

# The Impact of Out-of-class Friends' Interaction on Second Language Writing

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**Abstract**—The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of friends' interaction outside the classroom on the development and production of writing in English as a second language inside the classroom. The paper examines second language writing from the perspective of second language learning in the field of education. The terms: friends, friendship, interaction, and conversational interaction are explored as they mean in the context of this study. Then an experimental study is performed to examine the feedback the students obtain from the interaction with their friends within the same field of study and the impact of this interaction on developing the students' writing and revision. The paper discusses how the interaction has or has not changed the writer of the paper's view of the topic. The result of the study shows that friends' feedback outside of the classroom plays a very important role in enhancing and developing second language writing. The group interaction helped in improving the writer's ideas, knowledge, linguistic and academic skills which all lead to producing a better written text.

**Index Terms**—interaction, friends, second language writing, writing development, writing communication

## I. INTRODUCTION

Interaction plays a very important role in second language writing. It is one of the assessable factors that help ESL/EFL students develop with language. Before I begin, it is important that I define some terms as they will be used within the context of this study. Interaction becomes a broad topic, as it is one of the basic elements required to function in society. It is considered a part of the socialization process. Still, there is debate about the definition of the term interaction. Most times, interaction is overlapped with the term interactivity and the two terms are treated as synonyms. Interaction in this study means a reflective experience which is created by the existence of both the actor and the reactor, who are engaged in an affective experience. It can occur between two or more people or things. A dictionary definition of the term interaction states "the direct effect that one kind of particle had on another, in particular, in inducing the emission or absorption of one particle by another" (dictionary.com, Para 1). There are many definitions for the term interaction offered by scholars across different fields. In education, Wagner (1994) defined it as:

Reciprocal events that require at least two objects and two actions. Interactions occur when these objects and events mutually influence one another. An instructional interaction is an event that takes place between a learner and the learner's environment. Its purpose is to respond to the learner in a way intended to change his or her behavior toward and educational goal. Instructional interactions have two purposes: to change learners and to move them toward achieving their goals. (p. 8)

In the above definition, Instructional interaction supports two main goals. The first one is measuring the changes that the interaction can add and the second one is to the extent that interaction encourages learners to achieve their goals. For this study, I will be adapting both of the above definitions.

Many studies like Entwistle & Entwistle (1991), Garrison (1990), Hackman & Walker (1990), Ramsden (1988), Schell & Branch (1993), and Wagner (1994) emphasized the role of interaction and its impact on second language learning in general, and second language writing as a component of the language in specific. Sutton (1999) concluded from the results of the above mentioned studies to determine that the increased level of interaction will lead to a greater satisfaction with instruction, expanded level of motivation, optimistic and positive attitudes and behavior toward learning, better achievement, and more significant and meaningful learning. Interaction then is a process that includes different ways in which learners experience for different purposes and with different people. The different ways can include, but not limited to: touch, signs, verbal communication, language, technology, or body language. In education, scholars recognized four types of interaction: learner-content, learner-instructor, learner-learner, and learner-interface (Hillman, Willis, & Gunawardena, 1994 & Moore, 1989; Mitchell et. al, 2013). The one that is related to this paper is the learner-learner interface which implies classmates, friends, friends and classmates.

In the field of education, interaction is described as a kind of action that occurs as two or more objects have an effect upon one another. The idea of a two-way effect is necessary in the concept of interaction instead of a one way effect (phentermine, Para. 4). Each object influences the other in different ways. For example, interaction can be created through communication between two or more people, groups, or organizations. Another type of interaction is providing or exchanging feedback between the interactors on a specific topic.

Conversation of interaction is another type of interaction. It is a structured action coordinated by conversation and negotiation. It is a critical element of acquiring fluency in a target language and is a very important source of comprehensible input. Its elements are opening, closing, turn taking, topic selection, and participants' determination. Still, this does not mean that all of the elements should exist in one conversation. Many of the interaction hypotheses of SLA emphasized the role of conversational interaction in developing and facilitating second language development in general, and second language writing in specific by connecting the input features, internal learner capacity, and the language output (McDonough, 2006). The value of interaction outside of the classroom is as important as the interaction that occurs inside of the classroom. As Dell Hymes (1972) states:

The key to understanding language in context is to start not with language but with context... only by viewing the relationship from the side of the contexts can we see an essential part of what is going on when language is taught and used. (p. xix).

