Writing development: A case study of the development of a second language speaker's academic literacy

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ABSTRACT

A major challenge for second language learners on academic programmes is how they develop their writing abilities. This study uses the framework of process writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hayes, 2012) and an autoethnographic research design data construction (Starfield, 2020; Yazan et al., 2020) to explore how one-second language learner changed how they planned their assignments and responded to feedback from their tutors on a one-year MA programme. Working with a critical friend, the author-researcher draws on six data sets: assignment briefs, guidance provided by lecturers, the author/researcher's outlines/plans for the assignments with comments from lecturers, notes on journal articles and textbooks, feedback from lecturers and personal reflections on the writing process. The author/researcher's development became more sophisticated in locating/ using sources and structuring her writing with language feedback impacting writing strategies rather than language knowledge. Her writing development was influenced by contextual features, particularly non-academic factors that limited the time she had for writing, and the structure of the assessment on her programme

scaffolded her writing in terms of increasing the length of assignments and the use of the author/researcher's own experience.

INTRODUCTION

An increasing number of second language learners are now studying for academic qualifications in English-speaking Universities. The process of writing assignments for these courses is demanding for second language learners and for students at universities where master-level programmes only last one year, typical of Australian and UK universities; developing appropriate writing skills is particularly challenging, but research into how such writers develop their skills is limited.

In the Flower and Hayes' model of writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hayes, 2012), the writing process comprises three elements: planning, translating (or drafting in other versions) and reviewing. See Figure 1. These are embedded within a broader context, particularly the writer's cognitive resources and the social or task environment. The present study focuses on two areas: planning, where research (Limpo & Alves, 2018; Sasaki, 2000) suggests that learner writers plan less than more experienced authors and the role of feedback within the reviewing element, where existing research is inconclusive about effective procedures (Han & Hyland, 2015; Truscott, 2015).

Process writing

Flower and Hayes's (1989) model of writing has been widely used to understand how novice academic writers learn to produce appropriate texts(Abdel Latif, 2021; Badger & White, 2000; Leki, 2006; Robinson, 1988). This model sees the writing process as happening within the context of writers' cognitive resources and the demands of the writing task. Flower and Hayes see the writing process as comprising three aspects: planning, translating (sometimes glossed as drafting) and reviewing, all of which are monitored by the writers. Planning requires that writers identify the goal of their text, generate content related to that goal and then organize the ideas into paragraphs in drafts in a rational manner and all of these are problematic for novice academic writers. Many assessment genres are not public(Green, 2013) and so writers often struggle to identify the goal of what they are writing and the content of the writing depends on "understanding and interpreting

source texts " (Wette, 2010: 167) so idea generation and organization may be problematic (cf. Myhill, 2005).

The reviewing process in academic writing is made more complex because the academic tutors provide feedback on the writing and "feedback is a key factor in students' development as writers" (Wilson & Post, 2019 p. 33) as well as being an almost universal feature of writing instruction (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Soden, 2013). Despite its importance, the impact of feedback on writing development is contested (Liu & Brown, 2015) and much research is critical of feedback, with Truscott(Truscott, 2015; Truscott & Hsu, 2008) arguing that grammar correction, for example, has no impact. The impact of feedback related to language is particularly salient for second-language writers.

Research into how second language learners plan their writing and response to feedback has been carried out in a range of ways, but ethnography is an important strand in this research. Leki's work, reported in a book-length study (Leki, 2007) and a series of article (Leki, 2003, 2006) is key here. She studied four international students over the course of their undergraduate studies in the USA. Leki adopted an ethnographic approach because she wanted to go beyond the examination of drafts of student writing to gain a "broader picture of what the academic side of college life was like for the four students in the study." Leki interviewed her participants approximately fortnightly over the course of their study, and these interviews were supplemented with interviews with academic tutors and observations of academic literacy classes.

Spack (1997) investigated one undergraduate over three years, also in the USA. She interviewed the students over the three years, observed some of her classes, and analyzed the texts she produced. Skyrme (2018) studied two students from her own academic writing course during their undergraduate programmes in New Zealand. Her data sets included transcripts of semi-structured interviews, email exchanges, documents associated with the assignments (instructions, readings, rubrics, etc.), students' scripts and markers' comments.

While ethnographic studies provide insights into how learner writers develop, they are constrained by the relationship between researchers and participants. Researchers are typically expert writers and have more power than learner writers. When learner writers talk about their writing process, they will be influenced by what they want the teacher or researcher to know. Studies also reflect researchers' decisions about what is important rather than what is valued by learner writers. A researcher may note when learner writers make a comment but cannot know when the same learner writers have an

insight into their writing process but say or write nothing. Only the learner writers know what they have understood (Badger, 2018). No matter how well an instance of advice from a teacher about writing is formulated, it will have no impact on the learner writers to whom it is addressed if they fail to understand it.

One way of addressing this gap in the literature is autoethnography, which "entails the scientist or practitioner performing narrative analysis pertaining to himself or herself as intimately related to a particular phenomenon" (McIlveen, 2008 p. 3). This is not a widely used research design, but Schmidt's seminal (1990) study of how he learnt Portuguese, though not described as autoethnography, exemplifies the approach, and we are starting to see instances of studies where the learner writers who are the subject of the study are also the authors of the reports of the research (Botelho de Magalhães et al., 2019) as well as more mainstream reflective investigations (Pennington-Russell & Hughes, 2017; Stanley, 2020; Tusting et al., 2019). In the field of academic writing, Li et al.(2023) have carried out an auto-ethnography of the three authors' experience as doctoral students in Australia.

We address the issues of planning and feedback through the following research question:

1. What insights can auto-ethnography provide into the ways a second language learner develops their goal setting, idea generation and structuring abilities in academic writing?

