The Role of L2 Supervisors' Written Feedback in Texts Written for Publication in English: A Sociocultural Perspective

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Abstract: *Postgraduate students in L2 countries are currently under pressure to publish in the English language (MARTÍN et al., 2014; MARTINEZ; GRAF, 2016; MUSTAFA, 2012). Thesis supervisors have been identified as influential in helping these students navigate the writing process toward publications(LEI; HU, 2015). Accordingly, this study aimed to understand if supervisors identified their supervisees' zone of proximal development in feedback provision.*

Based on the sociocultural framework, the participants of this qualitative case study included a postgraduate supervisor and one supervisee. The supervisor was the thesis supervisor of the supervisee, who provided written feedback on his drafts for publication. Data was collected using three text histories and semi-structured interviews. The text histories were used to investigate the effect of written feedback on the supervisee's ZPD during the writing process. Additionally, semi-structured interviews with the supervisee were used to clarify and get insights on issues that arose during the analysis of the text histories.

The study suggested that the nature of feedback and aspects of students' texts identified by the supervisor as requiring feedback signified that the supervisor aimed at providing assistance that was contingently responsive to the supervisee's ZPD. Similarly, written feedback enhanced interactions capable of developing co-constructed knowledge, which over time enabled the supervisee take responsibility for his writing. This study's findings will encourage supervisors to consider the type of feedback they provide to students closely during the writing process. The study may contribute to the SCT framework of understanding the ZPD in relation to L2 adult learners.

Keywords: Postgraduate Supervisors, Publications in a Second Language, Written Feedback, Sociocultural Theory, ZPD.

I.   Introduction

Postgraduate students are pressured to communicate their research by publishing articles written in English worldwide (LUO; HYLAND, 2016; GEA-VALOR; REY-ROCHA; MORENO, 2014). Publications are important for reasons such as receiving grants, the communication of research to a broader audience, postdoctoral jobs, increased scholarly worth, and peaceful coexistence amongst cross-cultural researchers who find themselves united in one language (HABIBIE, 2016; FLOWERDEW, 2015; LILLIS; CURRY, 2006). Additionally, some English as a second language countries (L2) such as Spain, China, Japan, and Brazil have adopted an educational policy whereby

postgraduate students, particularly doctoral students, must publish in English as partial fulfillment for completing their degrees in some disciplinary areas (MARTINEZ; GRAF, 2016; MIKI, 2009; SALIH; HOLI; CLARK, 2014; CHO, 2009). However, the availability of writing support in L2 countries is scarce (FERREIRA, 2016). The scarcity of writing support makes postgraduate students depend on the feedback by their thesis supervisors to go through the writing process (MARTINEZ; GRAF, 2016).

Written feedback is used in consolidating and encouraging writing (KAHYALAR; YILMAZ, 2016; SHUTE, 2008: MORTON; STORCH; THOMPSON, 2014). Through written feedback, supervisors nurture novice researchers into becoming published researchers (LI; FLOWERDEW, 2007). Drawing on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, this paper will use the concepts of Mediation, and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), to investigate issues surrounding the role of feedback in writing for publication in English in L2 countries.

A large body of literature has investigated the importance of written feedback in L2 classrooms on writing activities (ALJAAFREH; 1994; FADDA, 2012; HOSSEINY, 2014; LENG, 2014). However, there is limited research on the effect of L2 supervisors' written feedback on articles written for publications. It is against this background that this study aimed to address the question, do supervisors determine their supervisees' Zone of Proximal Development in feedback provision? Consequently, the result of this study aims to fill the gap in the existing literature and contribute to the growing field of research on the role of supervisors' written feedback in L2 writing.

II.   Literature Review

Mediation and the Zone of Proximal Development based on Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory

According to the Sociocultural theory, human cognitive development occurs from mediated social interactions between individuals and their environment, leading to the development of higher mental functions (LANTOLF; APPEL, 1994; VYGOTSKY, 1978). Lantolf and Thorne (2006,p.59) defined higher mental functions as sophisticated cognitive processes such as "logical memory," "voluntary attention," and "logical thinking. Mediation is a determinant factor in developing higher mental functions (DANIELS; COLE; WERTSCH, 2007). Mediation occurs through tools that can be material (books, articles, and computers) or psychological (language). Tools are culturally and socially meaningful things that determine the in-depth transformation of the natural forms of cognitive behaviors (VYGOTSKY, 1978). Tools' relevance depends on the meanings encoded in them(DANIELS, 2007). Vygotsky views language as an essential mediational tool whose primary functions are communication, organization, and generalization of thinking" (VYGOTSKY, 1980). Thus, language is an auxiliary aid for facilitating and deep reconstruction of activity performance.