This study will focus on friends' interaction and feedback outside the classroom which is considered as students' social systems that would possibly impact their attitudes and thinking about writing in second language.

The term "friend" is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "a person with whom one has a bond of mutual affection, typically one exclusive of sexual or family relations. A person who supports a particular cause or organization" (Para. 1). Friend implies people who we know, communicate, and interact with by different ways for different purposes because we want to by choice. Friends exchange information, benefits, ideas, and opinions among each other. They exhibit loyalty towards, and trust for, each other. The term friend is connected with the term friendship. Friendship is a kind of interpersonal relationship that is created through time among human beings seeking out each other's company and involves helping behavior. It exists when two or more people become friends. It is used to indicate cooperative and supportive behavior that is created between two or more social entities. Friendship is central to all human beings' lives; people need to develop different kinds of friendship by their nature whether it occurs between family members, classmates, neighbors, or people who come across our lives. It involves some degree of intimacy and sometimes plays an important role in shaping our personality and who we are. Friendship could lead to success or failure for the members depending on the effect they have upon each other whether it is a positive or negative one. For this study, I define friends as peers with in the field who share the same classes and become friends.

Friends' conversational interaction reflects the process in which two people or more interact, communicate, engage, and exchange ideas, knowledge, and benefits through an oral (spoken) conversational interaction for a specific period of time in a specific context and by discussing a specific topic. Interacting with friends is familiar and intimate which is different than interacting with strangers or acquaintances. This type of interaction is called "horizontal (friendship) networks" which means informal communication that occurs between friends (Gibson, 2005; Ellis, 2015). Friends can interact with each other more effectively and freely without committing themselves to watch their speech and conversation. In terms of writing in a second language, friends' interaction may create a motivated environment that helps when negotiating, correcting, increasing understanding, and exchanging ideas and concepts. Thus, the purpose of this study is to find out: what kind of affect this interaction has on the second language writing process and learners, how actors and reactors are influenced by the conversational interaction process, and how second language writing is influenced by this interaction.

## II. RESEARCH QUESTION

The above questionable purposes can be reformed in the following research question: How do friends' conversational interaction outside the classroom impact writing in a second language?

## III. METHODOLOGY

### A. Participants

The sample of participants involved in this study is comprised of two types. The first type is the writer (the case) who is a male nonnative speaker of English, and a graduate student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in the MA TESOL program. He is from the Middle East and has been in the United States for almost a year and a half. His level of English is advanced. The second type is a group of friends of the writer, which consists of four PhD students in the Composition and TESOL program in IUP. The group includes multicultural students from different countries who speak different first languages. The first one is a female native speaker of English who has been a friend of the writer for almost a year. The second one is a male nonnative speaker from Thailand who has known the writer for four months. The third one is a female nonnative speaker from Indonesia who has known the writer for a year and a half. The fourth participant is a female nonnative speaker from Kazakhstan who has been a friend of the writer for four months. I am the final participant and a female nonnative speaker from America but spent most of my life in the Middle East and I have known the writer for a year and a half. I played the role of both participant and observer for this study. All participants knew each others previously and for different amounts of time.

The participants' ages ranged from early twenties to late forties, three were in their late twenties and one was in her late forties. Most of the participants, except the native speaker, had arrived to the United States within the last year with an advanced level of English and traveled to many countries and had a good multicultural background. The real names

of the participants were not used in the study. I chose the participants based on the relationship with the writer both within and outside of the classroom. All of the participants including me took classes together and then became friends outside of the classroom environment.