2. What insights can auto-ethnography provide into the ways a second language learner develops their ability to respond to feedback in academic writing?
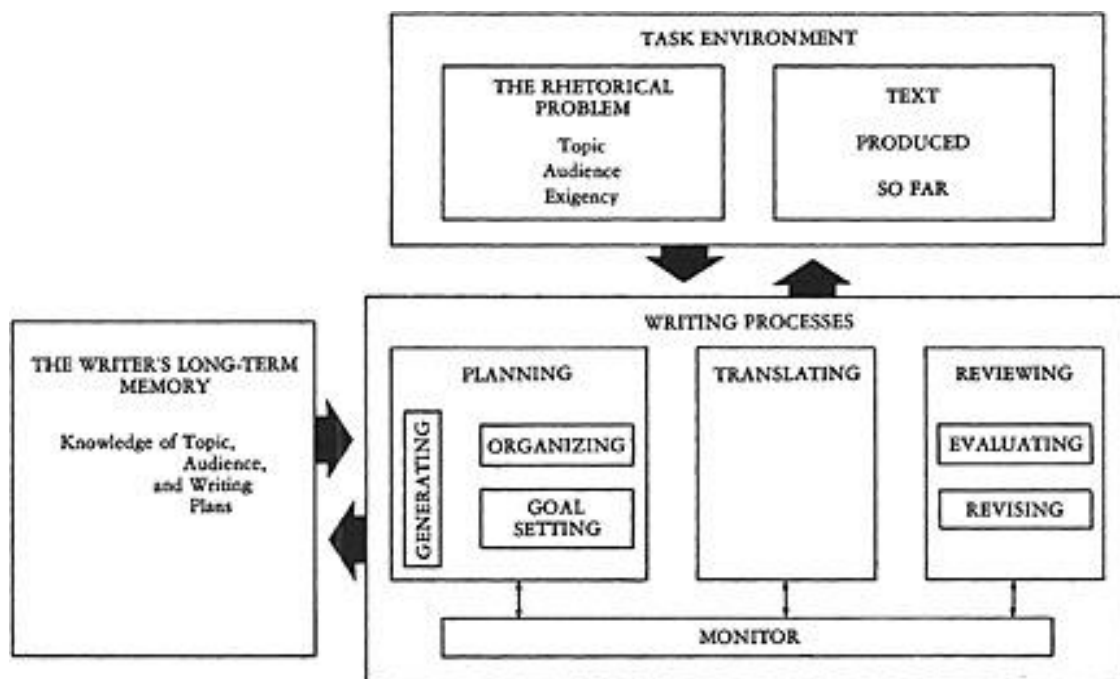
Figure 1. Flower and Hayes's (1981, p.370) process model of writing

METHOD
Research Design

While autoethnography seemed an appropriate research approach to academic literacy development, we wanted to ensure the robustness of the research and so followed Anderson's (2006) five guidelines for analytic auto-ethnography to ensure the robustness of the data. See table one.

Table 1. Anderson's (2006) guidelines for analytical auto-ethnography

Guideline	Strategy for addressing guidelines in this study
Complete member researcher status	The first researcher writes academic text in English as a second language.
Analytic reflexivity	The first researcher uses reflection to better understand both themselves and others through a systematic examination of relevant actions and perceptions.
Narrative visibility of the researcher's self	The researchers acknowledge their role in the research process.
Dialogue with informants beyond the self	The first and second authors discussed the data and analysis.

| Commitment to theoretical analysis | The purpose of the auto-ethnography is to go beyond the data to address the research questions. |

Instruments and Procedures

The research was conducted during a one-year MA TESOL program at a large research-intensive UK university, from September to September, with a focus on assignments written during the semesters, i.e. September to June.

The first author is a native speaker of Chinese and had studied English for ten years before coming to the UK. English was her undergraduate major. She obtained a score of 6 on IELTS in March 2017 and then attended a twelve-week pre-sessional at her UK University.

The research design was approved through local ethical approval procedures. The process of data collection and construction imposed a significant burden on the first author, so we only collected/constructed data related to half of the taught modules. In semester one, the two modules the student took had two three-thousand-word assignments, which were completed in each half of the semester, and we only collected/constructed data for one of the two assignments for each module. In the second semester, we collected or constructed data related to one module assessed by one six-thousand-word assignment.

 Six data sets related to the first author's writing processes were collected or constructed.   These data sets were accompanied by entries from the first author's diary. The first data set comprised four assignment briefs, including assessment criteria and reflections on the task required. This included seminar materials related to assignments, including the provision of sample assignments, emails between the first researcher and tutors and notes of face-to-face interactions (figure 2). The second data set comprised the outlines and plans of assignments (figure 3). The third data set included notes from lectures/seminars, journals and books (figure 4). The fourth data set was the full texts of submitted assignments (including drafts). Table 2 includes sample opening paragraphs. The fifth data consisted of the feedback on first and second drafts and both in-text comments and holistic summaries, including marks (figure 5 and Table 3). The sixth data set was constructed by the first author after the collection/completion of the other data sets and was made up of the writer's reflection on the writing process (figure 6).
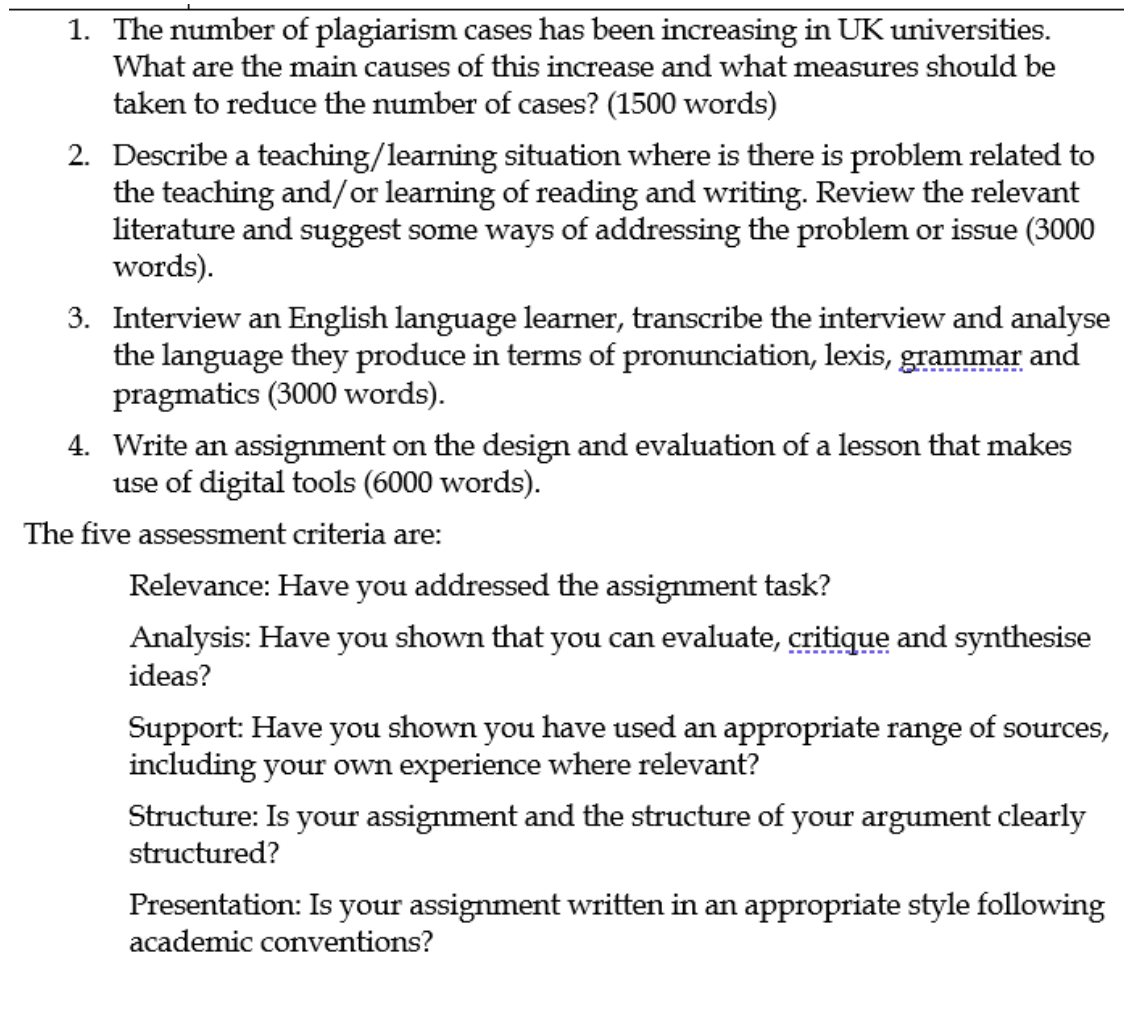
1. The number of plagiarism cases has been increasing in UK universities. What are the main causes of this increase and what measures should be taken to reduce the number of cases? (1500 words)

