

# L2 Students' Academic Literacy Development Guided by Teacher Written Feedback: A Writing-to-Learn Perspective

Rui Cheng – Carine M. Feyten

## ABSTRACT:

Non-native graduate students need to master specialized disciplinary knowledge and genre conventions to perform academic writing tasks. The learning practice is always a process of legitimate peripheral participation where students are inducted into their chosen discipline through collaboration and interaction with people in their social and academic network. Adopting a writing-to-learn perspective, the study sought to examine how teacher written feedback guided L2 graduate students to engage in legitimate, peripheral, and participatory activities with the purpose of understanding teacher expectations, learning disciplinary conventions and developing academic literacy in the discipline of applied linguistics. The exploration demonstrated that teacher written feedback provided opportunities for students to engage in dialogic interaction with various parties through interpreting and/or clarifying teacher written feedback. These legitimate peripheral participation activities not only enabled L2 students to gain necessary disciplinary knowledge for successful papers, but also situated them in relation to more experienced members and by extension to the field.

## KEY WORDS:

academic literacy, applied linguistics, learning-to-write, legitimate peripheral participation, teacher written feedback, writing-to-learn

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is some discussion between learning-to-write and writing-to-learn perspectives in both first language (L1) and second language (L2) contexts. Learning-to-write paints the scenario where students learn to use language to express themselves in writing, which for L2 students, often occurs outside the contexts of the discipline in language learning classrooms. Writing-to-learn is a process where students use writing to develop their expertise, their disciplinary knowledge, and their familiarity with the conventions of the discipline. In the writing-to-learn contexts, writing is often not taught explicitly. These two approaches “have developed almost independently from each other, have been informed by different theoretical frameworks, and have resulted in different pedagogical procedures” (Manchón, 2011, p. 3). However, they are “fundamentally inseparable because educational knowing itself occurs at the intersection of language, learning and knowledge” (Byrnes, 2011, p. 147).

In the majority of the content area courses (business, education, etc.) in higher education in the United States (US), writing takes a significant percentage toward the grade students earn, showing somewhat the consensus of recognition that writing is widely used to measure learning in content area courses. In such contexts, writing is usually not taught explicitly for multiple reasons: professors teaching within the

content area, especially those at graduate levels may expect students enrolled in those classes to have sharpened English writing skills elsewhere such as in composition classes, language classes or through the support from writing centers. Furthermore, the high demand of curricula in many disciplines does not allow professors the chance to spend limited course time on writing instructions or training. The main interaction between faculty and students on whether learning has occurred through writing is on feedback students received on their academic papers (if there is any) and their grades. The present case study captures how two non-native L2 graduate students utilized written feedback the instructor of a course provided to learn both the disciplinary knowledge and the conventions in the field of applied linguistics.

### 1.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Students in any field of study need to write in the specific ways that conform to their disciplinary conventions. Learning of the specialized academic literacy is always a process of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) (Lave — Wenger, 1991) in which novice students are gradually inducted into the community of practice (CoP) (Lave — Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) through participating in its discursive practice such as collaborating with professors (e.g. Belcher, 1994; Dong, 1996) and writing for publication (e.g. Casanave, 1998; Cho, 2004; Flowerdew, 2000; Li, 2006). It is legitimate because students are potentially members of the CoP of their choice. Peripherality indicates they are engaged in literacy activities at the margin because they are novices in the field and in the process of learning and familiarizing with the disciplinary conventions. Participation means they are acquiring the knowledge through their involvement with it. Through these legitimate, peripheral, and participatory activities, they move closer to the center and gain fuller participation in the CoP. Feedback itself is not equivalent to learning. It only provides possibilities or opportunities for further learning to occur. Feedback provides students with the potential to engage in additional legitimate peripheral participation, which eventually may lead to further learning. In reality, many major writing assignments in content area classes are only submitted to the course instructor toward the end of the semester. There is either no feedback provided or feedback received when students move on to other tasks or interests. Furthermore, some students do not treat writing as a learning tool, but a way to receive course credits. Students' agency (Duff, 2012; Flowerdew — Miller, 2008) also plays some roles on how students treat their feedback. Agency is people's "socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112). A sense of this agency to learn allows students to take an action as a reaction to the feedback they received and provides them the opportunity to interact with other people in or outside the CoP (Duff, 2012). The higher the agency the students hold, the more investment they would put into their learning. Agency should be encouraged as agent learners actively engaged in the terms and conditions of their learning (Lantolf — Pavlenko, 2001).

Much is involved after students' receipt of the teacher written feedback. Students' understanding of, and reaction to the teacher written feedback on academic papers serves as a channel for legitimate peripheral participation through which students can be engaged in inner or outer dialogical interaction (Casanave, 2002) with various parties. However, this aspect of feedback has not been explored in detail.

