor revised her corrective feedback based on the student's explanation:

> OK, in that instance, then I would use "the." You're correct. Since this strategy is applying not to an equation and to actually selecting the portfolios, I misunderstood it. "The" is correct. It's specific because you're using this strategy. (Jade, fall '23, session 2 with Lian, video recording)

In addition to discipline-specific nuances, a related subtheme within error identification is the discussion of intended meaning. In her reflection for session 2 with Abeo in spring '23, Deniz explains this concept and how she needed to look further and take part in deep discussions with the student in order to identify errors and co-construct structures, based on what the student intended to say: "And there was a reduced adverbial clause that was used in the wrong way that we needed to discuss for a long time, take it apart, see what's going on there."

Regardless of the discipline-specific or general checks on intended meaning in the GiW sessions, the identification of errors required tutors to engage in negotiation with students to determine whether an error was present. This negotiation would sometimes involve sentences that looked grammatically correct: "So when you read the sentence, it looks grammatical. But when you dig into the meaning, it turns out that that was the wrong preposition or the wrong word. So, that took a lot of discussion." (Deniz, spring '23, session 1 with Abeo, reflection)

Reviewing the video of the session this reflection was based on revealed how the tutor attempted to discover the intended meaning for an ambiguous sentence—"Teaching has become my lifestyle as I teach with ease"—by initiating a discussion on that meaning. Deniz asked, "Did it become your lifestyle because you teach with ease, or do you teach with ease because it has become your lifestyle?" (Deniz, spring '23, session 1 with Abeo, video recording)

The tutor also explained how constant negotiation and discussion were integrated into the sessions. Even when prominent errors were not present, based on continued negotiation, the lesson would proceed. In such lessons, as the tutor would ask what the intended meaning was, errors would be revealed, and the student would be correcting their own errors in the process of scaffolded learning:

> We had only a small number of errors, but we still managed to keep going and discuss, see what's going on, take some sentences apart. So I think the student benefited from that. And also she was mostly able to explain what she meant, and reformulate her phrases and the clauses on her own with just a little bit of help and guidance. (Deniz, spring '23, session 1 with Abeo, reflection)

The identification of errors through negotiation, for discipline-specific writing and general meaning, was the first answer to how GiW tutors addressed L2 writers' errors in one-on-one sessions. Patterns for negotiation

within these subthemes remained consistent over the course of the individual semesters and also across semesters.

Error Focus

The GiW protocol specifically asked tutors to think aloud while identifying errors in the first portion of the tutoring session, before proceeding to select one error pattern to emphasize for the remainder of the session. The data shows that the protocol to select one error pattern was not always followed, and this choice to break from protocol had to do with the subtheme regarding finding connections between errors, as well as whether the errors present in the L2 writing sample were treatable or untreatable.

Tutor reflections from spring 2023 address moments of difficulty in selecting one error pattern across the semester:

> The problem is because she is advanced, you don't really see one prevalent error, but you see minor subtle errors here and there. And that is why it makes it a little hard to for me to focus on the regular GiW protocol. (Deniz, spring '23, session 1 with Abeo, reflection)

> So, in this lesson, the student's writing contained minor errors, other than the first sentence. So, the focus of this lesson was mostly on word forms. And in general word choices, we need to focus on vocabulary too, because there were only really two or three errors, and there wasn't really a pattern. (Deniz, spring '23, session 2 with Abeo, reflection)

> I really couldn't find a pattern. So, I focused on each of them. I explained each error that I saw. And in the rest of the paragraph in the passage, I asked the participant, "So how so you see, there's an issue here, how would you rephrase this? What would be the alternative phrasing for this?" And I kind of had to take this approach because I really couldn't find out one error to focus, and it was such a short piece of writing, and I wanted to meet the needs of the learner. (Deniz, spring '23, session 3 with Huang, reflection)

These reflections point to the challenge of connecting found errors in a way that could be condensed to one focus to follow the GiW protocol. The data suggest the challenge is attributable to the nature of advanced writing. When a small number of errors were present and included untreatable errors such as word choice, the tutor deviated from the GiW protocol to address the L2 writer's needs.