2. Describe a teaching/learning situation where is there is problem related to the teaching and/or learning of reading and writing. Review the relevant literature and suggest some ways of addressing the problem or issue (3000 words).

3. Interview an English language learner, transcribe the interview and analyse the language they produce in terms of pronunciation, lexis, grammar and pragmatics (3000 words).

4. Write an assignment on the design and evaluation of a lesson that makes use of digital tools (6000 words).

The five assessment criteria are:

Relevance: Have you addressed the assignment task?

Analysis: Have you shown that you can evaluate, critique and synthesise ideas?

Support: Have you shown you have used an appropriate range of sources, including your own experience where relevant?

Structure: Is your assignment and the structure of your argument clearly structured?

Presentation: Is your assignment written in an appropriate style following academic conventions?

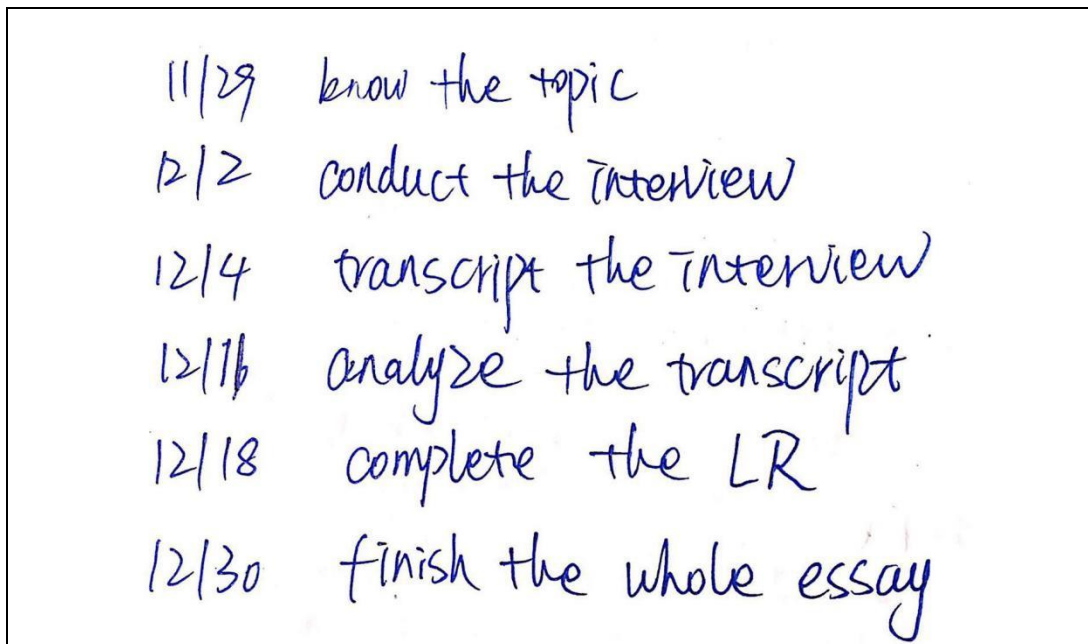Figure 1. Assignment briefs and assessment criteria.

Figure 2. The Writer's timeline for Assignment 3

Assignment one

Yet a further difference which is relevant is the assumed role of the individual student vis-à-vis their fellow students. In many cultures, especially those of Asia, achieving group consensus is more important than demonstrating one's own understanding and abilities. Such an attitude, of course, has deep socio-psychological roots. Speaking of the Japanese, Dorji (2001: 63) says that they 'learn from an early age to always consider themselves in relation to the group as a whole for wha...

> ASUS
> 2017/11/28 22:47:47
>
> I did not agree with this statement. What Chinese student seek for is the correctness of group work, instead of not willing to demonstrate personal understandings and abilities.

Assignment two

one that we suspect many students would find appealing. There is evidence that peer feedback enhances student learning (Falchikov, 2001) as students are actively engaged in articulating evolving understandings of subject matter. Peer feedback thus carries

> This statement could be used as evidence to support collaborative learning

Assignment three

this, he distinguished three sources of errors:
　　1. Interference errors: errors resulting from the use of elements from one language while speaking/writing anothe...
　　2. Intralingual errors: errors reflecting general characteristics of the rule learning such as faulty generaliza... incomplete application of rules and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply, and
　　3. Developmental errors: errors occurring when learners attempt to build up hypothesis about the target languag... the basis of limited experiences.
　　According to Richards (1971), intralingual errors are also subdivided to the following categories:

> Admini回复
> the sources of errors, be useful in data analysis

Assignment four

Larsen-Freeman (2001, 2003) offers "grammaring" – the ability to use grammar structures accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately as the proper goal of grammar instruction. The addition of "-ing" to grammar is meant to suggest a dy-

> direct quotation of grammaring

Figure 3. Sample notes on reading for assignments one, two and three.

Table 2. Sample opening paragraphs for assignments two, three and four

Assignment two

As one of the fundamental language skills, writing capacity is a tool of communication that China's high educational institutions highly value. However, because of the methods and materials of writing teaching, it seems that Chinese college teachers are engaged with less productive work, especially in giving feedback, mostly because of the large number of students in a class. Recently, peer feedback has been slowly introduced into Chinese colleges as supplementary to teacher feedback. Whereas it plays a limited role in writing ability improvement, the reasons for this will be explored in this essay to further facilitate EFL writing classes. And how to make peer feedback more effective is also crucial for writing improvement. Therefore, this essay will first introduce an example of the author's peer feedback in freshman year, along with the existing problems. The second section will focus on the relevant theories about writing peer feedback for L2 learners. The conclusion will offer several recommendations in accordance with the theories and problems for peer feedback on EFL writing ability for college students.

Assignment three

During the process of second language learning, it is impossible for learners not to make linguistic errors. The study on the causes and ways to deal with errors has lasted around 70 years. As time goes by, theorists and practitioners are testing those theories in a deeper manner. How to describe, analyze and use language learners' errors has been a hot debate for decades. Therefore, this essay will first critically discuss contrastive analysis theory, error analysis theory and interlanguage theory. The author also conducted a structured interview with an L2 learner to observe and analyze her errors. Finally, this essay also provides some suggestions for language development and language classrooms, respectively.