Social interactions occur through the assistance provided by a more knowledgeable other (parents, peers, and teachers) to the novice to develop higher mental functions (VYGOTSKY, 1980). However, not all assistance brings about development because they might not be appropriate for the novice's needs(STORCH, 2018). Therefore development occurs when the assistance provided considers the novices' current and potential levels of competence which is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The assistance within the ZPD is described "as an act of negotiated discovery," signifying that the assistance must be graduated and contingently responsive to the novices changing needs (PANAHI; BIRJANDI; AZABDAFTARI, 2013). Assistance is deemed to be graduated when the right measure of help is provided (FITHRIANI, 2019; STORCH, 2018). For instance, too much assistance might be detrimental to learning and prevent the novice from becoming independent, while, on the other hand, too little assistance could discourage the novice. Additionally, assistance is referred to as contingent when it is removed when the novice displays an ability to function independently (FITHRIANI, 2019; MORTON; STORCH; THOMPSON, 2014; STORCH, 2018). Relating SCT to this current study, supervisors' written feedback has been a tool used in providing assistance to encourage, organize, and aid the generalization of their students' thinking with respect to writing (BITCHENER; BASTURKMEN; EAST, 2010; MORTON; STORCH; THOMPSON, 2014).

The Role of supervisors' written feedback on postgraduate students' writing

Supervisory written feedback plays a significant role in the process of postgraduate writing (BITCHENER; BASTURKMEN, 2006; BITCHENER; BASTURKMEN; EAST, 2010). From a traditional perspective of supervisor-student relationships, supervisors are deemed as 'experts" capable of influencing the academic development of their supervisees, which includes writing and discipline-specific way of thinking (DYSTHE, 2002; MORTON; STORCH; THOMPSON, 2014). Written feedback is a tool that provides specialized writing guidance to students' texts, reflecting the texts' strengths and weaknesses(LEE, 2018). Written feedback is a process of "writing extensive comments on students' texts to provide a reader response to students' efforts and at the same time helping them improve and learn as writers"(HYLAND, 2003, p.8). Therefore, written feedback teaches, instructs, and assists students in improving their writing. Hyland and Hyland (2001) reported that adherence to feedback ensures that students make minimum errors and that their writing has clarity.

In the literature, supervisors have been recognized for providing feedback on content, organization, rhetorical structure, genre conventions, and language (BITCHENER; BASTURKMEN; EAST, 2010; KWAN, 2010). Therefore, supervisors give input in the development of virtually every aspect of their supervisees' text. Similarly, supervisors have been recognized for providing postgraduate students with the mastery of specific competencies capable of teaching supervisees how to develop arguments and construct coherent texts(LEE; MURRAY, 2015). Supervisors know and understand how to structure research articles and are aware that their supervisees need guidance on writing different sections of the research article manuscripts depending on their needs(MARTINEZ; GRAF, 2016).

III. Methods

Context of the study

The qualitative study occurred in the Engineering department at a public university in southeast Brazil. Postgraduate students in this institution are required to publish their research results in an internationally recognized journal as partial fulfillment for obtaining their degrees.

Participants of the Research

A case study approach was used in this paper to gain an in-depth understanding of the effect of that feedback on the writing process of texts aimed toward publication(BLOOMBERG; VOLPE, 2018; MERRIAM, 1998) .The case study included a postgraduate supervisor who published yearly in English and had postgraduate students who had similarly published in English, and a supervisee. The supervisor was referred to as Supervisor 1, and the supervisee as Supervisee A. Supervisee A was a male third-year doctoral student writing his second article for publication in English. Supervisor 1 was the thesis supervisor of supervisee A and provided written feedback on his manuscripts.

Data Collection Instruments.

Data were collected using text histories and semi-structured interviews. Text histories are means of data collection and analysis showing text trajectories towards publication impacted by individuals other than the authors (LILLIS; CURRY, 2006). The text histories showed the focus and nature of feedback. It also illustrated how the supervisee's writing progressed through feedback. Progress occurred when changes were made in the subsequent drafts with an improved text. Semi-The semi-structured interviews were used to clarify issues that arose during the analysis of text histories(HUMPHREY; SIMPSON, 2012).