## 1.2 WRITING-TO-LEARN IN SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING

L2 writing is not only an ability that students acquire and teachers teach and evaluate, it is also a tool and foundation for students to learn both language and writing itself. Disciplinary professors play important roles in this learning process, but mainly through instructions of the concepts and content of a subject which will help students familiarize themselves with the conventions and norms of the writing of their discipline. Furthermore, content professors can set some specific writing assignments that will help initiate students to think their way into their discipline via their writing activities (Currie, 1993; Hyland, 2013). Writing demonstrates students' understanding of both the disciplinary knowledge and conventions. A writing-to-learn perspective sees writing as a mode of learning, of both content and conventions of communication (Hyland, 2013). This mode of learning is particularly difficult for L2 writers as they must attend to both writing and language with greater efforts and it is not a skill set acquired easily or quickly (Hirvela, 2011). Studies (e.g. Hirvela, 2005; Spack, 1997; Smoke, 1994) focusing on understanding the relationship between writing and learning showed a gradual but powerful effect of writing on learning. Participants of these studies ultimately learned more about disciplinary knowledge and conventions when utilizing writing for content learning than when studying it as a subject (Hirvela, 2011).

One important, but often ignored aspect in the writing-to-learn perspective is the role of feedback from teachers. Feedback is a key way for faculty members to communicate their expectations and evaluations of students' learning. The current study looks at feedback from a writing-to-learn perspective and intends to contribute to the existing literature by strengthening the importance of feedback in students' learning of disciplinary knowledge and conventions.

## 1.3 FEEDBACK IN THE WRITE-TO-LEARN APPROACH

Feedback is generally viewed as an important tool for scaffolding second language writing and one of the most powerful influences on learning. Hattie and Timperley (2007) ranked feedback as the third most influential area in learning just below explicit teaching and students' cognitive abilities. Most feedback research so far has been conducted in learning-to-write contexts (e.g. Bitchener — Knoch, 2009; Ferris — Roberts, 2001; Truscott — Hsu, 2008), and focused mainly on error correction (Ferris, 2006; Truscott, 2009) as well as the improvement of writing. In cases like these, writing tasks are often isolated from the students' development of academic literacy in their field of study. The interactive and social dimensions of feedback have been mostly ignored (Goldstein, 2001). Students' active participation and engagement with feedback and the strategies they adopted to understand and respond to feedback have not been examined in detail. Hyland (2003; 2011) investigated writing-to-learn dimensions of writing in learning-to-write contexts. She made efforts to study students' active participation and engagement with feedback and individual differences in the strategies chosen by them to utilize feedback. Several student participants used spouses, friends and flat-mates as informants to help them revise their assignments after feedback. They were not asking someone else to "fix up" their writing, but instead sought to expand valuable language learning

opportunities. Hyland's reports provided a useful lens to investigate teacher feedback from the writing-to-learn perspective, but she still focused on the learning-to-write context. Furthermore, Hyland (2003) called for more studies focusing on individual students to help build a picture of how students incorporate feedback.

This study aims to explore various legitimate peripheral participation activities the students are involved in to utilize teacher feedback from the writing-to-learn perspective and context and tries to make pedagogical suggestions.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 PARTICIPANTS AND SETTINGS

Data for this study were derived from a larger research study on the academic literacy experience of a group of ten non-native English speaking graduate students in a MA program in applied linguistics in a large public university located in the south east of the United States (US). Ten participants in the larger research study contributed to our knowledge of their acquisition of academic literacy in different ways. Two participants of this case study: Pinky and Park (Pseudonyms) stood out for the purpose of this study because their experience represented writing to learn disciplinary knowledge and academic conventions through teacher written feedback on genre specific papers in applied linguistics. Their demographic information and academic writing backgrounds are listed in Table 1.

Name	Park	Pinky
Country of origin	South Korea	Germany
Gender	Male	Female
Age	Late 20s	Early 20s
Semester in the program	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>
Length of stay in the US	3 weeks	9 months
Bachelor's degree	Linguistics	Physical Ed & German
English Proficiency	High Intermediate	High Intermediate
Academic writing experience and attitude	Limited AW experience in Korea	Wrote some research papers in German
	Limited AW experience in English	Limited AW in English
	Only wrote essays and free writing	Regarded AW as a learning process
	Assumed AW difficult	Nervous writing in new genres
	Believed practice and review important in writing tasks	Believed practice brings success

**TABLE 1:** Participants demographic information and backgrounds in academic writing. Note: AW stands for academic writing.

Apparently neither Pinky nor Park has extensive experience writing academic papers in applied linguistics. They were somewhat nervous about the upcoming writing tasks, but they were all eager to practice and learn.

Both Pinky and Park were enrolled in the Methods of Teaching ESOL (MTE) class, which was designed for graduate students to build some foundations in the theories and practices in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). Students learned the major characteristics of different methods, observed, taught and reflected on real ESL classes in the English Language Institute (ELI), conducted peer teaching sessions in the class and developed their Statements of Teaching Philosophy (SOTP) in which they described what kind of teacher they are or aim to be through various components such as role of the teacher, role of students, teaching style. The teacher provided detailed feedback for SOTP, which served as a lens to examine the legitimate peripheral participation that Pinky and Park had experienced as their reaction to the teacher written comments on their SOTP.