 Assignment four

The education sector has seen constant and vast changes in recent years, especially with the introduction of network technology. One of the most striking aspects of this is the implementation of Web Quests for English language teaching. This essay will concentrate on the use of a Web Quest in a Chinese training school to help with the grammar of the present perfect tense. The teaching objectives motivate the learners to be more engaged with teaching activities, apply the present perfect tense in reality and become more communicative. The essay will first describe the teaching context in terms of people, place, and time, then focus on the pedagogical and design rationale by referring to previous studies and critically analysing them to construct a theoretical foundation. Then, the lesson plan will comprise the introduction, task, process, resources, evaluation and conclusion elements, followed by the explanation of how the lesson plan will be carried out in the classroom. During this process, the major three technological tools used include YouTube and some official pages, but it mainly focuses on WebQuest. Finally, the conclusion will summarize all the points mentioned and provide recommendations for better learning performance using WebQuest.

In text feedback on assignment one

The concept of memorization and showing respect to authority is absolutely different from the definition of plagiarism. Moreover, one can cite the sources properly of the master minds by introducing their ideas, which can be viewed as behaviors of authority acknowledgement. It is common to find that students to memorize the remarkable works both in Asian and western countries. Just like the westerners refer to the author when introducing others' ideas or texts or paragraphs, Chinese also value the mention of the authors or sources, which is also encouraging as a respectful action. Anyway, via "reply to Dilin Liu", Sowden (2005) definitely interpreted the effect of learning style, which then fostered a tendency of plagiarism. I stand on his side because Chinese learning styles are not seriously involved with creativity. Besides, it is true that Asian culture, such as Japan and China, emphasize on group contribution. Dili made a valuable point that western culture also values the group work. But their groups have different purposes.

Comments (right margin):
- Not an appropriate transition word
- This sentence is vague
- as
- delete
- word choice
- delete
- delete

Summative feedback on assignment one

I'm afraid this case study does not meet the requirement of a master's level assignment. There are several incoherent and ungrammatical pieces which are very difficult to understand. Please note that you need to carefully proofread and revise your work. You have attempted to address some of the required components of the assignment task. But overall, I found the assignment incoherent. The review of the literature was very difficult to understand and the analysis was mainly descriptive. There is some understanding of the main ideas. The assignment is mainly descriptive with limited discussion. There is some use of relevant sources to support your discussion. But you have not demonstrated that you have understood the main concepts. For example, your definition and explanation of interlanguage was far from clear. Your assignment has a clear structure but there are still specific gaps and inconsistencies which make it difficult to follow your argument. You have not observed the presentation conventions and language errors seriously affect comprehensibility.

Level 5	20 – 39	40 - 49	50 -59	60 - 69
Relevance *Have you addressed the assignment task?*	You have not addressed the assignment task.	You have addressed some of the required components of the assignment task.	You have addressed most of the required components of the assignment task.	You have fully ad... the required com... the assignment t...
Analysis *Have you shown that you can evaluate, critique and synthesise ideas?*	This is largely descriptive, with little evidence of understanding of the basic ideas, and without discussion or critical analysis.	There is some understanding of the main ideas with an attempt to relate ideas and experience (where relevant). The assignment is mainly descriptive with limited discussion.	There is a clear understanding of the main ideas linked with your own views and experience. There is criticality but limited synthesis in the discussion.	There is a clear a... discussion. You have criticall... different points o... included insightf... experience and p... ideas. There is some sy... reflective apprais... implications.
Support *Have you shown you have used a range of appropriate sources (including experience where relevant)?*	There is little or no evidence of reading in the area to support your discussion.	There is limited reading in the area and the sources are too few or insufficiently relevant to support your discussion.	There is some use of relevant sources to support your discussion.	There is compete... convincing use of... relevant sources... your discussion.
Structure *Is your assignment and the development of your argument clearly structured?*	The text does not have a clear structure and it is hard to see how the argument develops.	The text of your assignment has some structure and you have begun to develop the argument but gaps and inconsistencies make it difficult to follow your thinking.	Your assignment has a clear structure and the development of the argument is sufficiently sustained but there are still specific gaps and inconsistencies.	The structure of y... assignment and t... development of t... are systematicall... explicitly organiz... significant incons... provide overall c...
Presentation *Have you followed the conventions related to length, layout, language use and referencing?*	You have not observed the presentation conventions and language errors seriously affect comprehensibility.	You have observed some of the presentation conventions. Language errors occasionally affect comprehensibility.	You have observed most of the presentation conventions. There are some language errors but these do not affect comprehensibility.	You have observe... presentation con... there are minima... errors.

Figure 4. Feedback on assignment one

Table 3. The Writer's marks for the assignments

Assignment	Mark
Assignment one	48
Assignment two	64
Assignment three	46
Assignment four	55

For this time, I read and analyzed the comments carefully. I realized the importance of doing proof reading for writing quality. As a result, I was heavily criticized because of my language errors and inconsistency among paragraphs and sentences, which I bore in mind deeply for the following assignments. In addition, the instructor stated it was hard to comprehend the literature review, which reminded me of the writing audience was not to someone really professional on this aspect, but to make common readers readable and understandable. Moreover, literature review should never be too descriptive but should involve more discussions from different authors critically.

In the feedback, though there were no details about grammatical errors or clear suggestions centered on sentences or paragraph, it focused more on a whole picture, which provided me the chance to revise the structure, the ideas and anything that needed further supplement or deletion.

As a result, I checked the grammar in every sentence and the inconsistency among sentences and paragraphs and parts carefully. After spending two days on proof reading, I was confident it would be good one.

Figure 5. Sample diary entry on assignment one

FINDINGS

In the description below, the capitalized Writer refers to the first author as a learner writer rather than a researcher. Capitalisation also indicates an assessment criterion (e.g. Relevance) instead of using the term more generally. The data were analyzed thematically, using the research questions as our initial categories. We related the feedback to the second research question but also used the feedback on final drafts to measure the Writer's process with comments under the heading of Relevance connected to goal setting, comments under Support and Analysis to idea generating and comments under Structure to organizing.

This first section of the findings addresses research question one:

> What insights can auto-ethnography provide into the ways a second language learner develops their goal setting, idea generation and structuring abilities in academic writing?

Goal setting

The writer's approach to goal setting changed over the course of the study. She was initially confident about her understanding and made the following comment on the brief for assignment one:

> At first glance, the objective of the assignment was clear so that there was no need to do further research about the assignment to confirm the title. The title of the assignment would be "Discussion on the causes and prevention of plagiarism". I thought what the assignment should focus on was the definition of plagiarism, causes and prevention in a descriptive way and then discuss different ideas in the provided articles. For example, I should read Liu and Sowden, and write something like "Sowden stated that ... and Liu stated that ...". That would produce a passing assignment (Diary).