Data Analysis.

Data was analyzed using a thematic analytical framework. The use of thematic analysis enabled a systematic identification and organization of data, offering insights into patterns of meanings (themes) across a data set (BRAUN; CLARKE, 2006,p.57). All feedback instances were counted, and open coding was used to potentially identify essential features in the data set to answer the research question. The codes were determined through the meaning and functions attributed to relevant words and phrases given as feedback and their functions in the

text. Excerpts were allocated to each code to interpret data content (BRAUN; CLARKE, 2006). The changes in all 3 drafts were manually analyzed through cross-reference and comparison of the revised version with the previous version based on the feedback provided. The analysis showed that the nature of feedback used by the supervisor was deletions, additions, reformulations, directives, suggestions, and questions (See Appendix **1**).

Feedback on deletions, additions, and reformulations was direct to which the supervisor provided the proper form to be changed in the text (FERRIS, 2006). However, feedback that included suggestions, directives, and questions indicated that adjustments were required without providing the correct form (indirect feedback) (GHANDI; MAGHSOUDI, 2014; STORCH, 2018) (STORCH, 2018). Furthermore, the analysis of text histories showed that the supervisor focused on providing feedback on content, cohesion/coherence, sentence-level changes, technical words/vocabulary, and diagrams/ formatting. It is noteworthy that where supervisors' feedback dealt with more than one issue or an interplay between issues, such comments were counted twice, once for each category. Therefore based on the nature and focus of feedback, the supervisor's written feedback was the mediatory tool used in providing assistance to Supervisee A to achieve to achieve things that could be done with help. (See Appendix 1).

IV.   Results and Discussion

Table 1: Examples of Supervisors feedback showing the nature and Focus of feedback on Supervisees' draft

Supervisors Feedback	Focus of feedback	Nature of feedback	Direct	Indirect
In Within this context, investigations on delamination in of thermoplastic laminates properties are largely relevant.	Sentence level changes	Addition		
Is that all??? I think it's interesting for you to quantify the RT 25C.	Content	suggestions		x
Measured/ Catalog, please include reference and explain.	Content	Directive		x
Furthermore, these materials are more adequate to high-volume production than thermoset laminates mainly because no chemical reaction is needed.	Cohesion and Coherence	reformulations	x	
It is told that the degree of stress uniformity in a specimen can be given quantified by the parameter…	Technical words and vocabulary	Deletion	x	
Didn't you measure the lengths at several points to evaluate the parallelism?	Content	Questions		x
Image resolution is very bad. I think the original image is with X, if I don't have it with me, I suggest you take it with him ok?	Diagram /Formatting	suggestions		x

The words/phrases in red were cancelled and replaced with the words and phrases in green.

In Table 1, the consideration of the nature and focus of feedback showed that the supervisor considered ways of effectively directing the supervisee's writing process. The supervisor provided feedback that could inform the

supervisees of changes required to improve different aspects of the text either directly or indirectly (BITCHENER; BASTURKMEN; EAST, 2010; STORCH, 2018). Similarly, the provision of feedback in different aspects of the text showed that feedback is a means through which supervisors socialize their supervisees into disciplinary ways of writing (DYSTHE, 2002; MORTON; STORCH; THOMPSON, 2014). The supervisor gave feedback based on what he considered necessary to enhance writing. In this context, the directness or indirectness of feedback is viewed as two ends of a continuum of scaffold feedback. None is considered better than the other because the findings showed that feedback was provided based on the learner's demand at specific developmental points in the ZPD(STORCH, 2018). All kinds of feedback provided were considered potentially relevant for improvement (see Appendix **2**).

Table 2: Total amount of feedback given by Supervisor 1 on Drafts 1, 2 and 3 of Supervisee A

	Content	Sentence - level changes	Technical words and vocabulary	Coherence and cohesion	Diagrams and formatting	Total number of feedback
Draft 1	18	40	33	14	11	116
Draft 2	7	23	17	9	5	61
Draft 3	5	11	6	4	1	27
Total	30	74	56	27	17	204
Percentages	14.71	36.27	27.45	13.24	8.33	

Table 2 showed that the supervisor provided a significant amount of feedback on all the supervisee's drafts. Constant provision of feedback could indicate that the supervisor considered feedback provision as an ongoing process that should happen continuously throughout the writing process until a final product is achieved(CHENG; LIANG; TSAI, 2015). Additionally, a noticeable decrease in feedback quantity is observed from the first to the second draft and the second to the third draft. This decrease could signify that feedback helped the student bridge discover what he knew and what needed to be known to enhance the textual progression in the subsequent drafts, indicating effective scaffolded assistance (MORTON; STORCH; THOMPSON, 2014).

