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Carol Severino & Shih-Ni Prim

## Second Language Writing Development and the Role of Tutors: A Case Study of an Online Writing Center “Frequent Flyer”

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### Abstract

Motivated by increasing international student writing center use to learn more about second language writing development and its assessment, we conducted a case study of an undergraduate writer who submitted drafts to online tutoring over two years. Synthesizing the perspectives and methods of Applied Linguistics with those of First-Language Composition, we assessed the writer’s short- and long-term progress in the rhetorical, linguistic, and writing process components of her writing development. We found linguistic improvement in accuracy, especially short-term between drafts and revisions more so than over time, but only modest long-term improvement in both rhetorical and other linguistic components. We attributed these results to the writer’s expedient writing process and her narrow conceptions of writing development and of her tutors’ role in it. These expedient processes and narrow conceptions were exacerbated by the online tutors’ continued responses to her

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feedback requests for grammar help mostly by directly correcting her grammar. In asynchronous online tutoring, we recommend alternative methods to correction, such as color coding, for writers who submit to online tutoring mainly for grammar help, as well as a policy of sending back drafts that students have not yet proofread. We also recommend that both online and face-to-face tutors initiate discussions with students about the non-linear nature of second language writing development and the tutors' larger role in it, as well as the need to make full use of a complete writing process in order to improve long-term from project to project as well as short-term from draft to revision.

### **Motivation for the Study**

Writing development at the college level is complex and multifaceted. As both an expression and a means of formulating ideas, college writing requires the acquisition of multiple intellectual, rhetorical, and cognitive abilities; knowledge bases related to disciplines, topics, and genres; and syntactic, lexical, grammatical, and mechanical skills, all simultaneously orchestrated and performed (Flower & Hayes, 1981). To what extent does any college student of any background ever master these competencies that lifelong professional writers strive daily to improve? International second language writers pursuing undergraduate degrees in a second language environment face additional barriers of culture and language, often making it more difficult to negotiate a different culture's disciplinary discourses, or in David Bartholomae's (1985) terms, to "invent the university," in this case, a university in another country.

How much improvement in how many of the aforementioned skills and knowledge bases should international second language writers realistically expect of themselves during their undergraduate years? And how much improvement should their instructors and tutors reasonably expect of them? Such questions have become increasingly important as recent international student enrollment, especially of students from China with a wide range of English language proficiency levels, has dramatically increased in U.S. universities (ICEF, 2015) while instructional and support resources for them failed to keep pace with their enrollment (Hall, 2013).

Unlike a classroom teacher who may teach a student in only one course and therefore read that student's writing at only one point during that student's college career, a writing center tutor, particularly one who is staff, faculty, or a doctoral student, is more likely to read that student's writing in several courses over a few semesters and therefore may be in a better position to observe their writing development. In fact, tutors

and students often build relationships based on the student's expected writing improvement, especially if tutoring happens face-to-face. However, what happens when international students, as more and more do, find it more convenient and helpful to submit to an asynchronous online tutoring system in which any tutor can "claim" and tutor any paper, that is, a situation in which writing development can no longer be observed mainly by one tutor? This study examines the writing development of an international undergraduate second language writer who submitted drafts to an online writing center program to multiple tutors over a period of two years.

Online tutoring databases save original submissions and tutored drafts and therefore provide the opportunity to study writing over longer periods of time than most classroom studies. In fact, one of the gaps that scholars highlight (Norris & Manchon, 2012; Connor-Linton & Polio, 2014) is the dearth of studies that evaluate second language writing development over longer periods of time rather than a semester. Writing center studies based on years of a student's saved online drafts can fill this gap.

Our motivation for conducting a second language writing development study was both pedagogical—to serve the needs of our tutors and students—and research-based—to fill in the gaps in the Second Language Writing literature. Invariably though, pedagogy and research overlap, as research on writing clearly serves teaching and learning. To paraphrase Hedgcock & Lefkowitz (1994), the pedagogical impetus for our study was that our online tutors wanted more feedback on their feedback. That is, they wanted to know if and how their feedback is used short-term in the revised papers handed in to classroom instructors. Tutors usually cannot find out whether and how their feedback is implemented unless writers submit subsequent drafts. Thus, we wanted to ask students for permission to see copies of their revised final drafts. Furthermore, we were interested in the possible long-term effects of online feedback on second language writing development. What role does our online writing center feedback play in students' progress as writers in English during their college careers?

### **Writing Development and Second Language Writers**

The research purpose of the study was to investigate the nature of second language writing development and the tutor's role in it—two areas in which more research is needed. Second language writing development is a super-construct composed of process and product, global and local, rhetorical and linguistic, and textual and language sub-constructs

(Manchón, 2012; Connor-Linton & Polio, 2014). Compared to native language writing development, a larger part of second language writing development involves second language development itself as manifested in the writing (Norris & Manchón, 2012). However, scholars influenced by second language acquisition (SLA) and its parent discipline Applied Linguistics, both of which focus on second language learning, often view second language writing as a reflection of second language development and a means of assessing it (Manchón, 2012) rather than the focus itself of development and assessment. Therefore, they depend more on linguistic analyses of the sentence complexity, grammatical accuracy, and fluency of writing than on evaluations that include global and rhetorical elements of content, organization, and effectiveness for a particular audience (Polio & Shea, 2014). Hence, college-level second language writing development needs the more inclusive perspectives of the fields of Second Language Writing and First-Language Composition to balance applied linguists' focus on language. Second Language Writing and First-Language Composition remind researchers that besides its linguistic components (vocabulary, syntax, grammar), second language writing development involves the rhetorical and global components of assignment adherence, argumentation, logic, and audience awareness, as well as process components such as recursively going back and forth between various sub-processes such as planning, drafting, and editing.

We wanted to consult the writers about the multiple elements of their writing development rather than only analyze it ourselves and compare assessments, as their perceptions of their development, which affect their writing performances, are as important as ours, and self-reports are a common and useful tool in pedagogical and language research.

### **Studies of Second Language Development and Second Language Writing Development**

The best ways to define and measure second language development and more specifically, second language writing development have begun to interest more second language writing researchers—at the same time that Second Language Acquisition has been employing Chaos/Complexity Theory and Dynamic Systems Theory (Larsen-Freeman, 2007) to illuminate the unique, non-linear developmental trajectories of individual language learners, whose progress varies both intra- and inter-individually. Change in the components or sub-systems of language acquisition is found to be bidirectional and characterized by both progression and regression as well as plateaus. Diane Larsen-Freeman

(2006) found that the lexical, grammatical, complexity, and fluency components of second language acquisition of five Chinese students who wrote and told the same narrative four times over six months to be up and down, with each student exhibiting a different, unique path in regard to the directions of the three variables.

In terms of second language writing development itself (vs. second language development), some studies piqued our curiosity about the elements of writing that improve and stay the same over time. Other studies served as models of case studies over time or investigated the effects of feedback, as our study does. For example, Neomy Storch's (2009) study of how an English-language medium university (a university in which instruction is offered in English) affects second language writing development found that after one semester that included a writing course, students improved in structure and idea development and in formality of language but not in sentence level accuracy or complexity. Ute Knock, Amir Rouhshad, & Storch's (2014) study of Asian international students in an English-medium university found that after a year they improved only in fluency (length of writing), but not in accuracy, complexity, or globally.

In particular, case studies of second language writing development served as models for our own case study. For example, Ruth Spack's (1997) three-year longitudinal, naturalistic case study of the literacy development of an undergraduate named Yuko relied heavily on her own assessments of progress, as ours does. Similarly, a longitudinal case study of electronic communication that focused on, as does ours, the development of one Chinese writer was Chi-Fen Emily Chen's (2006) examination of the development of the e-mail literacy of Ling, a Taiwanese graduate student studying in the U.S. for over two years.

More recently, Hiroe Kobayashi & Carol Rinnert (2013), using qualitative and quantitative methods as we do, compared the first language (Japanese), second language (English), and third language (Chinese) writing development of Natsu. In their complex case study, the researchers used a multiliteracy and multicompetence perspective to evaluate Natsu's rhetorical development in different genres in different languages as well as her linguistic development, assessing her writing via the complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) analyses traditionally used in second language writing research (Wolfe-Quintero, Inagaki, & Kim, 1998). They also examined her writing processes and contextual factors that influenced her, as our study similarly does.