### B. Design and Instructional Context

The design of this study consists of several steps. At the beginning, I asked the participant to sign a consent form and also for their permission to record the interaction that takes place during the group meeting for verbal agreement. I also asked for the writer's permission to use both of his paper versions, the before and after paper, as the samples to be analyzed. The writer participant was asked to share his draft paper with the other group members. A group meeting was set at the library to discuss the presented draft for an hour so that the writer could get feedback for rewriting his draft. The meeting was tape-recorded so that I could analyze the feedback and the writer was given a transcript of the dialogue in order to assist in revising his paper. Finally, the participants were asked for their perspectives of the group meeting and the interaction.

The writer was asked to supply me with an electronic copy of the final version of the draft after the interaction. The two copies (the draft and the final version) were matched with the use of the "Compare and Merge Documents" command through the 'Tool Menu' of the Microsoft Office Word. I analyzed both versions carefully, including the list of found differences, searching for differences the writer made after the group meeting. A comparison between the main issues that were raised during the group meeting and the final version of the paper were documented.

## IV. ANALYSIS

To analyze the collected data from matching the two versions of the paper and the group interaction itself, several variables were taken into account.

### A. Draft One and Group Feedback

In this part, I will discuss the writer's draft and the types of issues that were raised during the group meeting interaction reflecting on the draft. The draft was titled *Personal Reflection on Sociolinguistics: Marriage in Saudi Arabia* for a class project at the PhD level for a language and cognition class. It explores the aspects of marriage in Saudi Arabia in the past and present and how socio-cultural and socio-linguistic aspects play a role in marriage, relationships, and wedding ceremonies. The paper focuses on how transformation from the tribes or villages to the cities has been playing a role in changing the interaction between the members. Also, the student mentions how a guy and a girl meet each other before marriage under certain roles. It explores the use of language in the communication process between a couple before and after marriage. The draft also talks about the society itself as it is experiencing rapid changes, mostly social ones and the role of the dominance of technology in changing the Saudi society. In the paper, he discusses other issues which include the rarity of marriage between a Saudi and someone who practices religions other than Islam. It also talks about the multi-cultural diversity contributing to the nature of marriages among people living in Saudi Arabia of various ethnic backgrounds. The writer concludes his paper with a hope that the traditional concept of marriage in Saudi Arabia will be modified and adjusted to a better and more acceptable type of marriage that offers more advantages than disadvantages to the individual and society.

During the group meeting, the participants read the draft together; after clarifying the main idea of his draft, the writer explained his concerns and the issues he needed help with. The group participants interacted in an open conversation and provided the requested feedback for the writer's draft. Here are the issues that were raised during the interaction:

- The participants provided some advice on the organization of the ideas in the draft. They asked the writer to clarify his thesis paragraph and the main aims of his paper by suggesting that he could add some of his conclusion to the thesis paragraph. The participants clarified for the writer that his paper felt more like an explanation of how marriage is done in Saudi Arabia than how it is related to his course, language and cognition. One of the group members whom I will refer to as Dana said:

"I am going to start with the first page because that's my question, ah, my first question comes from the last page. And here in this paragraph which is the second to the last paragraph when you actually state an opinion with the word hopefully with the rose colored promising towards the future, the traditional concept of marriage in Saudi Arabia will be modified and adjusted to better and more acceptable type of marriage that offers more advantages to the individual and society here you seem to be arguing for marriage to change a little bit and I notice your teacher also pointed that out. I did not get this point at all really until I got here and so, ah, I am wondering if this is really your main argument and if you would consider, ah, stating it a little more specifically in the beginning of the paper because up to that point that is why I was reading slowly. I do that, I look for, ah, a prevailing argument even if the feeling that is not explicitly stated in the beginning of the paper where we intend traditionally put it, it doesn't have to be, but that is traditional thing... ah because otherwise I, as I was reading, I read the information which was clearly stated, ah, but I was reading it as more of an explanation of how marriage is done in Saudi Arabia, more than your call for it to change a little bit. Do you know what I mean?"

- The participants asked the writer to clarify some of the points in his draft that they did not understand. For the writer, the information he provided was common sense, but for the readers from other cultures, they could not comprehend the meaning of some of the issues.