## 2.2 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data collection for the larger research study lasted for two semesters. During the data collection process, one of the researchers assumed the role of a participant observer. She was present at all the class meetings (except exams), taking extensive notes of participants' activities in the class such as their communication with the teacher or peers. She also participated in some of the after class group meetings or teacher student conferences especially when these activities took place immediately after class. Multiple sources of data were collected for this study. A questionnaire was distributed to Pinky and Park to complete. The questionnaire elicited their personal information such as their national origin, native language, language study experience as well as their academic background and goals, previous disciplinary affiliations, and previous experience in academic writing in both L1 and English. The students' SOTPs with the teacher written feedback were collected. Other writing correspondence such as emails and online postings were assembled as the evidence for the "conversation" outside the classroom. Discourse-based interviews where the researcher and each student scrutinized each feedback and discussed whether or how they impacted students' revision of the paper and learning of the disciplinary knowledge served as another main source for data collection. The same researcher served as the interviewer to elicit information on what activities they had been engaged in as their efforts to respond to specific comments provided by the instructor on their written assignment: SOTP. The interviews focused on students' perception and understanding of teacher written feedback, their activities to address teacher written comments and their revisions. The purpose of this discourse-based interview was to explore whether teacher written feedback on discipline specific papers would facilitate L2 students' acquisition of academic literacy through providing opportunities for legitimate peripheral participation.

All possible feedback points for both Pinky and Park's SOTP were identified. For the long comments, they were chunked into meaning units. For example, feedback like "This is a good point, but can you be more specific about it?" will be chunked into two meaning units. All the feedback points were categorized as "feedback needs no

action” (such as good point, super) and “feedback needs action” (such as I’m not sure what you mean? How?). Table 2 indicates number of feedback points Pinky and Park each received. Among the feedback points that need action, a number of them were at grammatical level. They were not the major focus of this study.

Name	Park	Pinky
Total feedback points	21	25
Feedback needs no action	10	5
Feedback needs action	11	20

**TABLE 2:** Feedback on SOTP Participants Received.

The obtained interview, email or online posting data were analyzed mainly using the constant comparative method (Lincoln — Guba, 1985). The data were transcribed and read multiple times for common themes. A second rater not related with this study was invited to read the data independently. Themes identified by both readers were compared and any differences were resolved. The identified themes were reported below.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1 PARK’S LEGITIMATE PERIPHERAL PARTICIPATION GUIDED BY TEACHER WRITTEN FEEDBACK

Park received both brief marginal and lengthy end-of-paper comments on his SOTP assignment from his instructor. While a majority of feedback was either positive or at the grammar level, some comments expressed the instructor’s constructive criticism. Park disclosed during the interview that although he cared a lot about the grade he received on the assignment, it was the constructive feedback from the instructor that made him learn.

One piece of brief marginal feedback Park received was “Transition needed”. Park related this feedback back to two terms he just learned in the program: Coherence and Cohesion.

I know transition. We just talked about coherence and cohesion in the class. But I guess these two word[s] look too similar. We just talked about them, but I already forgot the difference between them. I know one is related with transition. But I am confused it is a cohesion or coherence problem (Interview, December, 2005).

This feeling of uncertainty made him review his class notes and straighten the definitions of confusing terms.

I finally know it is cohesion. There are lots of words in English I cannot tell the difference between them because they look so similar. But if I can relate the words

to something I know, I will get it... I guess I won't be confused by these two words anymore because I can always remember this (Interview, December, 2005).

After clearly targeting the problem, Park realized what he needed to do was to add transitional words in multiple places within his SOTP.

In the example above, the teacher written feedback guided the student to review and reflect on the concept of discourse in the field of applied linguistics. Coherence and cohesion refer to distinguishable features of discourse. The teacher written feedback made the student realize his lack of disciplinary knowledge in effectively differentiating these two important terms and take action by reviewing his class notes. This activity promoted the development of Park's academic literacy.

Park used multiple sets of metaphors in his SOTP assignment, such as driving directions and serving a meal, to prove how important it is for teachers to provide guidance and directions to students in their learning. The comments he received from the instructor were like this:

Although metaphor is ok with this type of academic paper, we are taught not to mix metaphors. So, stay with the driving analogy.

I really enjoyed your use of the driving metaphor throughout your statement of teaching philosophy, and believe it was very effective. It allowed you to make various important points without over-doing it. Congratulations! My only concern is that you sometimes lose the specificity of your message because occasionally it gets "lost" in the metaphor. In other words, make sure you support each aspect of the metaphor (maps, directions, getting lost, etc.) with specific example from the classroom (Teacher written comments, 2005).

When discussing these comments in a discourse-based interview, Park revealed that he was involved in multiple activities as he attempted to understand and respond to the written comments.

Park was curious why the professor was against the use of multiple sets of metaphors after he received the comments. To him, the utilization of multiple sets of metaphors in SOTP avoided boredom and unnecessary redundancy and enhanced the readability of the paper. In order to figure out this issue, Park posted his question on some online Listserv groups (the course instructor helped student enroll in some Listservs at the beginning of the semester) and received some responses:

One of the responders commented:

You should not use metaphor at all in the academic paper. I thought metaphors are for novel, essays and even poetry (Email).