The writer failed the first assignment, and the feedback noted that she had only addressed some of the required components of the assignment. This made her more cautious about the second assignment.

> The key words were "a teaching or learning situation", "problem", "literature review" and "suggest" after reading the task description. Reflecting on my personal experience and what I had been learning in MA courses, I recalled many Chinese college students' writing was too much affected by L1 and at that moment, I acquired the concept of language transfer, error analysis and contrastive analysis which had impacts on writing competency. Consequently, I planned to take "the relationship between writing and L1" as my title. However, as the first marked assignment, I was not confident it was directing the right path so I sought for tutor M's advice (Diary).

She communicated with the tutor by email:

> Dear X
>
> I am X, a student in MA TESOL. I am sorry to interrupt you but I have a problem about my assignment. I have planned to study the writing problems in Chinese higher education institutions, especially about the negative impacts of first language towards the writing. Firstly, I will describe the writing errors for those college students, mainly from the first language perspective, and then I will use the theories of language transfer theories, mainly error analysis, contrastive analysis and interlanguage theory to analyse those errors. And the third section will focus on the recommendations.
>
> Please be kind to tell me whether the plan will work. I get a little confuse whether the errors description make a situation or not.
>
> Thanks a lot.

The tutor responded by email:

> The topics you've suggested is pretty interesting. However, rather than focussing on error analysis and transfer, it might be better if you focus on the process of writing, theories of learning … This might make your assignment more focussed and aligned with what we have discussed in our three sessions on writing.

The Writer responded:

> Thanks for you quick response. I have not written the section on the problem. I will aim to describe the wrong roles of teacher and students, the lack of genre input, ignoring the process of writing but focussing too much on the product and not enough on the processes of writing tasks, writing process, feedback giving and commenting on writing. I notice you use the terms "issue and problem". Does this mean I must focus on one problem, instead of two or three?

> Thanks very much.

The tutor replied:

> The issue/problem section is the most important part of the assignment. The issue you had suggested seems interesting. I think it would be best if you focus only one issue rather than two or three as you might not have enough space to address then all adequately.
>
> I hope this helps.

The Writer then asked for a face-to-face meeting with the tutor. She said this "helped me a lot [and] … was more effective than emails to communicate with on some complicated problems, yet due to my limited language skills and my respect to the tutor, there might be occasions not understanding everything he commentated" (Diary). This led her to decide that she would write about peer feedback. This strategy led to success, and the Writer obtained a score of 65 in the merit band with a merit rating for Relevance.

Assignment three was different from the first two assignments in that it required that the Writer collect data by interviewing a language learner. This meant that a smaller proportion of the assignment could be devoted to the literature review.

The module tutor offered advice to the whole cohort about the assignment.

> [This] was advantageous to explain the hidden ideas of assignment instructions within a short time and offer an opportunity for students to solve their problems spontaneously. The shortcoming was that with a large number of students in only one writing conference, the tutor could not fully attend to everyone's demands (Diary).

The Writer made notes on the advice offered by the module leader about the assignment (see figure 5) and made some changes to her organizing processes described below but did not contact the tutor: "For me, I did not intend to bother the tutor too much" (Diary).
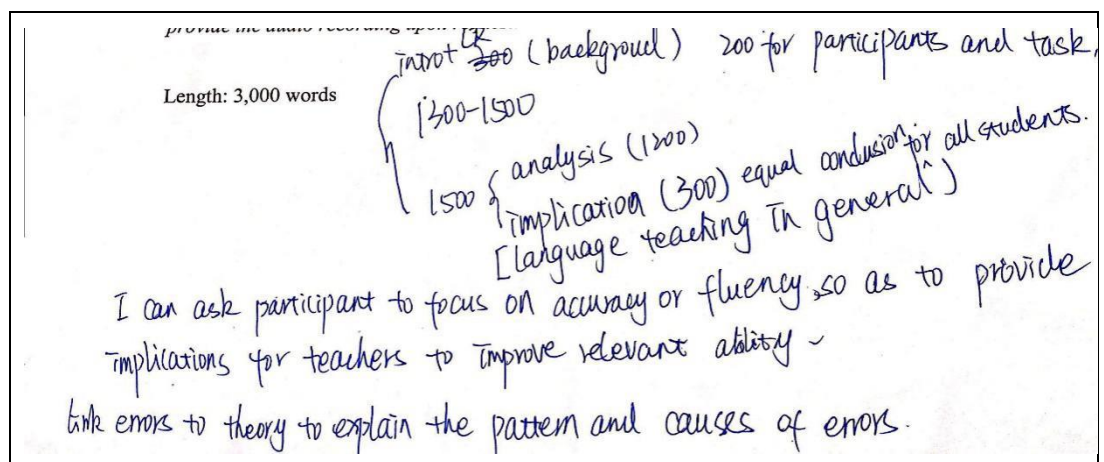
Figure 1. The Writer's notes on the tutor's advice about assignment three.

As with the first assignment, the Writer did not do well on assignment three. The feedback read:

> You have attempted to address some of the required components of the assignment task. But overall, I found the assignment incoherent. The review of the literature was very difficult to understand and the analysis was mainly descriptive.

Again, the issue was that the Writer had not addressed all the components of the task and the Relevance was rated as unsatisfactory.

For assignment four, the Writer "better understood the assignment as the lecturer explained the keywords were 'technology' and 'language learning'" (Diary). However, she again wrote to the module tutor:

> Dear Y
>
> Hi, I planned to start my assignment for module XXX and found an interest in "web quests", but also found the topic of web quests exist in samples, so I was wondering whether it is okay for me to write about it? I do admit if focus on this topic, there will be some parts overlapped with the sample ….. Thanks for everything!

The tutor responded briefly:

> Thanks for this. It is fine to do the assignment on web quests.

The Writer then had a face-to-face meeting with the tutor which was more successful than the face to face meeting about assignment two.

> I just had a small talk with the tutor Z, she explicitly answered to my puzzles exactly (Diary).

The Writer then looked at:

> the available Web Quests online, I found it was more proper to study the present perfect tense as it was only about one grammatical rule. Therefore, the evaluation would be more measurable and it would give enough space to design different activities. I recalled my memory as an English teacher working in an institution for high school students, who had problems to master the grammatical rules. I decided to take them as my research object and design Web Quest lesson material for them.

The Relevance of her assignment was satisfactory.

Generating ideas

We examine how the Writer generated ideas in two stages: first, how she identified relevant reading and, secondly, how she took notes on her reading. This reflected our understanding of the difference between the Support and Analysis assessment criteria.

For assignment one, the assignment brief gave the topic of the essay and identified three articles that should be read to address the assignment.

The second assignment required the Writer to identify her own topic. After an email interchange and a face-to-face meeting, the writer decided to focus on improving student writing using peer feedback. She used the library catalogue to search for books and articles using keywords of "peer feedback", "peer feedback, writing process theory", "peer feedback, cooperative learning theory and ZPD", and "peer feedback, Chinese students, writing." In her final draft, she had thirty-three references. The feedback on the assignment said that she had used "relevant sources to support your argument" and Support was graded as good.