Furthermore, in Table 2, although there was a reduction in the feedback quantity, the feedback focus remained consistent in all three drafts. The consistency in the supervisor's focus on feedback emphasized that the supervisor ensured that feedback was responsive to the supervisee's needs. Sentence level changes, technical words, and vocabulary and content received the highest feedback percentages. On the other hand, cohesion and coherence and diagrams/formatting received the least amount of feedback. Table 2 showed that sentence level changes and technical words and vocabulary focused on linguistic accuracy were challenging for the supervisee. The supervisors constantly provided feedback in this area aimed at ensuring error-free texts. The supervisor prioritized ensuring that the students' writings conform to the rules set out by specific areas of studies and met the required standards (See Appendix 3).
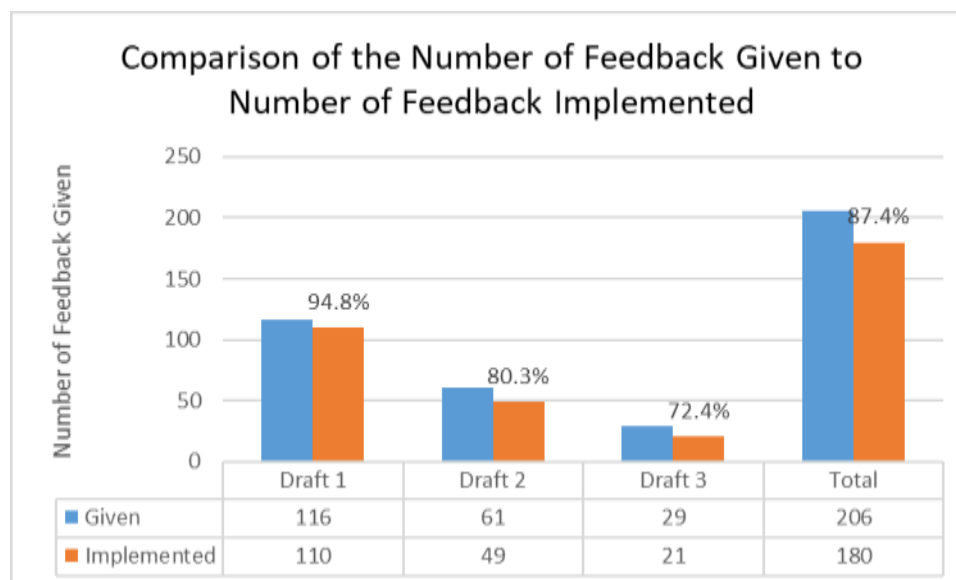
Comparison of the Number of Feedback Given to Number of Feedback Implemented

	Draft 1	Draft 2	Draft 3	Total
Given	116	61	29	206
Implemented	110	49	21	180

Figure 1: Comparison of Number of Feedback Given to Number of Feedback Implemented by Supervisee A

Figure 1 shows that in the three drafts, there were 94.8%, 80.3%, and 72.4% on feedback implementation, respectively. The level of feedback implementation showed that feedback was crucial for encouraging and consolidating the writing process(KAHYALAR; YILMAZ, 2016; SHUTE, 2008) . Feedback brought the student's awareness of his text's strengths and weaknesses and pointed the supervisee in the direction where adequate changes could be made (See Appendix **2**). There was a progressive decline in feedback implementation by the supervisee. The drop-in feedback implementation signified that the supervisee had begun to assume more responsibility for his writing and becoming a more competent writer that could analyze some aspects of his texts effectively and self-correct (See Appendix 3). Additionally, the level of implementation of supervisors' feedback resulted from the collaborative relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. The supervisee negotiated opinions on feedback with the supervisor, which influenced feedback implementation (See Appendix 3**)**. The process of negotiating feedback indicated that the feedback process was interactive. These interactions helped the supervisee develop as he co-constructed knowledge with his supervisor, which is essential for developing higher mental functions(LANTOLF; APPEL, 1994; VYGOTSKY, 1978).