Another person responded with a different opinion:

Most often, people don't use metaphors in an academic paper because metaphors are descriptive but an academic paper is more serious. But a statement of teaching philosophy is not a strictly defined research paper. So I guess using

metaphor is all right. I also feel you'll lose focus by using too many different metaphors (Email).

The identities of the people who responded were not clear to Park. They may be international students just like him. So Park could not totally trust their opinions. In addition their views were different. This activity did not solve Park's problem completely, but allowed Park to reflect on the use of metaphor in papers like SOTP. "It seemed metaphor is not a close friend with the paper. I'd better just keep[ing] driving" (Park, Dec, 2005). It is noticeable, though, at that moment, he still did not entirely decipher the metaphor comments from the instructor. Park did not approach his instructor who provided the comments for explanation as he felt the teacher had no obligation to meet him after the last class. However, this was not the end of the story. He expanded his communication with some experts in the field of applied linguistics in the following semester. He raised his metaphor questions on two occasions: at a guest speech session and in a new class he enrolled in when it was time for him to write another paper.

It seemed to me they all think limited use of metaphors in papers. I should not use metaphors to show off, like how much I learn in English, I should focus on my topic. That should be my main purpose. I guess too many different metaphors blocked my real purpose. I should come back to teaching (Chat, March, 2006).

Finally, Park felt he had a much better understanding of this issue.

Park disclosed from his own experience that he learned more from these legitimate peripheral participation activities than from a single lecture. It was disclosed by him that metaphor was only briefly mentioned in one of the class sessions on semantics. There were neither intensive discussions on metaphor nor any explanations on how to use it in an academic paper. Park was fascinated by some examples of metaphor and believed utilizing metaphors represented higher English proficiency. The essence of successful use of metaphor in disciplinary academic papers of applied linguistics was not acquired until he was engaged in the legitimate and peripheral activities guided by the teacher's written feedback on his SOTP. Park finally learned that, conventionally, people tend not to use multiple sets of metaphors in a single academic paper in applied linguistics: "I guess it is easy to confuse the reader if I use many metaphors in the paper." He realized that using driving metaphor might actually express his points more clearly and effectively. He also realized that the purpose of using the metaphors was to illustrate his ideas of teaching. Metaphors should not be the focus of the paper. He needed to always switch back to the main point, that is, classroom teaching.

Park was engaged in multiple legitimate peripheral participation activities as a way for him to understand the teacher's written comments. For non-native English speakers, many terminologies and the use of metaphor are not intuitive but learned through hard work. Park tended to demonstrate his learning in the assignments as a representation of his efforts and achievements. Classroom instructors might lead him to the door of terminology and metaphor; however, the accurate understanding

of terminologies and appropriate use of metaphor were often learned through writing, making mistakes and eventual understanding. In Park's case, it was initiated by the teacher's written feedback on his academic paper. In order to have better understanding of teacher feedback on his SOTP, Park reviewed course content, communicated with people in the virtual community by posting his question in online Listserv forum and discussing the questions with the more experienced members in the field. Although Park did not always receive answers that he considers satisfactory from any specific venue, he at least was more engaged in thinking and reflecting, which might be beneficial for his future journey in the field.

### 3.2 PINKY'S LEGITIMATE PERIPHERAL PARTICIPATION GUIDED BY TEACHER WRITTEN FEEDBACK

Pinky received more constructive feedback from the professor on her SOTP. She picked four areas of focus: the role of the teacher, the role of the learner, promising methods, and control and evaluation and listed these four topics at the beginning of the paper. This format of presentation was apparently not approved by the professor, by commenting "announc[ing] each of these at the beginning of the appropriate sections. They all seem to blend in together and the focus gets lost" (Appendix). Also in the papers, there were several marginal notes like "Is this where you begin to address the role of the teacher?" (Appendix), "Is this where promising methods begin?" etc. Upon receiving these comments, Pinky reflected on her thoughts about listing all four topics at the beginning of the paper.

When I learned to write in English, especially when I prepare for the English test, I got to know I present main idea first and use several paragraphs to support the main idea and make the conclusion. So when I am writing the SOTP, I did the same thing. I present my main focus and I explain each of them in detail. But I do feel a little bit not sure whether, I mean, to put all the topics at the beginning or not because this is quite different. I used to write only 4 or 5 paragraphs. It's easy to tell the beginning and ending of main idea, idea one, idea two and the conclusion. SOTP is a longer paper. Yeah, I did find it is hard to tell different sections, I mean, if I put all the topics at the beginning (Interview, December, 2005).

Pinky was glad that the instructor pointed that out because it confirmed that her doubt was reasonable. It also conformed to what she just learned about the writing style of American English which greatly emphasizes being reader friendly: "I guess I ignored this might be a problem for readers to tell where the section ended and the new section began. The reader had to do extra work to tell the beginning and ending of each section" (Interview, December, 2005). Pinky realized she needed to announce each topic at the beginning of the appropriate section, but did not want to just remove the list at the beginning of the paper. Pinky conducted some research by browsing several SOTP from the Internet and made the conclusion that she can have both the list at the beginning of the paper and restate each topic at the corresponding section. She mentioned for future writing tasks: "I will be more reader friendly. Maybe it is not a bad idea to introduce the

topics as a whole at the beginning of the paper, but I think I need to list them again when I start each section, because readers may have a big idea at the beginning, and they will also be very clear on my discussion in each section” (Interview, December, 2005). The self-reflection and online research as ways of legitimate peripheral participation enabled Pinky to learn more disciplinary knowledge in her field.