For assignment three, the Writer spoke to other students on the module and was advised to look at the sample assignments. She read the samples and "totally got the hang of my questions", and this helped her decide what sources she should use:

> I noticed all the theories used in the sample assignments were from lectures, which reminded me of the importance of [lecture] handouts. Students should use it not only to get a basic understanding of the essential theories and frameworks, but also the core of the assignments. Before that moment, I thought the expected theories and literature review could be anything related with the topic (Diary).

The Writer's search was based on recommended readings in books and journals from the handouts from class related to theories of language acquisition, error analysis, interlanguage, language transfer and socio-cultural theory. She had twenty-two sources in the final draft and felt this was limited.

> What should be mentioned was that my literature review was narrowed to a few books because I thought it was enough to introduce people like Ellis's ideas into the assignment (Diary).

The two assignments were 3000 words long, but the requirement of data collection and analysis in the third assignment allowed less space for a review of the literature. The feedback on the assignment rated the Support from sources more highly than Relevance as being at passing level but an in-text comment suggested that she needed more recent references.

For assignment four,

> I put key words, "WebQuest, language learning", "WebQuest, theory", "WebQuest, inquiry", "online learning, theory", "technology, language learning", "digital, language learning" into university library search engine and Google scholar, through which, I was more certain the literature review should be about "constructivism, scaffolding and comprehensible input". In addition, as the core of the material was to solidify knowledge of present perfect tense, it was essential to figure out how learners comprehend and master the grammatical rule. Accordingly, I searched for

> "grammar learning", "language grammar theory" and "English grammar" and got what I intended to collect (Diary).

This assignment was 6000 words long, and the Writer had 46 references in her final draft. The comment on Support in her feedback said, "You have read a good range of sources. This is satisfactory."

We now turn to the Writer's note-taking processes which we take to be connected to her ability to analyse her reading. She annotated most of her reading on her laptop. See Figure eight and Figure nine. The notes here suggest that the Writer was focused on her response to what she had read. In the feedback on the assignment, the tutor said, "There is criticality but limited synthesis", and put this on the border between a pass and fail.
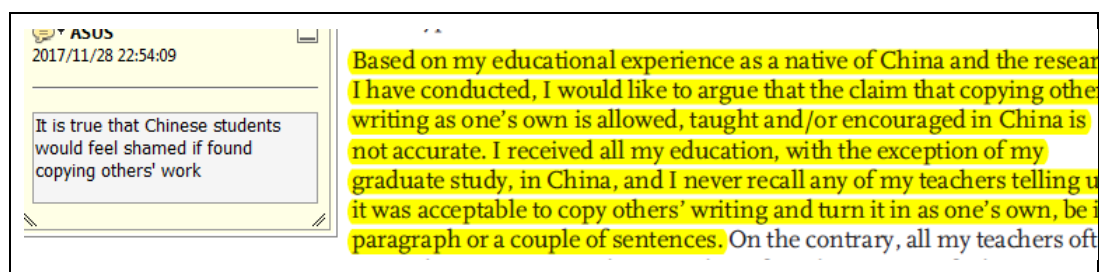
Figure 2. The Writer's annotation of reading for assignment one

By assignment two, the Writer was moving away from what she thought about her reading to how she could use her reading in the assignment. She also attended a writing workshop where she received the following advice:

> The way most writers work is they construct a 'critical conversation' i.e. they introduce an issue and then show what A has said about this, and then explore the limitations or problems of A's view using B, and C, and then explore the limitations of B and C's views, maybe using A or D or their own experience. What this 'critical conversation' achieves is a movement towards an understanding of an issue, an understanding of different perspectives on that issue, and the writer's conclusion about it.

From the above instruction, the Writer "realized the distinctions between description and critical writing, of which the latter contained more than description, but also contrast, comparison, synthesis, evaluation, conceptualization to judge something." She aimed to organize her literature review critically and this was reflected in how she commented on her reading. See figures 8 and 9. The tutor's comments on analysis referred to the lack of synthesis in the literature but did say that the Writer had used her sources to support her argument. The analysis was rated as good.
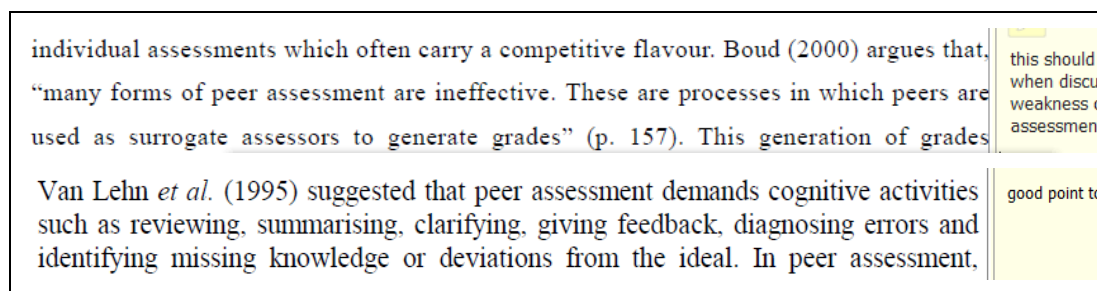
individual assessments which often carry a competitive flavour. Boud (2000) argues that, "many forms of peer assessment are ineffective. These are processes in which peers are used as surrogate assessors to generate grades" (p. 157). This generation of grades

this should when discu weakness o assessmen

Van Lehn *et al.* (1995) suggested that peer assessment demands cognitive activities such as reviewing, summarising, clarifying, giving feedback, diagnosing errors and identifying missing knowledge or deviations from the ideal. In peer assessment,

good point to

Figure 3. The Writers annotation of reading for assignment two

The Writer adopted a similar approach for assignment three. This process was interrupted by a visit to China.

> I spent about two weeks handling jetlag issues before I reconsidered the assignment. I was not idle even though I could not focus on writing for the next two weeks. However, as the deadline was approaching, I forced myself to read and write it (Diary).
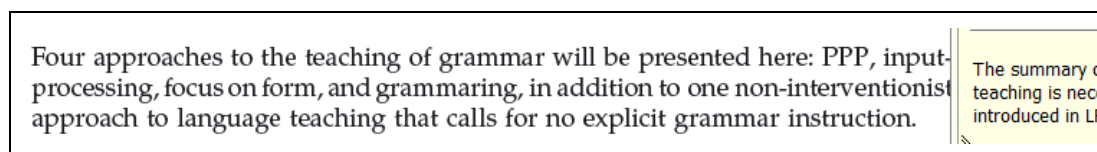
When she did start writing her focus was on the analysis of the data she had collected.