- The participants suggested some ideas on how to connect the topic (marriage in Saudi Arabia) to linguistics and diatoplectology. The participants focused more on providing content suggestions and help and stayed away from the grammatical and structural suggestions. They asked him to consider the speech forms of interaction that occur during the proposal; who does the talking first in proposing, is it the father of the groom, the groom himself, or an older member of the family, and how does the conversation go? Is the groom's family supposed to call the potential wife's family before they go to ask for her hand? If yes, what kind of speech act happens throughout the conversation? Are there specific phrases that need to be said during the proposal? How does language play a role in the wedding ceremony? All these questions were suggested by the group members. A member of the group said:

"I think that would be really intriguing if you could add some of that because I was wondering the same thing like you know you mention online you mention briefly how a guy and a girl can come together under the certain roles but you know to, as Rony said this point in how language plays a role in all those things and at the family meeting are you the one doing most of the talking, or is there an elder family member probably a male doing the talking, and how does that conversation go like what registers it in I guess."

The participants were unclear of the writer's meaning and were making assumptions based on what they knew about the culture. This interaction helped the writer to realize that he needed to be more specific about things he took as common sense.

- The participants focused on the ideas of the paper and understanding the topic; they suggested how to include in the draft other related topics that they found interesting, including: the language that is used between the groom and wife, how the language changes before and after the marriage, and how social class plays a role in the speech acts and interactions that occur during the wedding ceremonies? Ideas sometimes flowed very quickly and the participants built on each others ideas as seen in the following dialogue:

"Chris: I would like to know whether or not the uhh, the social status of the brides make any differences in the wedding ceremony,

Chris: it seems to me there will be a lot of factors how strict the parents are, and how rich they are and

Dana: and how does the social status affect the formality of the speech?

Hun: as you can see in the paragraph, the factors that affect the wedding ceremony such as social status, all these stuff

Chris: education of bride

Hun: How it affects the social linguistics (mm yeah) that yeah the language of the ceremony that is used in the context

Dana: cause I can guarantee you that here a wedding ceremony in NYC among the rich costs, catholic, is going to be way different than a wedding ceremony with my country people who were Baptist (Anton: oh yeah) you know what I'm saying? The language is going to be completely different..."

- The participants also asked the writer to explain how the Saudi wedding ceremony is different from other cultures. They mentioned that there are other good issues to raise in the paper such as, if there are any variation of ceremonies in Saudi Arabia based on the social status, how strict certain Islamic groups are, and the location of the wedding in Saudi Arabia. Also, what are the factors that affect the wedding ceremonies and the formality of the speech in Saudi Arabia?

The participants also discussed some of the wedding rituals in their cultures to identify the similarities and differences between their cultures and the writer's. They addressed the rituals of wedding ceremonies in Kazakhstan, Indonesia, and America. The group member from Kazakhstan commented:

"I think your culture since we are Muslims; we have the same procedures in the wedding ceremonies. When you go, we call the person ambassador who talks, we call him ambassador and he talks. He usually, and during the wedding ceremony we drink not tea but water we call it holy water. There is some word right; we call the priest not the priest, Mola, Mola right. He says something than you have to repeat after him but these speech only is like, ahh, can occur only during the ceremony. Outside, like in the street you don't use these words like "tump tumpo tumpo" you have to say three times like..."

So the participants found ways to connect to the draft personally and could offer suggestions based on their own knowledge of weddings in their own cultures.

- The participants raised the issue of authority of certain linguistic forms. The participant from Kazakhstan gave an example of how authority of language plays a role in marriage. The example was that in Islam, of divorcing someone in Islam. Dana discussed this topic from her culture:

"even in divorce procedures they say three times: I divorce you, I divorce you, I divorce you, then you are divorced, so I think you can connect it not only marriage but even in divorce we say three times I divorce you then this is the end of marriage."

- The participants asked the writer to use a research method to support his ideas and statements, for example, like using some citations or interviews with married or unmarried Saudi people. This will strengthen and support his argument.

“Chris: Are you going to use any, to back your words with some citations? It’s kind of narrative right?”