At the end, the professor provided long comments in a paragraph form: “You presented the image of an experienced and caring teacher. However, I propose that you narrow down the number of topics you introduce. You don’t have to include everything nor do you have to focus on specific teaching activities. Instead you should identify broad goals and demonstrate how you address those goals via certain behaviors. I felt that you presented more of a list of behaviors rather than a set of behaviors. Also feel free to state what you believe as much as you give examples of how you teach” (Teacher Comments).

Most of the comments made sense to Pinky. However, she did not quite understand what the instructor meant by saying “I felt that you presented more of a list of behaviors rather than a set of behaviors”. During the discourse-based interview, Pinky shared how she understood the teacher comments.

Pinky first checked with her friend, an American graduate student in a totally different academic discipline. The friend did not quite understand the comments either but mentioned in her field, “a set of” means something that has to be connected to other things in a certain way. A missing piece may cause a problem because the list will be incomplete. However, “a list of” can be things that are loosely connected. Pinky thought the explanation was reasonable, but could not understand it in the context of her paper.

Pinky also discussed these comments with one of her peers in the same class. The peer could not offer anything new but suggested Pinky make an appointment with the instructor. Pinky reflected:

I guess I am shy. I don’t want to bother instructor after class. I guess my professor is busy and I don’t want her to think I am stupid. Now the semester is over. [...] I would prefer to solve the problem myself or ask my classmates or my friends. Ann didn’t know, but she told me it is ok to talk to Dr. Smith. She said she made appointments with Dr. Smith a few time[s] throughout the semester. It seemed to her that the instructor is really happy about her visit and questions. She felt she learned a lot from these meetings.<sup>1</sup>

Encouraged by her peer, Pinky finally made an appointment and met the instructor. Pinky disclosed during the discourse-based interview that she benefitted greatly from the meeting.

The instructor and Pinky reread the whole paper together, which was accompanied by multiple questions, explanations and discussions. For example, the following was the one of the beginning paragraphs in Pinky’s SOTP, which aimed to discuss the teacher’s role.

---

<sup>1</sup> All names are Pseudonyms.

As a teacher, I am responsible for inspiring students' interest and motivation in learning. Enthusiasm towards my students and the subject is one trait that characterizes my teaching. It is of greatest importance to demonstrate passion for my activity. Basis therefore is my very positive opened and energetic appearance while teaching. I see my teaching as a guide for my students through the language learning process, whereas I support them as much as possible. I take my students problems very seriously, I am available during office hours or off time if necessary, answer emails within a short period of time and provide additional explanations or exercises, if desired.

The instructor pointed out after reading the first sentence in the paragraph, the reader would expect a further description of the role of the teacher to inspire and motivate students. However, without doing that, Pinky started to describe enthusiasm, passion, guiding students, supporting students and availability. Each one was mentioned very briefly in one sentence. Pinky admitted, after reading carefully, that she just listed several roles she wanted to play as a teacher without making any connection among them to present readers a complete and organized idea on the role of the teacher.

Pinky also disclosed in the interview that the benefit of meeting with the teacher was not only helping her to understand teacher comments to revise the paper,<sup>2</sup> but also a lot of meaningful exchanges took place between them, which enabled her to gain some insights in the field. For example, Pinky mentioned she developed some interest in sociocultural theory in second language acquisition, and the professor suggested a reading list from some big names and encouraged her to meet another faculty member at the university affiliated with the program who is prolific in the use of sociocultural theory in studies of second language learners.

Pinky engaged in multiple legitimate peripheral participation activities in order to respond to the teacher written feedback on her SOTP. Through self-reflection, conducting research, consulting with the peers in the same and different disciplines, and conferencing with the more experienced course instructor who provided the feedback, Pinky's understanding of the disciplinary conventions improved. Learning took place in the process. Pinky was a quiet non-native graduate student and had very limited individual communication with the course instructor. However, the conversation with the professor on the feedback extended the opportunity for her to engage in dialogic interaction with the expert of the disciplinary knowledge. Pinky felt she learned more from the conversation than the lectures in class.

#### 4. DISCUSSIONS

Lots of the reported failures non-native students experienced in English speaking higher institutions relate to the students' lack of interaction with the local community and/or larger disciplinary discourse community (e.g. Casanave, 1995;

---

<sup>2</sup> Pinky was not awarded extra credit for revising her SOTP. However, SOTP will be included in her graduation portfolio and potentially useful for her job application.

Prior, 1998; Schneider — Fujishima, 1995). Subjects of such studies were isolated in their own world without networking with their student peers, instructors or the community at large. Although they worked hard towards their goals, that is, the mastery of academic literacy in their chosen field of study, their efforts rarely generated positive results. One of the reasons might be that these students did not attach enough importance to what and how they can learn from their writing and the feedback they received.