> For the data analysis sector, I firstly reviewed and examined how it was conducted in three sample assignments, and noticed they connected the literature review part closely with data analysis, which method I should adopt in my case. After reading the audio transcripts three times, as the assignment suggested I concentrated on errors. I read the transcript carefully line by line to identify and categorize the errors into phonological, lexical, pragmatic errors, after which I would not be distracted by seeking for errors while writing. Thereafter, I spent one and half days accomplishing data analysis (Diary).

She also said, "I found it easy to analyse the data … categorized the errors, analysed their causes and impacts." However, the analysis in the assignment was not rated as being a pass, and the tutor commented on the lack of a connection between the literature and the data analysis with one in-text comment:

> Are these related to any of the issues you discussed in your literature review?

For assignment four, the Writer adopted a different approach, focusing partly on identifying appropriate quotations for her assignment. She cut and pasted sections of her reading into her notes and these appeared as quotations or paraphrases in the final assignment. See Figure ten. The final draft was evaluated as satisfactory but said, "You demonstrate an ability to reflect."

Four approaches to the teaching of grammar will be presented here: PPP, input-processing, focus on form, and grammaring, in addition to one non-interventionist approach to language teaching that calls for no explicit grammar instruction.

The summary o teaching is ne introduced in LF
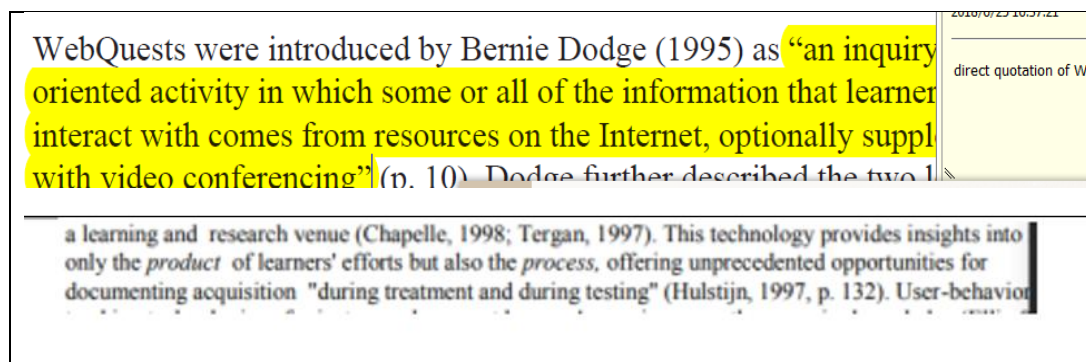
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Figure 4. The Writer's annotation of reading for assignment four

For assignment four, she used the same strategy of annotating her reading but also included unannotated sections of text. She read her notes multiple times and when it came to organising was able to draw on how she had taught the present perfect without technology before the course. This assignment was rated as satisfactory in terms of sources.
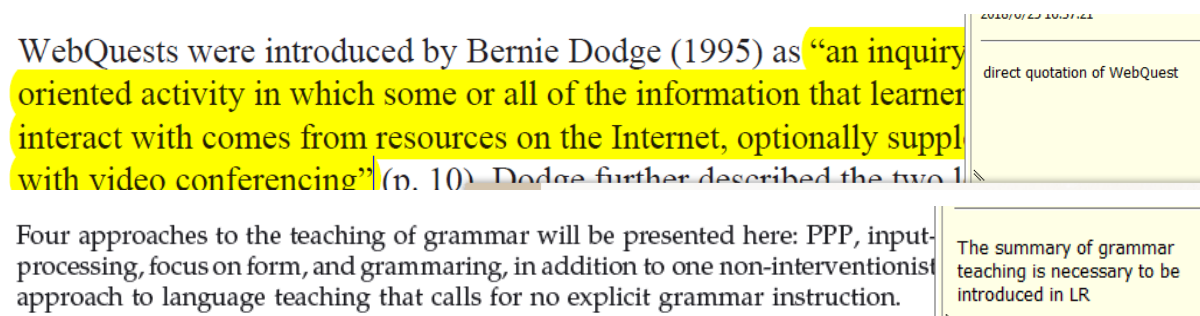

Figure 5. Annotated texts for assignment four

In terms of identifying sources and notetaking, the Writer finds it easier to adopt a critical understanding of her literature when she can relate it to her own experience, as in assignments two and four, than in relation to what she has read about. The Writer's approach to assignment four was the most sophisticated. While this may be accounted for by the Writer's internal development, it is also connected to the fact that assignment four was the longest piece of work that the Writer had produced.

Structuring

The Writer started her planning with a three-part structure. For assignment one, she wrote:

> the structure was clear: the introduction would briefly describe the importance and current situation of plagiarism, the body would be composed of the causes and prevention of plagiarism underpinned by theories and concepts from articles, and

personal experience of plagiarism, the conclusion would give personal views about it and summarize the main contents (Diary).

The assignment was largely written in one day after the Writer had made notes on her reading.

My train of thoughts was clear and definite. What I needed to do was to organize the ideas from the three articles. With ideas, structure and theories supported in hand, I found it easy to finish the assignment (Diary).

The structure of the final assignment was rated as unsatisfactory. The comment was that the essay "had some structure but gaps and inconsistencies make it hard to follow your thinking."

After communication with her tutor about the second assignment, the Writer said she "planned the structure of the draft in my mind, including introduction, description of the context and the problem, literature review, solutions and conclusion", a more complex version of the introduction, body and conclusion of assignment one but, partly as a result of advice from her tutor, this had been reconfigured in what might be called a problem solution pattern(Hoey, 1991). The structure of the assignment was rated as good, and the tutor commented:

Your assignment has a clear structure and the development of the argument is sufficiently sustained but there are still specific gaps and inconsistencies.

For assignment three, the Writer started with the following structure: "introduction, literature review, data analysis and implications." See Figure 2 for the Writer's timeline for this assignment. A comment on her draft mentioned the lack of an introduction, and the writer added an introduction to the final draft, which was rated as unsatisfactory overall, although the tutor thought the structure was satisfactory.

The Writer found it hard to construct the overall structure of assignment four, but after consulting with the tutor and analysing sample assignments came up with the following structure, which incorporated a timeline:

Introduction (June 13)
Literature review (March 16)
Pedagogical rationale (April 19)
Lesson plan design (April 30)
Implementation (May 20)
Evaluation (June 10)
Conclusion (June 13).

She commented, "Besides, based on the planned essay structure, I was confident about the content" (Diary). The assignment was a pass, and the Structure was rated as satisfactory, with the comments that the overall

structure was clear but that the pedagogic rationale weakened the logical connections.

The Writer's approach to structuring her writing became more sophisticated with the incorporation of timelines and drawing on the problem-solution pattern in assignments two and four. Except for the first assignment, the Writer's Structure was rated as being satisfactory, even in assignment four, where the word length was double what she had previously produced.

In general terms, the Writer's development was not linear but did improve over the length of the study. Her development was affected by the structure of the programme, in terms of the increasing length from 1500 to 6000 words and the requirements of the task. In assignments two and four, which required a consideration of teaching experience, the Writer demonstrated higher levels of criticality and a more complex structure. She was also affected by factors outside the programme. For example, her writing was negatively impacted by the trip she made to China.