The L2 writing samples provided for use in the fall 2023 semester sessions showed more overall prevalence of treatable errors, such as choices between definite or indefinite articles and count/non-count corrections, in comparison to spring '23. It follows that the GiW tutor for that fall semester, Jade, was more easily able to identify connections between the errors to establish a pattern and keep to the narrow focus of the intended GiW protocol. Jade wrote: "We focused specifically on errors with article usage" (session 1 with Abeo, reflection). "We focused specifically on agreement count errors or agreements subject verb errors in their writing, as well as some smaller errors that came up" (session 2 with Abeo, reflection). "We continued to look at article errors in their writing, as well as a couple agreement count errors as they popped up" (session 3 with Abeo, reflection).

It is worth noting that, even with this narrower focus, Jade also addressed more types of errors per session as the semester progressed. A common overarching message in the reflections and tutoring session data was that the selection of error pattern focus (or lack thereof) was due to the advanced nature of the L2 writers. The presence of non-treatable errors, such as vocabulary choice, in cases where there were no clear patterns of treatable errors meant the tutors shifted focus from the GiW protocol to discussing vocabulary and style choices.

Learner Uptake

The purpose of GiW tutoring sessions was to help L2 writers develop their skills through uptake, and reflecting on the efficacy of a session was a common part of the tutor reflections. Tutors evaluated the success of a session in several ways, but the most prominent were in students' verbalization of metalanguage rules associated with the errors and in the ability to apply corrections to their own writing.

Examples of Metalanguage in Session Evaluation

The student was able to identify and locate article errors in their writing. And by the end of the lesson, they were able to explain why they would use a specific article or why they should use no article and instead pluralize a noun in the sentence, using targeted vocabulary like, "because it's specific and more than one." (Jade, fall '23, session 1 with Jeong, reflection)

The student was able to identify and correct article usage in the target language, as well as defend correct usages of articles in their writing, showing a pretty strong understanding of this concept. (Jade, fall '23, session 2 with Jeong, reflection)

The student was able to identify, correct, and explain article errors in their writing using target terminology, "because this is specific about these two things, it needs to use the." (Jade, fall '23, session 3 with Jeong, reflection)

Examples of Application as Uptake in Session Evaluation

And after some brainstorming, she was actually able to understand and come up with solutions to those errors, and she was able to fix it. (Deniz, spring '23, session 1 with Abeo, reflection)

I believe it was a successful session in which we really discussed with the participant, and she was actually able to comprehend those errors and correct them on her own. (Deniz, spring '23, session 2 with Abeo, reflection)

And when it came to her turn of rephrasing things, restructuring sentences, she did a better job and also even when I asked about alternative words that she could use instead of the ones that she chose, because there were many vocabulary errors as well, she was able to come up with alternatives. (Deniz, spring '23, session 3 with Huang, reflection)

It appears that when a treatable error pattern was present, the tutor was more likely to emphasize the verbalization of a metalinguistic explanation, with rules as to why the correction was needed and what changes to make. In contrast, tutor reflections on sessions with corrections due to word choice issues were more likely to discuss the success of a session in line with the participant's successful ability to make relevant changes to the writing, rather than the change and the articulation of a metalinguistic rule.