In addition, as our study includes the feedback of tutors and how the writer incorporated it as part of her writing processes to develop her writing, we were influenced by case studies of tutor-student interaction,

for example, Carol Severino & Elizabeth Deifell (2011), as well as by numerous studies that examine the effects of different types of teacher comments on short-term and occasionally long-term second language writing development (e.g. Bitchner & Ferris, 2012; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2013). Few published writing center studies examine the short-term effects of tutor feedback on revisions (e.g. Stay, 1983; Bell, 2002; Williams, 2004) or review the long-term effects of tutor feedback on either first or second language writing development (e.g. Jones, 2001). In fact, Williams and Jones point out that research on the writing center's measurable effects on either short- or long-term writing improvement has been inconclusive. In Jones's words, "Concrete evidence that writing centers improve student writing is difficult to construct" (3).

Thus, we combine the elements of naturalistic case studies of multilingual writers and their course writing; the analysis and assessment of tutors' feedback; and the triangulation of the writer's and researchers' assessments of rhetorical, linguistic, and process components of second language writing development and the tutors' role in them. By necessity, triangulating involve comparisons and contrasts between the researchers' and the writer's assessments. Our study therefore addresses the following research questions:

1. How do the case study participant's assessments compare to those of the researchers in terms of rhetorical, linguistic, and writing process components of her short-term and long-term second language writing development?
2. To what extent does tutors' online feedback influence the participant's short- and long-term second language writing development?

## **Methods**

**Finding participants.** Researchers wanted to find three second language writers to compare their individual second language writing development trajectories. To that end, first we looked in the online tutoring database for Chinese seniors who had frequently submitted drafts to online tutoring for at least two years. We sought out Chinese students because they are the largest population of international students at our university as well as in the U.S., the U.K., and Australia (ICEF, 2015). We eliminated from consideration students who had mainly submitted personal statements because we were more interested in course-based writing. After we identified three students and obtained IRB

clearance,<sup>1</sup> we sent them invitations in both English and Chinese to participate in the study. However, only one student responded, a senior double major in Journalism and Mass Communication and Studio Art we will call Fei. To employ a writing center term coined by tutors at the University of Wisconsin Writing Center (Hughes, 2015), regular users of writing center services are called “Frequent Flyers,” and Fei means “to fly” in Chinese. The pseudonym Fei was fitting because she had just obtained a job working for an airline in China, which she would start a month after graduating that semester.

**The participant.** Besides Mandarin, Fei, from Guangzhou, Guangdong, in Southern China, also speaks Cantonese, which she started learning at age six; therefore, she considers English her third language. As a foreign exchange student in the U.S., she completed her last two and a half years of high school in Boston and then Maine, taking ESL and regular English classes simultaneously. In Fall 2010, she enrolled in the university’s Intensive English Program before taking writing, grammar, and reading in the ESL Program along with regular college courses in general education and in her two majors. She chose Journalism and Mass Communication as her first major, adding that she was not enamored with Math even though she was good at it. Indeed, Journalism, which depends on not only factual, but linguistic accuracy, is a brave choice of majors for an international student second language writer. Fei graduated in Spring 2014 with a B+ average.

Fei’s literacy background is diverse and cosmopolitan. An active photographer, she considered herself a photojournalist rather than a journalist in the U.S., and when she worked for the university’s student newspaper, she wrote only captions for her photos. She studied photojournalism abroad in Italy one semester and had traveled to Japan, Costa Rica, Panama, the Bahamas, and all over the U.S., taking photos and maintaining an illustrated travel blog in Chinese on a Chinese travel site. As part of a multimedia blog for a journalism class, she also made travel recommendations to Americans in English. When she was in high school, she wrote romance novels in Chinese. She noted that as a teenager and adult, her Chinese writing had been narrative and descriptive, but that her English writing has mainly been journalistic, analytical, or argumentative.

**Collecting a sample of Fei’s writing.** The letter of invitation offered Fei \$100 for completing a self-assessment questionnaire, participating in an interview, and locating the revised drafts that she handed in to her course professors that corresponded to the drafts that

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1 IR.BID# 201402733.



received online writing center feedback. At first Fei provided us with 13 revised papers of the 21 drafts she had submitted over 2+ years to online tutoring. However, three of the revisions did not match the original drafts. Fei had access to the revisions of her submitted autobiographical course writings, personal statements, and internship application letters, but did not want to give them to us because she thought they were too personal, and we respected her wishes. That meant we had 10 draft-revision pairs. Fei estimated that she sent 40% of her writing to online tutoring, so these 10 papers probably represented about 20% of her formal writing assignments, in other words a representative sample of her college writing spread over two years.

Because most students usually do not request particular online tutors, as all of our graduate student and faculty tutors have online tutoring responsibilities, these 10 papers were responded to by seven tutors; one paper was tutored by Carol and two by Shih-Ni, employing for this study a teacher/tutor research approach (Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein, 2010); three were tutored by Jason, and one each by Wendy, Linda, Harry, and Garth. (The names of tutors other than those of the researchers are pseudonyms.) Six of her papers were for Journalism courses, two for Mass Communication courses, and two for General Education Literature (See Table 1 for papers, their tag name used in subsequent tables and discussions, and the tutor's name). The Journalism papers were news stories, except for numbers five, seven, and eight related to her proposed novel for Specialized Reporting and Writing, which were multi-genre (analytic, argumentative, and descriptive and narrative fiction writing). The two Mass Communication papers were analytical, and the literature papers were argumentative.

Number	Paper tag name	Description	Tutor
1	Papish	Analysis of a First Amendment media court case	Jason
2	Interview	Interview-based news story on Obama's visit to campus	Jason
3	Ceramics	Interview-based profile of student ceramicists	Carol
4	Lawyer	Interview-based feature story on local pro-bono lawyer who defends students vs. an unscrupulous property manager	Linda

5	Autism Outline	A project toward a novel about a Chinese immigrant family with an autistic child	Jason
6	Olympics	Short-essay answers analyzing an academic article comparing American and Chinese journalists' approach to their respective country's Olympic athletes	Garth
7	Book Proposal	A project toward a novel about a Chinese immigrant family with an autistic child	Harry
8	Autism Story	A project toward a novel about a Chinese immigrant family with an autistic child	Wendy
9	Gender Role	Literature paper on gender roles in a short story	Shih-Ni
10	Amy Tan	Literature paper on how history helps readers understand the context for a short story	Shih-Ni

**Table 1: Fei's Papers and their Tutors**

**Quantitative methods.** In response to part of Research Question #1, we used the traditional measures for complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) to analyze the 10 draft-revisions pairs and assess Fei's short- and long-term linguistic changes over two years. CAF measures are commonly used in Applied Linguistics, a field that focuses on language because of its interest in second language learning processes (Wolfe-Quintero, Inagaki, & Kim, 1998; Connor-Linton & Polio, 2014). Fluency was measured as total words and total T-units in a draft or revision; accuracy was measured as errors per T-unit and error-free-T-units; sentence complexity was measured as words per T-unit, words per clause, and clauses per T-unit.

A T-unit, meaning terminable unit (able to be terminated with end punctuation), is any sentence with its associated clauses (Hunt, 1965). For example, in Gender Role, Fei wrote about the female character: *She knows she cant have wealthy life, but she hope one day her son can have better opportunity to find a better life.* That sentence has two T-units, one before the coordinate conjunction "but" and one after it. The CAF figures were then compared between each draft and revision and across

the draft/revision pairs. Carol performed most of the CAF analysis with Shih-Ni checking her work.

**Qualitative methods.** Qualitative instruments consisted of a 19-item questionnaire to help answer Research Question #1, and a 75-minute interview and a descriptive and analytical chart of her online submissions and revised drafts to answer both research questions. First, we constructed a second language writing development self-assessment questionnaire for Fei (see Appendix I) that asked her to assess whether she thought she had improved, stayed the same, or gotten worse on 8 rhetorical features and 11 features of linguistic writing development. After we read over her questionnaire responses and papers, we conducted a 75-minute interview with her about her writing in the context of her language and literacy development during her six-and-a-half-year U.S. experience and four-year university experience (See Interview Questions in Appendix II). The third qualitative method was our textual analyses of her drafts and revisions, which we included on a chart we constructed of the 10 projects based on the following categories: the Course Description from the University's course registration site; Fei's Assignment Description, the Time She Allotted for Revision, and her Feedback Request from the online submission form; and a Draft Description and a Revision Description, based on our own close readings of her work. (See Sample Chart Entry, Appendix III.)