Planning

In general, we can say that the writer's strategies for planning became more diverse in the programme. Firstly, she learned that she needed to plan different kinds of writing and draw on different kinds of resources, with greater trust in her own experience and judgement about what to include and exclude. These changes were encouraged by the fact that the lengths of what she had to write increased throughout the programme.

Feedback

This section addresses research question two:

> What insights can auto-ethnography provide into the ways a second language learner develops their ability to respond to feedback in academic writing?

For assignments two, three and four, students could submit a draft of up to 50% of the assignment word length. Tutors indicated aspects for improvement where the assignment was in danger of failing but did not give the writing a mark. On both drafts and final submissions, students receive general feedback and specific in-text comments on each piece of writing.

Assignment one

Assignment one was given a failing grade. The Writer was "shocked". The Writer went through all the language-related feedback on the assignment and made a list of what she saw as the most significant problems with language.

compare "moreover" with "furthermore"
just as, instead of "just like"
attention to "via", check it in dictionary
emphasise + Noun
make sth easy
try not to use long sentence
keep proofreading for the assignments
make efforts to express ideas clearly

Figure 6. The Writer's language problems in assignment one

Assignment two

When she was writing her second assignment

> I made great efforts to do proofreading based on my reading experience of journal articles and books recommended by the lecturers, especially learning the collocation and sentence structures the authors used. In addition, I also highlighted the vocabulary".

Figure ten lists hedging devices that the writer found useful, though hedging did not appear in the comments on assignment one.

It + verb	*Expressions of degrees of certainty*
It is generally accepted that ...	perhaps
It seems to be the case that ...	tend to be
While it cannot be denied that ...	arguably
X seemed to be ...	probably
X would allow for ...	clearly
Expressions of frequency	*Expressions of quantity*
frequently, generally	A significant number of
not always, sometimes	A basic knowledge of
usually, often	
Modal Verbs	*Choice of verb*
can be stated	appears
could be concluded	indicates
might be overestimated	suggests
may be regarded as	

Figure 7. Common hedging devices

The feedback on the Writer's first draft for assignment two indicated that the Structure and Support were satisfactory. Fourteen in-text comments were included, of which five referred to problems with referencing, reflecting the fact that the Writer had decided not to include any dates for her references in the draft, and three comments were on the choice of vocabulary and the same number on a sentence being vague. One comment advised against using long sentences, echoing a comment on assignment one. The Writer's response was:

> I determined to be more careful when using long sentences. The other problem was my vague using of words and sentence. When involved with revision activities, I read the draft twice to check whether the paragraphs and sentences were logically sequenced and making sense, even for the parts not given feedback.

The general feedback on the assignment was positive, and there were fifteen in-text comments, five of which were good or related items, four related to language, three to content, two to vagueness and one to a specific lack of criticality.

Assignment three

Twelve in-text comments were made on the draft, three of which referred to general language issues. The Writer was able to address most of the comments made on the draft, but a lack of time meant she did not proofread her assignment. The tutor provided twenty in-text comments on the final submission, eight of which were related to language. The general comments included the following:

> There are several incoherent and ungrammatical pieces which are very difficult to understand. Please note that you need to carefully proofread and revise your work.

The Writer said that she "analysed the comments carefully. I realized the importance of doing proofreading for writing quality" (Diary).

Assignment four

The draft assignment received fourteen comments, only two of which related to language but the tutor commented:

> You'll need to work on the accuracy of language use and reference styles in your final assignment as well. …. Check use of English generally. You're not using the word 'accepted' correctly, for example. Also, avoid sexist language (use of 'he' for 'she/he' or 'they').

In the process of writing, the Writer said, "I focused on the mistakes I had made and avoided them as much as I could, like the inconsistency in sentences and grammatical errors…. After spending two days on proofreading, I was confident it would be a good one". The assignment was given an overall mark of 55. Of the twelve in-text comments, two referred to language, one was about grammar and one about spelling. The lemma "accept" did not appear in the final draft.

Over the nine months of the study, the Writer's language remained an issue. The feedback on this issue was general and we did not identify any instances where a piece of feedback led to a change in linguistic accuracy. However, feedback was read carefully by the Writer, as shown in her list of her own language problems after the first assignment. The most striking impact was that the Writer devoted more time to proofreading, something which impacted her writing quality. The feedback supports the point made in the

literature about the limited impact of language related feedback and the need for specific advice. Comments about vague language and overly long sentences seem to have little impact.

DISCUSSION

The discussion focuses on the Writer's language development and on the implications of the research design for future research. The Writer's development was not smooth but she did develop as a writer over the nine months of the study (cf. Abdel Latif, 2021). This was a movement to greater sophistication in how she found and processed the sources she read writing and how she structured her writing. It is also striking how far her writing development was influenced by contextual features. This confirms Leki (2003, 2006) and Skyrme (2018) point that what happens outside the classroom has a major impact on writing development. These features include the fact that a visit to China limited the time she had to work on her third assignment but a specific contribution of this study in the structure of the academic programme scaffolded writing development. This covered the fact that the length of the assignments moved from 1500 words to 6000 words but also that assignments varied in the extent to which they drew on the Writer's experience, something which provide an important scaffold for her development.

The main impact we identified in addressing the second research question was that it encouraged the Writer to proofread her work. This may be a way of reconciling Truscott's (Truscott, 2015; Truscott & Hsu, 2008) argument that feedback has little impact on grammatical correctness and the fact that teachers feel that such feedback is useful (Liu & Brown, 2015). Language-focused feedback has its main impact on encouraging learners to think about correctness rather than teaching them a particular grammatical rule.

However, this underplays the impact on non-language-oriented feedback, where the Writer engaged with and responded particularly to negative feedback with varying degrees of success, with face-to-face feedback being the most effective. The fact that the Writer was disappointed with her marks motivated her to improve. The Writer saw the writing process as a problem-solving task, and this attitude was central to her development, emphasizing the importance of focusing less on the content of feedback and more on how this is interpreted by the learner((Badger, 2018)

The research design used in this study is unusual in investigating the development of second-language writers. We have attempted to model a systematic and robust strategy for auto-ethnography in his area using Anderson's (2006) guidelines. We are conscious that one of the logistic drawbacks of this approach is that it involves looking at the development of

individual learners, and this makes it hard to generalize, a point also made by Let et al.(2023). So, our study highlights the importance of academic courses being structured so that they scaffold writing development, but we only have evidence from one writer. We would need multiple auto-ethnographies if we wanted to make generalizations and it is hard to see how current models for academic research might support this. It may be that auto-ethnographies come to be used as a kind of check of the validity of approaches to research, which take less account of the subjective nature of writing development. More generally, we would argue for greater acknowledgement of the subjective nature of writer development and its implications for research design.

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