V.　Conclusion

Writing an article for publication is a social activity situated within the context of a discourse community. Supervisors as custodians of disciplinary cultures through written feedback reflect their ability to impact their supervisees' textual production. The study findings showed that the supervisor's feedback in the form of addition, deletions, directives, questioning, comments, and suggestions constituted direct and indirect feedback that influenced articles written for publications. Additionally, supervisors provided feedback on different aspects, including content, sentence-level changes, technical words and vocabulary, coherence and cohesion, and diagrams and formatting.

The supervisor's consideration of the nature and aspects of the supervisee's text requiring feedback that was capable of enhancing writing progress showed that the supervisor considered what the learner could do on his own and what he could do with the help of a more knowledgeable or experienced individual ZPD. Feedback provided models for imitation in which the supervisee carried out constructive experimentation leading to effective scaffolded assistance. A limitation of the study was the non-consideration of students' perceived needs compared to the feedback provided by the supervisor. By examining if supervisors provided feedback in

cognizance of their supervisees ZPD, the study provided insightful contributions to higher education. This study will encourage supervisors to consider the type of feedback they provide to students closely during the writing process. The study may contribute to the SCT framework of understanding the ZPD in relation to L2 adult learners.

VI. REFERENCES

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Appendix 1. Definition of Terms on the Nature and Focus of Feedback

1. Deletions meant crossing out parts from the texts considered unimportant due.

2. Addition required the inclusion of more context to the texts, sentences, grammar, and vocabulary.

3. Reformulations meant rewriting the text to enhance meaning. Directives gave instructions that provided clarifications.

4. Suggestions indicated a need for content, and questions brought awareness that gaps needed to be filled

5. Content: Feedback focused on the availability, relevance, completeness, and accuracy of information which aided textual development and clarity of ideas(BITCHENER; BASTURKMEN; EAST, 2010).

6. Cohesion and Coherence. Feedback was given to ensure intra-text connectedness and the contextual fitness of ideas essential in writing academic texts to make them more understandable (POUDEL; DHANKUTA,2018).

7. Sentence Level Changes: Feedback included the proper use of grammar (prepositions, verb tenses, and spelling (LILLIS; CURRY, 2006).

8. Technical Words and Vocabulary; Feedback ensured the use of the disciplinary areas register and the appropriate language(LILLIS; CURRY, 2006).

9. Diagrams and Formatting; Feedback ensured the use of proper font sizes numbering of sections of RA and images (LILLIS; CURRY, 2006).

Appendix 2: Table showing how the use of feedback brought about progression in writing across the Drafts.

Draft 1	Supervisors feedback	Draft 2	Supervisors Feedback	Draft 3
Since there are still no proper and widely used failure criteria for woven composites, this paper tries to provoque the academic community by starting a new kind of analysis and development of failure criterias for woven composites based on the conception of a mosaic 21 model applied to a plain weave, 5HS, 8HS and other types of woven laminates	This is not clear, what do you intend to say???	Deleted Since there are still no currently available physically based woven components, this paper attempts to propose a new rate and temperature dependent failure criterion for thermoplastic composites fabrics. The failure criterion formulation is based on a phenomenological approach and experimental evidences ,where the fabric architecture at ply level is idealized as a two parts mosaic models	Reference from literature???	Lifshitz and Leber [15] and Reis et. al, for example, had drawn failure envelopes considering strain rate effects for plain weave thermoset composites, however, none of them have proposed a failure criterion for fabric laminates. The proposed failure criterion is based on a phenomenological approach and experimental evidence, where the fabric architecture at ply level is idealized as a two-part mosaic model.
In this context, investigations on delamination in thermoplastic laminates properties are largely relevant.	Within Of	maintained	No feedback	maintained

Appendix 3. Excerpts from Semi–structured interview of the Supervisee

Question what type of feedback do you receive from your supervisor?

I receive different types of feedback and use the best for my paper. My grammar is very bad so if I write the wrong thing and he does not understand what I am saying, he cancels and put something else. He tries to make my points clear. Also, when feedback is simple and direct it is better to understand and use.

Question: To what extent do you implement the feedback from your supervisor in your manuscripts?

Supervisee A: I implement feedback given by my supervisor, but not totally without a discussion on my opinions on certain aspects of the feedback. There are some points he wants me to write longer or change some things which I think will change the meaning of what I am trying to say. *We usually meet to discuss my doubts about the feedback, and if I do not accept or agree with it, we go back and forth until we arrive at what is best a 100percent.*