**Mixed methods and triangulation.** In order to answer Research Question #2 about the role of online feedback in second language writing development, we classified all feedback points in each draft's margins and in the text itself by Comment Type and by Discourse Area. Then for each instance of each category, we summed up the total numbers of uptaken (used accurately) or not uptaken (not used or not used accurately) feedback points to see which Comment Types and Discourse Areas Fei responded to most. Below we describe our procedure in greater detail.

To assess the Comment Type that elicited the most uptake—correct or appropriate implementation—in Fei's revised essays, all the tutors' marginal and in-text comments were coded using a scheme similar to that of Severino & Prim (2015)—according to whether the comments were direct corrections (DC), simply noted that an error existed (EI), whether they supplied an explanation (Exp), asked a question (Q), made a suggestion (S), or provided options (O).<sup>2</sup> If a comment directed at

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2 Our 2015 study on word choice errors used five categories for comments: Correction, Error Indication, Explanation, Option, and Question. For the current study, we added Suggestion to study all levels of discourse, because in the previous

one problem contained several moves, it was classified according to the most salient move. If a comment in a commenting MS Word bubble addressed multiple problems, it was subdivided according to problem.

To assess the Discourse Area that elicited the most uptake from Fei, each comment was coded for General Discourse Area: Rhetoric, Syntax, Expression, Lexis, Grammar, or Mechanics. Next, the particular passage targeted by the tutor as the problem was identified, and the corresponding passage in the revised essay was examined to see whether and how Fei used the feedback: what change she made if any, and whether the change was successful or not. Successful changes were coded as Y and non- or unsuccessful changes or deletions were coded as N.<sup>3</sup> Then, statistical tests were done to see to what extent Comment Types and General Discourse Areas predicted Fei's uptake (See Table 2 for the Classification Schemes by Comment Type and Discourse Area with examples from Fei's papers). The majority of the Comment Type and Discourse Area coding was done by Shih-Ni with Carol checking her work.

We triangulated the data by looking at the qualitative results from the instruments (interview, questionnaire, chart) in light of the results of the quantitative analyses of the papers and the tutors' comments (CAF, Comment Type, and Discourse Area) looking for patterns, correspondences, and corroborations.

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study, the category Options served the function of Suggestion comments for word choice errors.

- 3 Categorizing the revisions into simply Y and N may appear simplistic, but we adjusted our classification scheme to fit the data: As we found that Fei usually ignored global suggestions, such as "Consider explaining Japan's invasion of China with more details," most of her revisions were local and fit nicely into the two options. Also, as she herself asserted a number of times during the interview, she used almost all the tutors' language feedback. For more complicated error feedback, Fei sometimes deleted the passage altogether. At first, we counted deletions as a different category but later decided to combine "N" and "delete" to simplify the analysis. In addition, our original analysis included descriptions of her self-sponsored revisions, but they were so few and so minor that we considered them inconsequential and decided not to include them. For future studies with different participants, a binary system might not reflect the writers' revision process, especially if writers go beyond tutors' marginal comments with self-sponsored revisions and/or respond to tutors' suggestions for structural or rhetorical changes.

		Examples from Fei’s papers
Comment types	DC (direct correction)	In response to “The setting of the story is in a small village in Haiti <i>on</i> 1950,” the tutor wrote “in.” (Gender Role)
	EI (error indication)	In response to “historical research allows me to understand the way she impact her American born daughter on her <i>self-identify</i> ,” the tutor wrote “You need a noun here.” (Amy Tan)
	Exp (explanation)	In response to “Her parents <i>want she have</i> another child...,” the tutor wrote “Want someone TO do something (and “she” is the wrong pronoun, right?)” (Autism Outline)
	O (options)	In response to “Lili works <i>as possible as she can</i> to...,” the tutor wrote “as much as possible? as much as she can?” (Gender Role)
	Q (question)	In response to “because the editor <i>putted</i> the published political...,” the tutor wrote “What do you mean? This term is used in golfing usually.” (Papish)
	S (suggestion)	In response to “It described <i>how reporters report differently about individual gold medalists and Olympic success, which influenced by their culture</i> ,” the tutor wrote “You may want to be a little clearer here: are reporters from different nations biased in favor of their own gold medal winners?” (Olympics)
Discourse areas	Expression	Even though they <i>have modest life</i> , [live modestly] (Gender Role)
	Grammar	they <i>never been</i> to China [have never been] (Amy Tan)
	Lexis	She believed autistic child is not <i>idiot</i> but have unusual talent. [disabled] (Autism Outline)

	Mechanics	she <i>wont</i> get any credit... [won't] (Papish)
	Rhetoric	It described <i>how reporters report differently about individual gold medalists and Olympic success, which influenced by their culture.</i> (thesis statement of Olympics)
	Syntax	<i>Working for multiple law cases but didn't ask for money is fifty year old man's hobby.</i> (Lawyer)

**Table 2: Comment Types, General Discourse Areas, and Examples**

## Results and Discussion

### Fei's assessments of her rhetorical and linguistic development.

We first report on aspects of the interview to describe Fei as a student and a second language writer. We asked Fei about her second language writing development in the context of her language and literacy development—speaking, listening, and reading—in both academic and non-academic contexts (See Interview Questions, Appendix II). She used English outside of class when she worked for the campus newspaper, when she participated in a journalism club that produced a campus magazine, and when she bartended at the stadium during home football games. She had several American friends with whom she communicated in English and wrote e-mails to them in English, and even to her Chinese friends here in the U.S., because she did not know the Chinese email format. She also texted her Chinese friends in the U.S. in English as her phone did not allow texting in Chinese. She could understand Americans one-to-one but had difficulty understanding a group of them. As for reading, over the years, she said, her academic reading had become faster. For out-of-school reading, she would frequently buy best-selling novels in English, especially Pulitzer prize-winners, start reading them, but then because of the pressures of her academic work, never finish them.

When we asked her to assess her overall writing development, she said it was hardly noticeable, describing it as “slight” and “a slowly process.” Her writing strength she identified as “ideas” and her writing weakness as “grammar.” Her self-assessment of her rhetorical development was that since she had come to the U.S. she had improved in “structure,” by which she meant a thesis-driven organization of para-

graphs with topic sentences, which she had never used in her Chinese writing. Improvement in ideas and structure was also Storch's (2009) finding about the improvement after one semester with a writing class of international students at an Australian university. Fei learned different genres in English that, because she had come to the U.S. as a high school teenager, she had never learned in Chinese—legal, media, and literary analysis, the proposal, and the news story. However, she noted that her problems and errors in English prevented her from enjoying English writing like she enjoyed writing her Chinese blog and her Chinese romance novels. She said that in China she had very good grades in Mandarin, but poor grades in English.

Her questionnaire responses corroborate her interview responses that she thought she had improved more rhetorically than linguistically in her writing. She marked that she improved in six of the eight items of rhetorical development: audience awareness, expressing and connecting ideas, thesis, ability to sustain an argument, using sources, and using feedback to make global changes. However, she said she improved in only three of the 11 listed features of linguistic writing development: using a varied vocabulary, using feedback to address language problems, and use of prepositions. The two features of rhetorical development that she said stayed the same were assignment fulfillment—her evidence for that claim was her up and down grades—and organizing a piece logically. What she said stayed the same in her linguistic development were syntactic and grammatical features: control of word order, use of varied sentence structure, and six types of accuracy: accurate vocabulary, sentence structures, agreement, word forms, verb tenses, and articles. We will first provide our own assessments of her linguistic development and then assess her rhetorical development and her writing processes.