Summary of Findings

Three themes and their related subthemes emerged. Tutors needed first to identify errors present in the L2 writers' texts, and this process often required negotiation between the L2 writer and the tutor in terms of discipline-specific writing and overall intended meaning, before marking something as an error. Error focus was related to the GiW protocol training, which asked tutors to focus on one specific error per session, based on the most prevalent need in the L2 writer's text. Selecting an error type to focus on proved difficult in many cases in which there was not a clear connection between errors present in the student-provided texts. When working with these advanced L2 graduate-level writers, it was not always possible to find one clear pattern of error for correction by which to follow the GiW protocol. Whether or not the protocol was followed strictly came down to whether the errors present in the L2 writers' texts were treatable or not. In the case of treatable errors, patterns were possible to define and follow. Otherwise, the tutors deviated to address the L2 writers'

needs. For the last theme of learner uptake, tutors addressed the efficacy of their sessions with L2 writers by reflecting on learner uptake in one of two ways: either in observations of learners' ability to make corrections and defend the corrections by articulating a metalinguistic rule (as in the case with treatable errors) or in their ability to simply articulate appropriate corrections for their paper (as in the case of untreatable errors). Thus, the results describe the challenges associated with applying a strict feedback protocol for advanced L2 writers. The observations of the tutoring sessions and the tutors' reflections reinforce the importance of adapting feedback practices to meet the needs of L2 writers in the one-on-one setting.

Discussion

Integration Into the Current Literature

The GiW tutoring protocol instructed tutors to identify errors present in L2 writers' work and select from those errors to create narrowly focused feedback on one type of error in each session. Results of the study show that tutors deviated from this protocol for various reasons, including the need for negotiation with the L2 writer on discipline-specific writing and intended meaning. This interaction between the tutor and the L2 writer for the purpose of identifying errors is supported by the theory of fine-tuning, which claims that understanding the student's intention in communication is essential for avoiding mismatches in feedback (Han, 2001). Indeed, feedback has been described as an active dialogue between teachers and students (Maas, 2017). Conversations about writing and feedback with mentors were a salient aspect of the writerly journeys of successful L2 academics included in Crawford et al. (2016). Using the sociocultural approach, feedback instruction is a form of mediation, whereby feedback becomes a tool for students to use in developing their skills (Storch, 2018). Working within the zone of proximal development (ZPD) requires adjustment on the part of the instructor to provide not too much assistance nor too little assistance to encourage the goal of independence (Storch, 2018; Vygotsky et al., 1978). Through this lens, the tutors' negotiations with L2 writers as they decided on the provision of feedback constituted an adjustment made within the ZPD (Lantolf et al., 2016).

The challenge tutors experienced when instructed to focus feedback on one major type of error in the GiW sessions was related to whether there was an identifiable pattern between the errors found in the papers of their advanced L2 writer students and whether these errors were treatable. Notably, marking errors is not "one size fits all" (Ferris, 1999, p. 6). Coding systems like the one used in Kurzer (2018a; 2018b) acknowledge that different levels of errors exist, such as global, local, and mechanical. In the case of the present study, the distinction between treatable and non-treatable errors was useful in explaining some deviations from the GiW protocol. Treatable errors are errors with a clear explanation and rule that can be applied to corrections, unlike non-treatable errors (Ferris, 2018; Kurzer, 2018b). Treatable errors are not necessarily simple errors (Bitchener & Storch, 2016). In the cases where treatable errors, such as article-use errors, were present throughout the L2 writer's document, these were chosen as the focus of the session.

However, the presence of both treatable and non-treatable errors in a session with few errors present overall sometimes resulted in a deviation from GiW protocol in order to address the L2 writer's needs. These findings align with previous research on tutors who found it difficult to provide focused feedback and would sometimes mark errors that were not critical in meaning but were noticeable (Guénette, 2012). Similarly, the instructors in the McMartin-Miller (2014) study found it challenging to implement selective error treatment and concluded that, although instructors may have a well-reasoned and planned approach, they can still exhibit flexibility and adapt to student needs. In the case of the current study, the improvement seen in L2 writers' documents over time also led tutors to address multiple errors per session, which is an example of adjustments made to meet students' needs. This finding aligns with Yu (2020), who emphasized the dynamic and fluid nature of tutor roles while working with EAP writers.