The study presented here sought to examine how teacher written feedback guided non-native graduate students to engage in meaningful activities with the purpose of understanding teacher expectations, learning disciplinary conventions and developing academic literacy in the discipline of applied linguistics. The study does not aim for a broad generalization as it focused on two participants and a single genre. Furthermore, the participation of the study may have impacted the students' behaviors in their treatment of the teacher written feedback. Despite these limitations, the study should provide some useful information on the importance of writing, feedback, student's agency, etc. on the development of academic literacy.

Two participants received the teacher written comments on their SOTP, in which the instructor pinpointed the issues in their writing that did not conform to the disciplinary conventions. Park included multiple sets of metaphors in his paper to show his advanced mastery of English, while Pinky loosely listed specific activities a teacher needed to conduct. The comments provided by the course instructor on their SOTP guided both of them to engage in different types of legitimate, peripheral and participatory activities. The teacher's positive feedback served as an important reinforcement of what they have mastered, and the constructive criticism provided important learning opportunities for them to advance their academic literacy. Limited data in this case study already demonstrated significant potential feedback may have to facilitate students' movement to fuller participation in their CoP through reviewing confusing concepts and terms, utilizing computer technology for faster and broader responses, reaching outside experts, eliciting opinions from members of a different CoP, networking with peers in the same class and conferencing with the course instructor. All of these were triggered by the teacher written comments. Through these series of participation, both Park and Pinky understood the teacher written feedback better and moved somewhat closer to the center of the academic literacy than they were before.

Both Park and Pinky wrote the initial draft of SOTP to meet course requirements. Neither of them consulted any resources other than the instructions provided by the instructor. They treated this piece to a great extent as a personal reflection on their learning and teaching without giving much consideration on conventional specifications. Teacher written feedback gave them a legitimate reason for participation on a deeper level. Park and Pinky both began as outsiders, as reflected in many facts; for example, Park couldn't distinguish similar terms in applied linguistics and used multiple sets of metaphors in his SOTP, and Pinky structured her SOTP loosely. But, they both moved toward fuller participation through engaging in collaboration with other members within and outside their CoP. Although they did

not fully integrate themselves into the established community of experts in applied linguistics at this stage of participation, they acquired the knowledge and skills necessary for them to engage in fuller and broader participation within it.

Park and Pinky's experience demonstrated that learning through writing is a process of exploring, discovering and realizing (Canagarajah, 2011). Both Pinky and Park actually used writing as a tool to explore whether their understanding of the disciplinary conventions conformed to those of the discipline, even if they may not realize it. For example, Pinky wanted to confirm with the instructor the general composition formula of the main idea, supporting details and conclusion also worked within the pedagogical genre of the SOTP. When they discovered discrepancies through the feedback they received from the professor, they were engaged in a discussion with others and created a social network that worked for them to decode what needed to be learned, and eventually reached deeper understanding of conventions.

Writing promotes learning of content and operates as a tool for learning. Students used writing to test their hypotheses. The teacher written comments engaged the students in continued learning. Neither Pinky nor Park were passive recipients of feedback. They did not ignore the feedback; instead they incorporated all the feedback giving it a careful consideration. They were participants in their own learning. They invested their time, overcame their fear and developed their own strategies. They have demonstrated some positive images of agent learners.

Furthermore, the teacher written comments provided guidance for both Park and Pinky to be future TESOL teachers since the feedback from the course instructor on the SOTP also provided some teaching tips and strategies from the perspective of an experienced teacher.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Students developed a sense of themselves as evolving professionals by the kinds of comments they received (Casanave, 2002). The feedback would not only help them revise papers but also helped them "situate themselves" in relation to the class community and, by extension, in relation to the field. Professor's feedback can serve the powerful function of assisting students' movement into a particular community's professional practices. Both students regarded practice and review as key factors for writing successful academic papers, which are obviously important. Throughout the writing process, students practice their writing skills and combine their disciplinary and genre knowledge into a piece of written document. Teacher's written feedback, as a result of review, could possibly engage students into another round of practice to perfect the paper. Dialogic interaction between students and other parties in his or her network, although sometimes very informal, is beneficial to improve students' academic literacy.

The study again provides some pedagogical implications in helping students develop their academic literacy in their chosen fields. First of all, educators in specific disciplines should gain a greater awareness of the writing to learn perspective

through their feedback to students. Many novice graduate students won't be able to obtain help on their academic papers outside the classroom. Even if they work with a tutor that the institution's writing center provides, the feedback they receive on their disciplinary specific papers "tends to be prescriptive, cursory, and largely focused on content" (Hyland, 2013, p. 251). Feedback from the subject professors is potentially useful for novice students because professors will be able to communicate conventional expectations accurately and clearly, they will be able to easily point students to the right direction for further research, and professors themselves may serve as resources for students. All these possibilities that teacher feedback can provide are potentially important for students to gain conventional knowledge and academic literacy in their field of study.