**Researchers' assessments of linguistic development.** We agreed with Fei that her writing improved less overall in linguistic aspects than in some rhetorical ones. The accuracy part of the CAF analysis of Fei's linguistic development in writing confirm both Fei's assessments of her English language learning and our own experiences as tutors and close readers of her writing: that she made numerous syntax and grammar errors, some resistant to tutors' feedback, which Fei herself acknowledged in the interview. For example, she knew she had persisted in writing "autism child" throughout the three papers in her Specialized Reporting and Writing class.<sup>4</sup> She did, however,

<sup>4</sup> In Chinese, the term 自閉症 (*zì bì zhèng*) means "autism." To turn "autism" into "autistic," a character 的 (*de*, whose meaning equals to 's') would be added behind 自閉症, such as 自閉症的 (autistic) 兒童 (*ér tóng*, meaning child). But this character

make slight improvements in accuracy as measured by errors per T-unit, mostly short term, from draft to revision, and slight improvements long term over two years.

In a naturalistic study of course writing such as this one, fluency (measured by total words and total T-units) may be less important than accuracy and complexity because writing assignments for courses vary in length. In contrast, in controlled studies of timed writing, many of which use the same topic for pre- and post-tests, fluency is more crucial. However, Fei's later courses required writing assignments of more pages and words, and she increased her fluency correspondingly. Complexity, measured by clauses and words per T-unit and often related to the semantic carrying capacity and density of sentences (Hunt, 1965), showed some change, but little improvement either from draft to draft or between drafts over two years. See Table 3 for overall numbers on all three measures according to tutor, date, project, draft, and revision. See accuracy (Figure 1) and complexity (Figure 2) bar charts to observe a positive downward trend in error reduction, but no trend in complexity.

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的 can often be skipped; therefore, "autistic child" can be simply translated into 自閉症兒童, which would then be erroneously translated as "autism child."

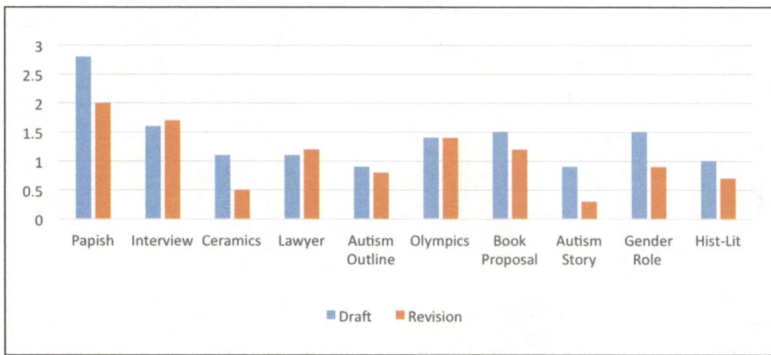


<b>Project</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Fluency</b>	
		<b># Words</b>	<b># T-units</b>
<b>Papish</b>	9/7/2012		
<b>Draft</b>		215	11
<b>Revision</b>		216	11
<b>Interview</b>	9/11/2012		
<b>Draft</b>		555	39
<b>Revision</b>		590	40
<b>Ceramics</b>	11/5/2012		
<b>Draft</b>		380	33
<b>Revision</b>		799	62
<b>Lawyer</b>	12/5/2012		
<b>Draft</b>		611	63
<b>Revision</b>		806	67
<b>Autism Outline</b>	2/8/2013		
<b>Draft</b>		707	69
<b>Revision</b>		699	68
<b>Olympics</b>	2/19/2013		
<b>Draft</b>		729	49
<b>Revision</b>		744	49
	3/28/2013		
<b>Draft</b>		1290	88
<b>Revision</b>		1946	149
<b>Autism Story</b>	4/15/2013		
<b>Draft</b>		1341	153
<b>Revision</b>		1535	168
<b>Gender Role</b>			
<b>Draft</b>	2/16/2014	1276	97
<b>Revision</b>	2/18/2014	1447	98
<b>Amy Tan</b>	3/25/2014		
<b>Draft</b>		1349	85
<b>Revision</b>		1544	84

**Table 3: Fluency, Accuracy, and Complexity of Fei’s Writing Samples over Time**

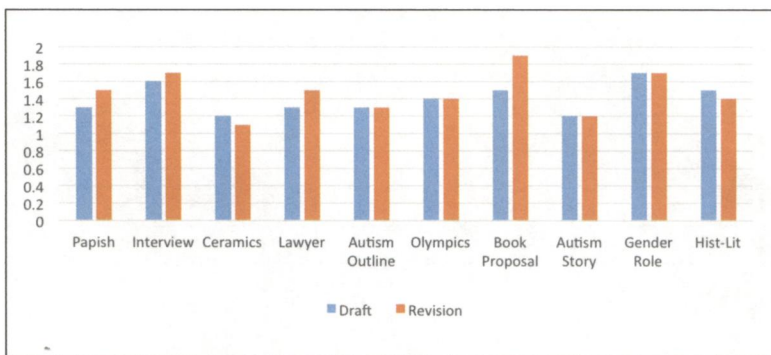
	Complexity			Accuracy	
	Words/T	Words/C	C/T	E/T	%EFT
	19.5	14.3	1.3	2.8	18%
	19.6	13.5	1.5	2	18%
	14.2	8.8	1.6	1.6	15%
	14.8	8.9	1.7	1.7	20%
	11.5	9.7	1.2	1.1	15%
	12.9	11	1.1	0.5	62%
	9.7	7.2	1.3	1.1	33%
	12	8.5	1.5	1.2	48%
	10.2	7.9	1.3	0.9	30%
	10.2	7.8	1.3	0.8	47%
	14.9	10.2	1.4	1.4	22%
	14.9	10.2	1.4	1.4	33%
	14.7	9.6	1.5	1.5	38%
	13	7	1.9	1.2	46%
	8.8	7	1.2	0.9	40%
	9.1	7.2	1.2	0.3	76%
	13.1	7.7	1.7	1.5	24%
	14.8	8.8	1.7	0.9	42%
	15.9	10.8	1.5	1	47%
	16	12.1	1.4	0.7	52%

Note in Table 3 that on two drafts that Fei submitted that were unfinished, Ceramics (a news story about student ceramicists) and Book Proposal, her fluency increased dramatically on the revision, from 380 words and 33 T-units to 799 words and 62 T-units for Ceramics, and from 1290 words and 88 T-units to 1946 words and 149 T-units for Book Proposal. Besides improving rhetorically (see below) in content and clarity, Ceramics also improved dramatically (see Appendix III) in accuracy—from 15% error-free T-units and 1.1 errors per T-unit to 62% error-free T-units and .5 errors per T-unit.



**Figure 1: Accuracy in Errors per T-unit from Draft to Revision over Time**

Note in Figure 1 (and Table 3) that over time the measure of errors per T-unit shows a general decline. More dramatic improvements in error reduction occurred in the Autism Story from .9 errors to .3 per T-unit and in Gender Role from 1.5 to .9 errors per T-unit.



**Figure 2: Complexity in Clauses per T-unit Over Time**

Note that unlike Figure 1, which shows a general decline in error, Figure 2 does not show an overall increase in complexity, but rather an up and down wave pattern within a small range between 1.2 and 1.9 mean clauses per T-unit, typical of non-linear aspects of second language writing development (Laresen-Freeman, 2007). Between draft and revision, complexity shows little increase and occasionally, with Ceramics and Amy Tan, a slight decrease. Complexity is generally thought to increase as second language proficiency increases (Bulté & Housen, 2014), so it is possible that Fei had reached a plateau in both; also, there are often trade-offs in the development of complexity and accuracy (Polio & Shea, 2014), and Fei appeared more concerned with accuracy, an area in which she frequently asked for help on her online submission forms (see below). In the interview, she said she would “lose points” for grammatical inaccuracy. Complexity often involves more risk-taking and therefore the possibility of making more errors in sentence structure, which are usually counted both by researchers and teachers as grammar errors.

**Researchers’ assessments of rhetorical development.** In terms of rhetorical improvement in the areas she checked as improved, we agree that Fei’s development of structure—her adequate control over theses, lead sentences in news stories, and topic sentences, all of which sustain an argument or develop a theme—made the first drafts of her later writing in 2013 and 2014 more organized and thus easier for her audience to follow (e.g. her three autism book papers arranged by proposal sections and chapters, or by chronology, and two literature papers driven by theses and three points) than her earlier writing in Fall 2012. That semester, her most structurally problematic paper was the draft of *Lawyer*, a feature story in which she faced the challenge of profiling a person while simultaneously highlighting a social issue.