Dana: yeah, it’s narrative

Chris: ok another point is that, ahhh, to be very important when ever you say something about culture, about something that is a fact sometimes, you have to find somebody or quotation.

Zee: yeah somebody to back your ideas up, yeah, that’s very good point, yeah, citations.

Chris: I know that you are writing according to your experience; I know that’s true but other people from other countries or researchers may not believe ok, you may make it up to, (Anton: ohh), make it real to serve your point, sometimes you have to find

Zee: supporters

Chris: yeah

Anton: interviews

Chris: writers, or?

Dana: you can use personal.

Chris: communication”

• The participants discussed the difference between public discourse and private discourse in linguistics. The participant from Kazakhstan gave an example about how classic Arabic is used in specific situations and special events like weddings.

“Dana: and does not that rise, I am thinking of the linguistic course, isn’t that the difference between the public discourse and the private discourse, and those are two different”

This was a new idea for the writer that could help him explore the different types of discourse.

• The participants provided alternative ideas and opinions that are related to the topic. Some questions raised were: what is the relationship between language and religion and how does religion play a role on the form of language that is used in weddings? They mentioned culture and how it controls the speech forms that are used in wedding ceremonies, and how arranged marriage is related to the topic and its advantages and disadvantages. Also, they addressed what the groom’s friends say to him about his potential wife? Are they supposed to say anything? How about after marriage, are the groom’s friends allowed to ask him about his wife? Will the language change in the way the friends address their friend’s wife?

• The participant from Thailand asked the writer why he specifically chose marriage and why not any other topic. Other group participants suggested some points about why they find this topic interesting.

“Chris: and you haven’t said why marriage why not something else in your culture.

Dana: yeah, that’s true

Rony: Marriage, family,

Anton: I’m thinking, what’s the reason for that... why would I choose marriage

Chris: that’s why I’m asking the question, why marriage?”

This could help the writer in formulating his rational and thinking critically about his topic. What was his personal connection to this topic and why was it important to him.

• The participants also discussed other topics that were raised during the conversation, such as flirting. Unrelated topics sometimes led to constructive feedback that the writer could incorporate into his paper.

“Anton: if a girl winked to a boy, does it send messages

Rony: yes of course

Anton: so it’s offensive or?

Rony: it’s asking for trouble

Hun: is it polite?

Rony: no

Dana: so it is asking for trouble Rony?

Rony: yes

Zee: not trouble trouble but flirting

Anton: not necessarily asking for trouble, yeah flirting”

This dialogue led to a discussion on who should make the first move when pursuing a relationship.

• At the end, the participants mentioned that there are still some issues that the writer needs to work on, such as: topics in the draft that the writer needs to further develop, to be neutral and not judgmental, to add some pictures and footnotes, and to re-organize the draft to include some of the suggested feedback.

### *B. Comparison between the Draft, the Final Version, and the Group Interaction*

In this part, I will compare the draft, the final version, and the group interaction to address the list of differences, if any, the writer made after the interaction took place. I started comparing both versions by using the Microsoft Office Word, tool “Compare and Merge Documents,” but no linguistic similarities were found between both versions. This means that the writer re-wrote his paper making complete changes not just with the clarity, simplicity, transparency, or straightforwardness of the sentences and paragraphs, but also with ideas and methodology. Since there are no linguistic similarities that were found, I changed the comparison tool from “Compare and Merge Documents” to personal depth reading and analyzing of the final version. I was looking for the main changes, or even the similarities in ideas between

the draft, the final version, and the group interaction. I set a list of questions before I analyzed the final version to find the impact of the group interaction on the writers' draft. These questions were: what types of changes did the writer make after the interaction? Are these changes related to the issues that were raised in the group meeting? Did the writer add all, some, or none of the issues that were raised throughout the group interaction? Did the writer make any changes that are not related to the draft or the group interaction? How much did the writer benefit from the group interaction?