Second, it is worth considering what kind of feedback the instructor should provide that would engage students' legitimate peripheral participation to the fullest extent. Apparently, comments on spelling and grammatical imperfection won't achieve the goal. Direct correction by professors may allow students to learn disciplinary knowledge and convention. However, these knowledge and convention might stay in student's short-term memory and may not be utilized effectively when students need to write another paper in a similar genre. The more effective feedback might be the ones that engaged students in questioning, communicating, researching, exploring, building networks, utilizing resources. Through all these legitimate, peripheral and participatory activities, novices will gradually move closer to the center of the CoP. In addition, the feedback should be tailored to suit each student and consider the writer's needs, ability, personality, and culture (Hyland, 1998).

Third, writing-to-learn perspective through teacher feedback could advocate student-centered learning. Educators should encourage students to be more agent learners and more responsible for their own learning. Effective teacher written feedback could potentially engage students into reflecting on their own learning, taking more control over their learning process and learn to collaborate with other people. Once the students discover the most suitable way of learning of the academic literacy in their fields, we could expect a better learning outcome.

This study is by no means deemphasizing the importance of explicit teaching, but proposing the combination of explicit teaching and legitimate peripheral participation through various channels. The teacher could provide opportunities for students to deliberate their legitimate peripheral participation experience in the class, not only to assure students are on the "legitimate" track but potentially benefit other students with similar concerns.

Teacher written feedback is among numerous other different channels for students' active participation in learning through writing. Future research in this regard could focus on other channels such as writing for publication, citation. These researches may help us gain a wider understanding of acquisition of academic literacy and best pedagogical practices to facilitate the challenging process.

## REFERENCES:

- AHEARN, Laura M. (2001): Language and agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 30, pp. 109–137.
- BELCHER, Diane (1994): The apprenticeship approach to advanced academic literacy: graduate students and their mentors. *English for Specific Purposes*, 13(1), pp. 23–34.
- BITCHENER, John — KNOCH, Ute (2009): The relative effectiveness of different types of direct written corrective feedback. *System*, 37(2), pp. 322–329.
- BYRNES, Heidi (2011): Beyond writing as language learning or content learning: constructing foreign language writing as meaning-making. In: Rosa M. Manchón (ed.), *Learning-to-Write and Writing-to-Learn in an Additional Language* [Language Learning and Language Teaching, 31]. Amsterdam — Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, pp. 133–157.
- CANAGARAJAH, Suresh (2011): Writing to learn and learning to write by shuttling between languages. In: Rosa M. Manchón (ed.), *Learning-to-Write and Writing-to-Learn in an Additional Language* [Language Learning and Language Teaching, 31]. Amsterdam — Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, pp. 111–132.
- CASANAVE, Christine Pearson (1995): Local interactions: constructing contexts for composing in a graduate sociology program. In: Diane Belcher — George Braine (eds.), *Academic Writing in a Second Language: Essays on Research and Pedagogy*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, pp. 83–110.
- CASANAVE, Christine Pearson (1998): Transitions: the balancing act of bilingual academics. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 7(2), pp. 175–203.
- CASANAVE, Christine Pearson (2002): *Writing Games: Multicultural Case Studies of Academic Literacy Practices in Higher Education*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- CHO, Seonhee (2004): Challenges of entering discourse communities through publishing in English: perspectives of nonnative-speaking doctoral students in the United States of America. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, 3(1), pp. 47–72.
- CURRIE, Pat (1993): Entering a disciplinary community: conceptual activities required to write for one introductory university course. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 2(2), pp. 101–117.
- DONG, Yu Ren (1996): Learning how to use citations for knowledge transformation: non-native doctoral students' dissertation writing in science. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 30(4), pp. 428–457.
- DUFF, Patricia A. (2012): Identity, agency and second language acquisition. In: Susan M. Gass, — Alison Mackey (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*. London — New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 410–426.
- FERRIS, Dana (2006): Does error feedback help student writers? New evidence on the short- and long-term effects of written error correction. In: Ken Hyland — Fiona Hyland (eds.), *Feedback in Second Language Writing: Contexts and Issues*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 81–104.
- FERRIS, Dana — ROBERTS, Barrie (2001): Error feedback in L2 writing classes: how explicit does it need to be? *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 10(3), pp. 161–184.
- FLOWERDEW, John (2000): Discourse community, legitimate peripheral participation, and the nonnative-English-speaking scholar. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34(1), pp. 127–150.
- FLOWERDEW, John — MILLER, Lindsay (2008): Social structure and individual agency in second language learning: evidence from three life histories. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 5(4), pp. 201–224.
- GOLDSTEIN, Lynn M. (2001): For Kyla: what does the research say about responding to ESL writers. In: Tony J. Silva — Paul Kei Matsuda (eds.), *On Second Language Writing*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 73–90.
- HATTIE, John — TIMPERLEY, Helen (2007): The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), pp. 81–112.