In assessing her use of sources, Fei told us she was pleased that she had learned how to find quotes online by keyword from historical sources for her literature paper, although as Shih-Ni noted in her feedback to Fei, she did not always connect them well to her ideas, even after receiving feedback. However, Fei did not seem open to finding supportive quotes in a less mechanical way; “I’m not going to read through the book,” she said in the interview. In Book Proposal, she also used sources to support her analysis of the book publications market to show the need for her novel, but passages were copied and pasted from those sources and not quoted, which went unnoticed by the tutor, and thus appeared in the revised draft. Therefore, according to our assessment, which disagrees with Fei’s, she did not improve appreciably in the way she used sources, nor the way she used feedback to revise globally; the

most dramatic global revisions in response to feedback were on Ceramics in Fall 2012, when in response to Carol's global comments on her unfinished draft, she clarified her purpose and described in greater detail the type of artwork each ceramicist did. But for Autism Outline, so Fei could have the doctor provide a more complete diagnosis, Wendy advised her to do some research on the autism spectrum so she could make the autistic child a rounder, more developed character who was not portrayed in stereotypical ways, for example, as having an amazing memory. In addition, she recommended that Fei have the character of the autistic girl's mother, who narrates the story, do some research when she is overwhelmed and confused by what the doctor says. But Fei did not take Wendy up on her suggestions.

Most importantly, Fei's language problems inevitably interfered with the expression, logic, and clarity of her ideas and thus with her rhetorical effectiveness. The number (density) and type (gravity) of errors (James, 1998) made some of the content of her structured points hard to comprehend, even in the revised versions of her papers, as shown by an early example from Fall 2012 of her conclusion to her news story on Obama's visit to Iowa (Interview), and the thesis to her last paper (Amy Tan) about how knowing Chinese history helps us understand an Amy Tan short story:

1. Revised Conclusion to Interview story Fall 2012: *Overall, it is a great speech and makes most Iowan think they are important to make the decision.* Here the main problem, besides the vocabulary and syntax of "important to make the decision," is missing information: What decision? The decision to vote for Obama? To vote for any candidate?
2. Revised Thesis of Amy Tan paper, Spring 2014: *Understanding the historical background for Chinese immigrants will enhance my understanding of the text, and reveal important aspects of Suyuan's decision to abandon her twins, impact on her American born daughter about her identification, and unspoken secret.* This sentence is an ambitious thesis that packs in a main idea and supporting points, but because of syntax and vocabulary problems, numerous ambiguities cloud its meaning. Does she mean she is understanding how Chinese immigrants understand Chinese history? What is the word "impact" connected to? "Suyuan's decision to impact on her American born daughter about her identification" doesn't make sense. Fei's understanding history "will impact on her American born daughter" doesn't make sense either. Do we consider "impact" a noun and attach it like

this: "... reveal important aspects of impact on her American born daughter?" "Unspoken secret" is probably connected to "about her unspoken thesis," so there shouldn't be a comma after identification, by which she probably means "identity."

When we observed to Fei that she hadn't checked "got worse" for any of the 19 items on the self-assessment questionnaire, she seemed disturbed by the notion that any aspect of her or anyone else's writing could worsen in college. Yet Chaos/Complexity Theory and Dynamic Systems Theory-driven studies (e.g. Larsen-Freeman, 2006; 2007) show the uneven, up and down, non-linear, bidirectional, unpredictable and idiosyncratic nature of second language development. To prevent a negative reaction to that response option, in the self-assessment survey that we revised and have sent out to all international writing center students, we have replaced "got worse" with the less negative-sounding "declined" in the context of a brief description of second language writing development as fluctuating over the entire time in which they have been writing English, that is, before and after their non-ESL college courses.

**Writing process assessments.** From the interview and from analyzing her papers quantitatively and qualitatively, we can conclude that Fei had developed an efficient, but not necessarily effective writing process for generating drafts and for getting feedback. Here is her typical writing process as described in the interview: 1. First, she would study the assignment sheet to figure out what she had to do and how many paragraphs it would take; 2. Next, after researching if the assignment required it, she would 3. freewrite, and then 4. separate and outline her points paragraph by paragraph; 5. If needed, she would derive keywords from her ideas and use them to search online for quotes to support her ideas; 6. Then, she might look the draft over and send it to the online writing center program. She noted that she generated her drafts all in one sitting except for a draft of a literature paper she did when she was traveling during spring break for which she needed more sittings. She said she didn't revise or edit the draft much before sending it to the writing center because given the writing center's maximum 48-hour turn-around time, she was afraid of not getting the feedback in time to revise before having to turn it into the course instructor.

The online submission form asks students for their assignment description and also to describe what kind of feedback they want. Fei often skimmed on the assignment descriptions and instructors' specifications, thus giving her tutors insufficient guidance to assess her draft rhetorically. For Ceramics, her assignment description was *story, and the interview*. For Book Proposal, her description was *Write a book proposal*.

For Amy Tan, she wrote, *It is a research paper base on the story 'A Pair of Tickets' by Amy Tan.* In two of the autism papers, tutors did not know what qualities and features the course instructor was looking for, especially for a journalism course rather than a creative writing course with which her tutors from the English Department would have been more familiar. Consequently, Harry, the tutor for Autism Chapter, impressed with the poignancy and drama of Fei's scenes, suggested she submit it to the writing center's literary magazine while at the same time her own journalism professor was giving the project mediocre grades.

For tutor feedback, grammar seemed to be Fei's priority. On seven of the 10 projects, she asked for feedback on grammar; on two of those she asked for feedback only on grammar and on one, she asked for, *grammar!!!!* For the Olympics paper based on a set of exam-like questions, she discouraged her tutor from giving global feedback with the request: *Garmmar. This is a paper basic on a research paper, which I dont think you have time to read it. So please helps with garmmar, and typo.*

Her process when she received the draft with the tutor's feedback, she said, was 1. to read the commenting letter and then the marginal comments one by one; 2. then, if she had time, she would make changes in structure and other global changes suggested in the commenting letter; but usually 3. she would just follow the comments and corrections in the margins and in the text. Like the creation of her draft, her revision would also be done in one sitting. On her online submission form, she reported she would allot either ½ or 1 hour to revision. For only two papers did she allot 2 and 3 hours respectively. The problem of time and running out of time was a recurring refrain in her interview responses. Drafting and revising in one sitting, researching via key words on-line, and prioritizing the tutors' marginal grammar comments over global feedback made for an incomplete, truncated writing process, although certainly more effective than waiting until the *very* last minute, plunging in without planning or outlining, and arriving at a single draft hastily uploaded to the course site. Fei's expedient writing process is not unlike that of many college students, both first and second language writers (Nelson, 1990). We agreed with Fei's description of her process because of corroborating evidence from tutoring her and from close-reading her papers and submission forms, but unlike Fei, we saw that process as problematic. See Table 4 for a summary of rhetorical, linguistic, and process features and whether Fei and the researchers agreed on their improvement or lack of improvement.