Tutor reflections on session efficacy included comments about whether the L2 writer was able to articulate metalanguage about a grammatical rule or whether a student was able to apply knowledge to make corrections when asked by the tutor. The data revealed that more focused and treatable errors were the target of sessions where the tutor chose to emphasize metalinguistic explanation on the part of a student when reflecting on session efficacy. In contrast, tutor reflections on application as a measure of uptake aligned with sessions that had a wider error focus, with fewer treatable errors, such as word choice and word form. This finding could be associated with perspectives in skill acquisition theory (Dekeyser, 2007), whereby a learner can progress from declarative knowledge of rules to procedural knowledge, which is more automatic. It is possible that the lens employed by the GiW tutors, who were instructed to provide focused feedback on one error pattern in L2 writing, may have resulted in a more procedural expectation for efficacy in a session with treatable errors. In contrast, it is possible that a tutoring session with a wider range of untreatable errors necessitated a focus on application of corrections, rather than verbalization of rules to determine the success of a session. However, further research into the expectations of tutors is needed to better address how tutor perceptions of session efficacy are formed. Regardless of the reflections' focus, informal tutor evaluation surveys collected by the primary author in both semesters as part of GiW supervision reflected a high level of satisfaction from the participating L2 writers towards their tutors.

Limitations

A potential limitation of this study was that it used repository data that was already collected as part of an existing tutoring service. While rich in content, the use of existing repository data did not allow for follow-up interviews with tutors. The opportunity to member check the accuracy of themes and subthemes of the data was possible because of the tutors' continued work with the repository during the time of this study, but additional interview data for the purpose of analysis could not be collected due to the use of repository data. Another potential limitation was the lack of provided structure in the tutor reflections. Because tutors were not specifically given a prompt to structure their audio-recorded reflections, the length and content varied. We interpreted this lack of structure as an opportunity given to tutors to focus on what was genuinely salient in reflections. Lesson data was used to confirm findings from reflection data.

Implications for Theory and Practice

This study supports the need for flexibility in the provision of feedback to advanced L2 writers. Teachers and tutors should consider adjusting feedback practices to meet the needs of learners, with the knowledge that this flexibility may mean deviating from a planned feedback approach. Teachers and tutors working with L2 writers in academic disciplines outside their area of expertise should be prepared to ask questions about field-specific terminology and be open to negotiation. Through the notion of fine-tuning, the tutor does not need to be a subject-area expert. In fact, this negotiation with the L2 writer is an opportunity to engage the learner in a way that promotes agency during editing (Bitchener & Storch, 2016). Additional research on the negotiation aspect of feedback with perceptions from both L2 writers and instructors is recommended to help clarify this aspect of feedback provision within the sociocultural perspective.

We noted the variability in how tutors approach reflections on session efficacy and learner uptake. If a certain standard or goal is expected of the L2 writers receiving feedback, the tutors need specific training and ongoing supervision to ensure that the goals are being met. Further studies on how training for specific feedback practices translates to the reality of a classroom or in tutoring sessions are recommended to better understand when and why deviations from a feedback plan are made.

Conclusion

This study explored how tutors of advanced graduate-level L2 writers approached written errors in one-on-one tutoring sessions. The results of this qualitative case study show that, even though there was a strict protocol for the provision of feedback, tutors deviated from this plan to suit the needs of the students. Identification of errors required fine-tuning through negotiation with the L2 writers on subject-specific content and intended meaning. The selection of a narrowly focused error pattern in each session was not always possible due to the types of errors present in the L2 writing. Tutors also interpreted the efficacy of sessions in different ways, potentially reflecting the nature of errors addressed in the sessions, such as whether the errors were treatable or not. To quote Ferris (1999) again, corrective feedback is not "one size fits all," and different types of errors may require different types of feedback. The practicality of working with L2 writers may require changes to meet learner needs, even in circumstances that begin with a strictly planned protocol. More research is recommended to continue to investigate the teacher variable in corrective feedback for L2 writing and the connection to treatable or untreatable errors.

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