## V. RESULTS

After analyzing the final version, here are the issues that were found:

- The writer re-wrote the whole paper including: adding an abstract, changing his outline organization, and the arrangement of the ideas. He further developed some of the existing issues and deleted others in the draft, added some new issues that were raised during the group interaction, and reorganized the thesis paragraph by adding the main issues and purposes of the paper. (The writer took advantage of the group suggestions.)

- The writer used the research method recommended by the participants for his final version to strengthen his paper with different perspectives, in addition to his views. He developed a questionnaire and distributed it to Saudi unmarried and married, males and females, inside and outside of the USA to identify the participants' views in relation to the marriage system in Saudi Arabia, and the extent to which their perspectives reflect changes in the past and in the present. By including different perspectives, he was able to validate or strengthen many of his points. (The writer took advantage of the group suggestions.)

- The writer added some of the issues that were raised during the group interaction, but not all of them. The writer selectively chose issues to add to his draft including: the language that is used between the groom and wife and how it changes before and after the marriage and the nature of private and public discourse between the couple. Thus, the writer was able to pick and chose from the suggestions without feeling obligated to include all of the feedback. (The writer took advantage of the group suggestions.)

- The writer's final paper title was changed to *Sociolinguistics and Language Use: An Observational Glimpse into the Aspect of Marriage in Saudi Arabia from an Insider Perspective*. Instead of an essay providing explanation of how marriage is done in Saudi Arabia, marriage was linked to the course of language and cognition by discussing sociolinguistics, and diatoplecton in relation to his topic. (The writer took advantage of the group suggestions.)

- The writer clarified some of the points that were mentioned in his draft. He also used some quotations from his participants as examples for the issues he discussed. (The writer took advantage of the group suggestions.)

## VI. DISCUSSION

The group members are friends who share some overlapping professional interest about academic topics and all of them study in the TESOL and Composition program. The main focus of the group was on providing discussion, suggestions, ideas, feedback, and some linguistic terms that the writer had not previously considered. No grammatical correction issues were raised during the interaction. From the above discussion, the result of the study is that friends' conversational interaction outside of the classroom plays a very important role in second language writing. It impacts and helps second language learners by improving and enhancing their abilities and skills in second language writing. The group meeting had a helpful and positive impact on their friend's draft. It enhanced the writer's draft to a level which displayed improvement in the content of his second language writing. As an observer, I did not find any negative impact from the group interaction that affected the writer or the group members.

The relationship that occurred during the friends' conversational interaction was a beneficial relationship between all the group members and the writer. It helped in improving the writer's ideas, knowledge, and linguistic and academic skills which all led to producing better written text. The writer commented that the group meeting is "an eye-opening for him;" it exposed him to different academic, linguistic, and social perspectives and widened his horizon. The group participants commented that the interaction was as helpful for them as it was for the writer. From the conversational interaction, the group members gained more knowledge about other cultures' rituals and traditions, widened their knowledge in relation to marriage socio-linguistically and socio-culturally, and shared ideas and points of view. They were also able to think critically about a text in order to provide constructive feedback, which may help all of the participants to think more critically about their own writing.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The ability to write well in English as a second language is challenging. It requires a combination of both formal structures consisting of a clear set of standards that have been gained through the learning process, and communicative applications inside and outside of the classroom. Formulating new ideas, retelling pieces of information in new forms of narrative or description, or transforming information can be difficult when producing a written text. Such a process of writing in a second language requires students (writers) to achieve proficiency in the use of the language standards, comprehension and understanding of the language, and familiarization with writing strategies, techniques, and skills. These are not naturally acquired skills but must be practiced through formal and informal communication, during both inside and outside of classroom interactions.

The current study's experiment proved that friends' interaction outside of the classroom encourages students to explore, arrange, integrate, and share knowledge, ideas, experience, and concepts. This encouragement assists in the development of second language writing skills and abilities. It also acts as a social dimension that can enhance the group members' attitudes towards writing.

Future areas of research can include the study of unstructured friends' interaction outside of the classroom. Would the interaction differ if it were not part of a study? Can the level of friendship affect the honesty and quality of the feedback among friends and peers?

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