<b>Rhetorical (Writing Development)</b>	<b>Questionnaire question number</b>	<b>Improved? (Fei)</b>	<b>Improved? (Authors)</b>	<b>Other corroborating data</b>
Audience awareness	2	Y	Y	Interview, textual analysis
Thesis	4	Y	Y	Interview, textual analysis
Sustaining an argument	5	Y	Y	Interview, textual analysis
Logical organization	6	N	Y	Textual analysis
Assignment fulfillment	1	N	N	Interview, textual analysis
Using sources	7	Y	N	Textual analysis
Expressing and connecting ideas	3	Y	N	Textual analysis
(Process) Using feedback to revise globally	8	Y	N	Textual analysis, uptake analysis

<b>Linguistic (English Development)</b>	<b>Questionnaire</b>	<b>Improved? (Fei)</b>	<b>Improved? (Authors)</b>	<b>Other corroborating data</b>
Using varied vocabulary	4	Y	Y	Textual analysis
(Process) Using feedback to address language problems	5	Y	Y	Textual analysis, accuracy analysis, uptake analysis
Use of prepositions	11	Y	Y	Textual analysis
Varied sentence structure	2	N	N	Complexity analysis



Linguistic (English Development)	Questionnaire	Improved? (Fei)	Improved? (Authors)	Other corroborating data
Accurate syntax	1	N	N	Accuracy analysis, textual analysis
Accurate vocabulary	3	N	N	Accuracy analysis, textual analysis
Accurate tenses	8	N	N	Interview, accuracy analysis, textual analysis
Accurate word forms	9	N	N	Interview, accuracy analysis, textual analysis
Accurate articles	10	N	N	Interview, accuracy analysis, textual analysis
Accurate agreement	7	N	N	Interview, accuracy analysis, textual analysis
(Process) Ability to edit and proofread on your own to correct grammar	6	N	N	Interview, accuracy analysis, textual analysis

**Table 4: Agreement between Participant and Researchers on Rhetorical, Linguistic, and Process Elements of her Second Language Writing Development**

**Tutors’ comments and their role in Fei’s second language writing development:** Fei’s seven tutors each had different styles and preferences, although all online tutors are trained to write a commenting letter with global and/or summative feedback, to give a limited

number of marginal comments (that is, not to correct every error), and to avoid using track changes because of writers' tendency to simply "Accept all changes" without reading the suggestions, evaluating them, and possibly learning from them. We were curious about Fei's own feedback preferences—the types of comments she felt most helpful for short term and her long term writing development. When asked how she saw the tutors' role in her second language writing development, she said that tutors helped her notice her errors. Perhaps her defining the tutor as error-noticing helper explained why she liked it when Jason, who tutored three of her papers, used track changes. Because she trusted his opinions of words she needed and didn't need, she did not find track changes offensive. "I don't care if you cross it out," she said. She noted though that she would not like it if tutors crossed out entire sentences.

However, Fei did find offensive marginal comments and commenting letters in which tutors explained grammar rules to her; she said she knows the rules, for example, for subject-verb agreement, but in the process of writing her ideas she just hadn't noticed all the occasions when she had to apply them. She said she would not read tutors' comments that contained grammar rules. Also, when tutors like Harry give her phrasing options, each one accompanied by a long explanation of meaning and connotation (e.g. the subtle differences between "I don't want any hard time" vs. "hard times" in *Autism Story*), she said she appreciated tutors' explanatory efforts but as long as she knows each option is acceptable, she would just copy and paste one of them without completely reading and understanding the differences. For Lawyer, she also simply copied and pasted Linda's reformulations of some of her awkward sentences into her paper. She said that she liked these reformulations, but that she knew that the short-cuts that they provided were not good for her learning. In the same vein, she said that tutors should point out a type of error, for example, adjective-noun confusion, the first time it occurs and then a few more times, but then allow her to find and correct the other instances of that type of error on her own. However, she was ambivalent about that practice because when we asked her whether tutors had ever disappointed her by not responding adequately to her feedback requests, she noted that she did not get the amount of grammar feedback she wanted although she understood why we could and would not correct all her errors.

Yet 234 of 494 (47%) of the tutors' total feedback points were on the Discourse Areas of Grammar, and an additional 212 on related language areas of Expression, Syntax, Lexis, and Mechanics. In other words, 88% of the tutors' marginal and in-text feedback was related to linguistic rather than rhetorical issues. Table 5 shows the numbers of

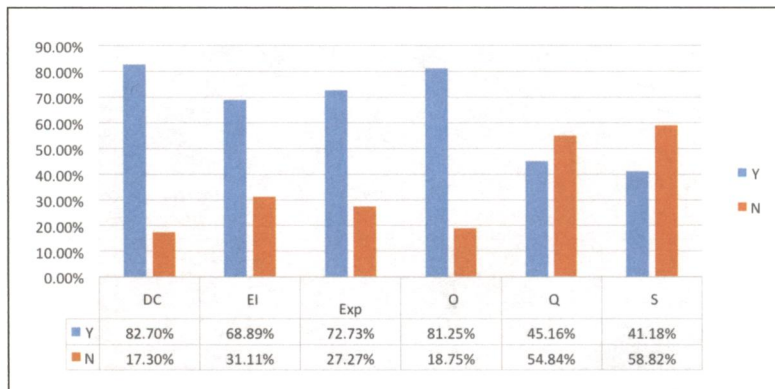
Comment Types, the numbers of comments on each Discourse Areas, and the number of Fei’s successful uptakes in her revisions for each of the 10 papers.

Comment types	Papish (n=18)	Interview (n=27)	Ceramics (n=42)	Lawyer (n=39)	Autism outline (n=23)	
DC	9	20	27	29	11	
EI	4	3	9	2	5	
Exp	1	2	2	2	5	
O	1	0	2	0	1	
Q	3	2	0	5	0	
S	0	0	2	1	1	
Discourse areas	Papish (n=18)	Interview (n=27)	Ceramics (n=42)	Lawyer (n=39)	Autism outline (n=23)	
Expression	2	1	1	2	4	
Grammar	6	18	24	11	10	
Lexis	1	0	1	2	4	
Mechanics	3	2	3	7	0	
Rhetoric	5	2	6	10	0	
Syntax	1	4	7	7	5	
Uptakes	Papish (n=18)	Interview (n=27)	Ceramics (n=42)	Lawyer (n=39)	Autism outline (n=23)	
Y	11	27	36	17	14	
N	7	0	6	22	9	

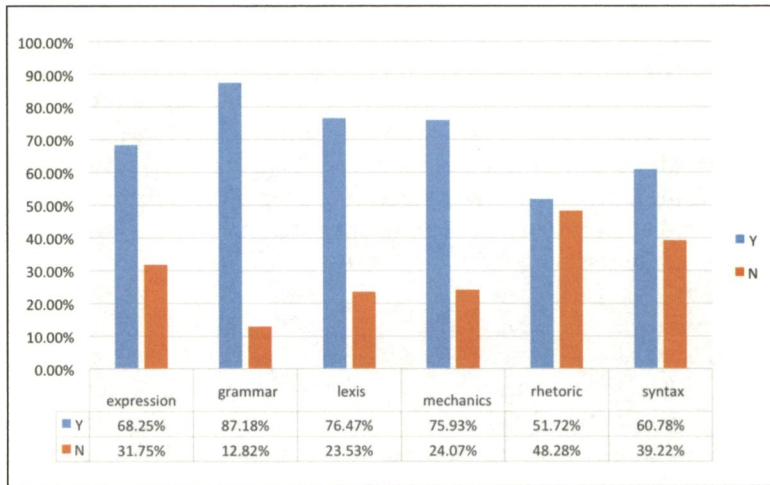
**Table 5: Comment Types, Discourse Areas, and Uptakes by Paper**

	Olympics (n=40)	Book proposal (n=48)	Autistic story (n=143)	Gender role (n=73)	Amy Tan (n=41)	Total (n=494)
	19	46	103	39	15	318
	7	0	22	21	17	90
	2	0	3	1	4	22
	3	1	5	2	1	16
	6	1	3	9	2	31
	3	0	7	1	2	17
	Olympics (n=40)	Book proposal (n=48)	Autistic story (n=143)	Gender role (n=73)	Amy Tan (n=41)	Total (n=494)
	13	3	20	14	3	63
	16	30	68	34	17	234
	6	3	12	4	1	34
	1	0	17	11	10	54
	3	2	18	5	7	58
	1	10	8	5	3	51
	Olympics (n=40)	Book proposal (n=48)	Autistic story (n=143)	Gender role (n=73)	Amy Tan (n=41)	Total (n=494)
	28	35	128	51	28	375
	12	13	15	22	13	119

Successful correction and revision does not guarantee linguistic or rhetorical learning, although undoubtedly it can enable it in terms of comprehensive input and modeling (Krashen, 1982). Certainly, successful revision of problematic features (Fei’s 375 uptakes) is more associated with learning than unsuccessful revision (her 119 non-uptakes). Fei’s overwhelmingly greater number of successful uptakes on 76% of the tutors’ feedback points surely indicates at least some short-term learning on her part. The dominating percentages of direct corrections and error indications, 83% combined, seem related to the 76% of successful uptakes, but the correlation was more complex. To see whether Comments Types (Direct Correction, Error Indication, Explanation, Options, Question, Suggestion) and Discourse areas (Rhetoric, Expression, Lexis, Syntax, Grammar, and Mechanics) could predict Fei’s successful or unsuccessful revisions, a Wald Chi-Square Test, which uses two independent variables (comment types and discourse areas) to predict the outcome variable (uptakes) was performed, resulting in a p value of less than .0001, indicating that both Comment Type and Discourse Area were correlated with her Revision.



**Figure 3: Percentages of Successful/Unsuccessful Uptakes for Comment Types**



**Figure 4: Percentages of Successful/Unsuccessful Uptakes for Discourse Areas**

A closer look into each of the six categories under Comment Types and Discourse Areas reveals that Fei was most likely to correct problems of the Discourse level of Grammar responded to with Direct Correction, but least likely to correct problems of Syntax and Rhetoric responded to with Questions or Suggestions (see Figures 4 and 5). These results could be explained by the fact that Syntax has more complex rules than Grammar, and Rhetoric has flexible principles rather than rules. Questions and Suggestions are less directive, and responding to them involve more deliberation and time on a writer’s part, and time was indeed an issue for Fei. Also, as we have shown, she was obviously more interested in revising language than rhetoric.

**Conclusions about Writing Center Research**

Although rich with biographical, pedagogical, and numerical data that create a complex portrait of a second language college writer’s writing development, case studies like this one are always limited in their representativeness. To increase the breadth of our inquiry into second language writing development, in a follow-up study, we revised the second language writing development self-assessment survey for international second language writers of all linguistic backgrounds. We sent a Qualtrics version to undergraduate international student

second language writers who have used the writing center. After a brief explanation of the nature of second language writing development, the survey asks participants to assess their rhetorical and linguistic writing development, as we did for Fei. The survey also includes short-answer questions about what rhetorical and language issues they have worked on with what degree of frequency in the writing center. We recommend that writing centers adapt their own version of the self-assessment survey in Appendix I for research, for tutor training, and also for their tutors to use and discuss with international students in face-to-face tutoring sessions.

Another limitation of the study was that although it involved papers over two years, it was conducted in Fei's last semester, unlike Spack's (1997) and Kobayashi & Rinnert's (2013) studies, for which interviews and other data collection were done periodically over years. Future writing center writing development studies should be planned likewise to capture more of the environmental factors that may have contributed to writers' fluctuations.

Writing Center researchers interested in the linguistic aspects of second language writing development could easily use the traditional complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) measures we employed to assess the linguistic development over time of "frequent flyers." An option would be to use controlled writing samples on the same prompt or prompts similar in topic or genre over time as controlled writing development studies in Applied Linguistics do. The diversity of Fei's writing in various genres and fields may have affected our CAF results.

## **Conclusions about Writing Center Tutoring**

**Online programs and face-to-face tutoring: An intervention effort with Fei.** Noticing that the number of syntax and grammar errors seemed large for a journalism major applying for internships, in 2012, Carol had attempted to intervene in the cycle of what seemed to be Fei's submitting her drafts without sufficient editing, asking mainly for grammar feedback, and then receiving it, only to do the same for the next paper without seeming to try to edit and correct more on her own. It did not surprise us that so much of the tutors' feedback was direct grammar correction, as Fei usually requested grammar help, and her writing exhibited error density (James, 1998). As part of her response to two of her submissions, Carol advised Fei in the commenting letters that accompanied her feedback on drafts that she would probably communicate with tutors more easily and learn a lot more about language long-term in face-to-face tutoring, especially in the semester-long

enrollment program of ongoing sessions with the same tutor. Yet Fei continued to submit to online tutoring.

When asked in the interview why she preferred online to face-to-face tutoring, Fei said that face-to-face appointments were only good for short papers like job application letters because tutors never got through an entire 4–5 page paper, especially when they had her read her papers aloud. She said after she read through the paper, half of the allotted 30 minute time was up, and there was only 15 minutes left to tell her “what was wrong.” In retrospect, we realized that she might not have been aware that the writing center permits two appointments a week that can be back-to-back for a total of 60 minutes, which could have given her more time with the tutor. However, during busier times of the semester, back-to-back appointments are harder to obtain. Carol explained to Fei that her face-to-face tutors were probably hoping that in reading the paper aloud, she would herself discover some of “what was wrong.” Fei also confessed that she was, as she said, “too lazy” to go to the writing center, especially in the cold. From 2011 to 2013, she attended eight face-to-face writing center appointments with different tutors, working on professional and academic projects that differed from those she sent to online tutoring, so one could say she had enough experience with both modes of tutoring to make her decision to use online only. As for the synchronous online tutoring options (chat, Skype) that work for many writing centers, which may have prevented the cycle that Fei and her tutors perpetuated, at this time it would not work for us given our circumstances: an overworked, multitasking online tutoring staff of staff, graduate students, and faculty who relish the convenience of the asynchronous mode and the ability to log into the system and work any time. In addition, we have tried to launch synchronous programs with poor response by students.

**Fei’s second language writing development: Implications for online tutoring.**

*Online tutors should work with the same students over time.* Fei’s development in the rhetorical, linguistic, and process components of writing development over two years was modest. Much of her writing seemed motivated by efficiency, expediency, and a race against time. Yet the nature of our writing center online tutoring program inadvertently conspired with her to exacerbate her truncated writing process by giving her the amount of grammar feedback she asked for and allowing seven different online tutors to tutor her papers, thus losing consistency and continuity. One or two tutors over two years would have been more easily able to witness change or lack thereof from one paper to another



and adjust their feedback accordingly. Online tutoring programs should encourage online tutors to “claim” drafts from the same students so they can witness and encourage their development.

**Break the cycle.** We also perpetuated the cycle of her submitting unedited, un-proofread papers by continuing to point out and correct her errors when we could have sent them back or required that she come in for face-to-face tutoring, a strategy we have used with other students, both native and non-native speakers of English. Lately we have been discouraging draft submissions for grammar correction only either by not responding to them (with a note to the student about why) or by color coding typical second language errors—missing plurals, missing or incorrect articles, subject-verb disagreement, and verb-tense problems—a type of feedback that combines Error Indication and Explanation and would warrant a new category for future feedback research. However, we should note it is not an option for writing centers to prohibit second language writers from using online tutoring. Such an option would be unjust and discriminatory. Many have good reasons for not using face-to-face tutoring. They are out of town or studying abroad; they have small children and cannot leave home; they are physically disabled; or they prefer the permanency of written feedback they can read over again to conversational feedback that may overly challenge their second language listening and speaking capacities.

**Talk with students about second language writing development and realistic goals.** Clearly, tutors and their feedback were an important part of Fei’s writing process, especially her editing and revising her drafts for language problems, but it is debatable how instrumental they were in the long-term growth and improvement of the rhetorical, linguistic, and process components of writing development. When we asked Fei if she improved in her writing as much as she would have liked, she said she was disappointed that she could not write like a native speaker, an unrealistic goal, considering that most second language writing will always be accented (Leki, 1992). To devise more realistic goals and then operationalize them, for example, learning how to notice and correct more types and instances of her own errors to reduce her error density and gravity (James, 1998), she needed to know about the non-linear, bidirectional nature of second language writing development, but more importantly, she needed practice in establishing more complete writing, revising, and editing processes. These process observations emphasize that writing centers’ need to continue to focus on the back-and-forth-between-phases nature, that is, the recursiveness of the writing process as well as on the later stages of editing and proofreading. Specifically, both online and face-to-face tutors should focus on self-editing strat-

egies—how to read one’s work to recognize and correct the types of errors one knows one makes, which could be recorded in an Error Log. Directors concerned about the perennial problem of global/local imbalances or about error indication/correction imbalances in online tutoring feedback could use the classification scheme according to Comment Type and Discourse Area to educate their online tutors as well as for tutor feedback research.

Perhaps more than four years are needed for further writing development; as Virginia P. Collier (1987) argues, at least seven years are necessary for second language academic literacy development. But when asked whether she would continue to write in English when she returned to China, Fei said she was more worried about regaining her fluency and skill in Chinese writing. She also said she had no plans to read in English and finish the best-sellers she started, and that she doubted she would continue writing in English unless her company transfers her to an English-speaking country. Lest this be depressing news, the same structural skills organizing writing in different genres will undoubtedly reverse-transfer to her Chinese writing at the workplace and in her travel blog. Taking a Multiliteracy perspective which sees the relationship between a speaker’s languages as fluid (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2013), her English writing development may stop for a time while her Chinese writing development, to a certain extent cut off because of U.S. study abroad, can resume. As Alister Cumming (1989) showed from his research with Canadian native French speakers writing in English, writing expertise—control over the structural and process aspects of writing—is not language bound and transfers back and forth between languages.

Writing centers should open up discussions between tutors themselves and between tutors and students about the non-linear, fluctuating, bidirectional nature of second language writing development and its rhetorical, linguistic, and process components and the tutors’ role in it. Second language writers should know that it is common for one feature, such as accuracy, to improve at the expense of another such as complexity, or vice versa. A writing development self-assessment survey such as ours will serve as a stimulus for discussions of development, which could more easily happen in face-to-face tutoring, but could also be initiated via the commenting letter in online tutoring. Tutors should talk to students about not only improving, both linguistically and rhetorically, from draft to revision of the same project, but also from project to project over time. Tutors and students should also compare how one another views the tutor’s role in the student’s writing development, so that tutors have a larger role than helping second language writers notice

their language errors—an important task surely, since accuracy is said to need more instruction than complexity (Connor-Linton & Polio, 2014).

However, the most vital role of any tutor, face-to-face or online, in either first or second language writing development, is to coach writers in their writing processes so they do not, as Fei did, truncate their composing, but instead take full advantage of a complete writing process of multiple drafts and multiple revisions, including editing, in multiple sittings. Perhaps, that is the best way to interpret and operationalize the need to improve the writer and not just the writing. Students at our center evaluate their online tutors on whether they have taught them lessons about the writing process that will apply to future projects. We often get so caught up in the content and language of drafts that we neglect this task. The case study of Fei reminds us of its importance.

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## Appendix I

### Self-Assessment of Writing and English Development

When you look over your drafts and revisions from the last two years, what patterns and changes do you notice, if any? Considering the aspects of writing and English language listed below, which do you think improved? Which do you think stayed the same? Which aspects got worse? Please use specific examples from your writing (include the paper title and date, page #, paragraph number and the example) to illustrate each of your observations. Circle the best choice, a) Stayed the Same, b) Improved, or c) Got Worse. Feel free to write on the back of the page.

### Writing Development

1. Ability to meet the demands of the assignment:
  - a. Stayed the Same b) Improved c) Got Worse (same choices for all subsequent questions)
2. Give specific examples from your papers to support what you circled and make any other comments you wish in English or Chinese (same for other items)
3. Ability to show awareness of the audience:
4. Ability to express and connect ideas:
5. Ability to construct a thesis statement:
6. Ability to sustain an argument throughout a paper:
7. Ability to organize a piece of writing logically:
8. Ability to use sources effectively:
9. Ability to use feedback to revise for larger issues, e.g. to strengthen thesis/argument

### English Development

1. Ability to use correct English syntax and sentence structure (英文句型与句法): for example, correct English word order; avoiding run-on sentences (不间断句子) and sentence fragments (不完整句)
2. Ability to vary sentence structures and sentence length: for example, not starting consecutive sentences with a transition such as “In addition” or “However.”
3. Ability to choose vocabulary (字汇) and expressions (英文惯用说法) accurately:
4. Ability to use a varied vocabulary (not using the same words for a particular meaning throughout a piece):
5. Ability to use feedback to correct language problems:
6. Ability to edit and proofread on your own to correct grammar (文法):
7. Ability to maintain agreement between subject (主词) and verb (动词): for example, he eats lunch
8. Ability to choose correct verb tenses (时态): for example, not mixing present and past tenses when talking about the past
9. Ability to choose correct word forms (e.g. adj. (形容词) vs. noun (名词)): for example, religious vs. religion
10. 10) Ability to make the correct decisions about articles (冠词): for example, a, the, or no article
11. Ability to make the correct decisions about prepositions (介系词): for example, with, by, in, on

### Appendix II

#### Interview Questions

1. What do you consider to be your strengths and weaknesses in English writing?
2. How much do you enjoy writing in English? How about in Chinese?
3. At the university and in the community, have you used English for any other activities besides reading, writing, and speaking for your



course work? That is, have you participated in any campus organizations or community activities in English? Have you spoken English with friends? If so, tell us more about these non-academic and social uses of English.

4. Do you write in English apart from doing course papers, homework, and application letters, for example, emails or letters to English speaking friends? If so, tell us more about this writing.
5. We noticed that your autism narrative and your autobiographical writing are very creative and effective. Do you ever do creative writing like that in English just for fun? In Chinese?
6. What is your typical writing process like—from when you receive an academic assignment to when you hand it in to your teacher? What are the steps in your research and writing process? That is, what do you do first, second, etc.?
7.
  - a. In the two and a half years you have been using online tutoring, do you think your English writing has changed? If so, how?
  - b. Do you think your English language skills in general have changed? If so, how?
  - c. What do you think are the factors in your US high school and college education and in your life that have influenced those changes in your writing?
  - d. In your English language?
  - e. If she mentions online tutors in c: How specifically have online and face-to-face tutors helped you improve your writing and your English?
  - f. What do you think are the factors in your US high school and college education and your life that may have prevented you from improving your English and your writing perhaps as much as you would have wanted?
  - g. Over the years, you seem to have preferred online tutoring over face to face tutoring. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of online tutoring over face-to-face tutoring? For what purposes have you made face-to-face appointments?
  - h. Have you ever shared your writing with others besides writing center tutors? For example, do you work with your classmates or English speaking friends on assignments?

8. You have received feedback from many different online tutors over the years. Is there one particular tutoring style or type of feedback that you find the most helpful? Please take some time and look through the drafts with feedback.
  - a. (If she hasn't covered this already): In what ways did this or these feedback style(s) or type(s) help you with your writing and/or English?
  - b. Do you pay more attention to the cover letters tutors write you at the beginning of the draft, the comments in the margin, or both equally?
  - c. Do you find the tutors' cover letters useful? Is it easier or harder to apply tutors' overall suggestions than marginal comments?
  - d. Have the tutors adequately responded to your requests for feedback on particular areas (say grammar or structure) and to the questions you ask on the online tutoring submission form?
  - e. Have you filled out the evaluations of the tutors' feedback when you get the email with the link to the survey along with your feedback? Why or why not?
9. Can you comment on the kinds of writing assignments you've received over the years—in journalism, rhetoric, gen ed lit, art, which ones you remember as helpful to learning the subject matter and English writing and which ones were not as helpful? Follow up: Why were those particular assignments helpful and the others not as helpful? Do you remember any assignments that you thought were too difficult for you and other students in the class?
10. What plans do you have to keep up with your English in China? For example, will you be writing emails to English-speaking friends or keeping up with them on Facebook? Reading books and magazines in English? Watching movies in English? Do you have plans to continue to work on grammar issues, for example, how to decide whether to use an adjective, noun, or verb? Or how to decide whether to use the present or past tense?

### Appendix III

#### Sample Entry to the Descriptive Chart of Fei's Papers:

**Paper 3: Ceramics, 11/05/12;** the following four headings are from the online submission form the student fills out.

**Course:** Fei wrote N/A

**Assignment Description:** "Story and then the Interview."

**Time for Revision:** ½ hour

**Feedback Request:** "I did not done with my geature story, but please correct some grammar mistakes, and looking the format and structure."

**Draft Description:** The purpose of the draft was hard to understand—was it to announce a show, profile some ceramicists? Most of her descriptions of the artists' work were too vague and general to communicate what their art was like: "His works are very abstract, but interesting."

**Commenting Letter (Carol):** Asks for more elaboration on the artist's work. Also asks for her to proofread before she sends her work to us and to review her grammar, and to use f2f tutoring. "There are too many basic errors here, for example, with verbs, that you should be able to identify and correct yourself at this stage of your journalism career." Carol was responding to the fact that she was a senior journalism major and still had basic sentence structure problems.

**Revision Description:** The revision still had errors, but the purpose of the piece, profiling the artists' in relation to their up-coming student shows was clearer as was the philosophy and art of each artist. She also interviewed additional artists and finished the piece. It was a huge improvement in accuracy and therefore in readability.

### About the Authors

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