- HIRVELA, Alan (2005): Computer-based reading and writing across the curriculum: two case studies of L2 writers. *Computers and Composition*, 22(3), pp. 337-356.
- HIRVELA, Alan (2011): Writing-to-learn in content areas: research insights. In: Rosa M. Manchón (ed.), *Learning-to-Write and Writing-to-Learn in an Additional Language* [Language Learning and Language Teaching, 31]. Amsterdam — Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, pp. 37-59.
- HYLAND, Fiona (1998): The impact of teacher written feedback on individual writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 7(3), pp. 255-286.
- HYLAND, Fiona (2003): Focusing on form: student engagement with teacher feedback. *System*, 31(2), pp. 217-230.
- HYLAND, Fiona (2011): The language learning potential of form-focused feedback on writing: students' and teachers' perceptions. In: Rosa M. Manchón (ed.), *Learning-to-Write and Writing-to-Learn in an Additional Language* [Language Learning and Language Teaching, 31]. Amsterdam — Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, pp. 159-179.
- HYLAND, Ken (2013): Faculty feedback: perceptions and practices in L2 disciplinary writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 22(3), pp. 240-253.
- LANTOLF, James P. — PAVLENKO, Aneta (2001): (S)econd (L)anguage (A)ctivity theory: understanding second language learners as people. In: Michael P. Breen (ed.), *Learner Contributions to Language Learning: New Directions in Research*. Harlow: Pearson, pp. 141-158.
- LAVE, Jean — WENGER, Etienne (1991): *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press.
- LI, Yongyan (2006): A doctoral student of physics writing for publication: a sociopolitically-oriented case study. *English for Specific Purposes*, 25(4), pp. 456-478.
- LINCOLN, Yvonna S. — GUBA, Egon G. (1985): *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.
- MANCHÓN, Rosa M. (ed.) (2011): *Learning-to-Write and Writing-to-Learn in an Additional Language* [Language Learning and Language Teaching, 31]. Amsterdam — Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- PRIOR, Paul A. (1998): *Writing/Disciplinarity: A Sociohistoric Account of Literate Activity in the Academy*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- SCHNEIDER, Melanie — FUJISHIMA, Naomi K. (1995): When practice doesn't make perfect: the case of a graduate ESL student. In: Diane Belcher — George Braine (eds.), *Academic Writing in a Second Language: Essays on Research and Pedagogy*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, pp. 3-22.
- SMOKE, Trudy (1994): Writing as a means of learning. *College ESL*, 4(2), pp. 1-11.
- SPACK, Ruth (1997): The acquisition of academic literacy in a second language: a longitudinal case study. *Written Communication*, 14(1), pp. 3-62.
- TRUSCOTT, John (2009): Arguments and appearances: a response to Chandler. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 18(1), pp. 59-60.
- TRUSCOTT, John — HSU, Angela Yi-ping (2008): Error correction, revision, and learning. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 17(4), pp. 292-305.
- WENGER, Etienne (1998): *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press.

**APPENDIX: PINKY'S SOTP WITH TEACHER COMMENTS**

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

My principle guideline regarding teaching and learning is that the teacher has to attempt with his/her best efforts to increase the students' interest and motivation in the target language. To the same degree, he/she should seek to <sup>develop in?</sup> enable students <sup>willingness?</sup> with the ability to take responsibility and control of their own learning. Having the achievement of these goals in mind, I will comment on the following issues:

- (1) The role of the teacher *Announce each of these at the*
- (2) The role of the learner *beginning of the appropriate sections.*
- (3) Promising methods *They all seem to blend in together and*
- (4) Control and evaluation. *The focus gets lost.*

As a teacher, I am responsible for inspiring students' interest and motivation in learning. Enthusiasm towards my students and the subject is one trait that characterizes my teaching. It is of greatest importance to demonstrate passion for my activity. <sup>I'm not sure what you mean.</sup> Basis therefore is my very positive, opened and energetic appearance while teaching. I see my teaching as a guide for my students through the language learning process, <sup>and</sup> ~~whereas~~ I support them as much as possible. I take my students' ~~problems~~ very seriously, I am available during office hours or off time if necessary, answer e-mails within a short period of time and provide additional explanations or exercises, if desired. *explain how you serve as a guide*

Furthermore, I set a high value on creating a positive and very familiar classroom atmosphere. In my opinion, an enjoyable learning environment in which students feel comfortable to communicate, to ask questions and to make mistakes is the foundation for a successful learning process. I hit this target by providing well-structured lessons in which

students know what I expect from them. Noticing structure and knowing the goal of learning provides students with a feeling of security. *good point*

Besides this, I let students work in pairs or groups so they get to know each other and develop a sense of community. I encourage them to speak, and I correct mistakes in a very pleasant way so that students do not feel offended. Rather than being rigorous towards students, I prefer a more informal learning atmosphere. Certainly, it is still a teacher-student relationship with set boundaries that I do not cross. *Examples?*

My audience includes adults who should be aware of their reasons for taking a language class. Consequently, I involve them to some degree in decisions about the object of learning and the learning process. *How, for example? Since the beginning, From* I show confidence towards my students, even though I know that I always have to deal with students that are not convinced about taking my class. I am not too strict regarding attendance, but I clearly appeal to their responsibility and respect towards their own learning process and towards me as teacher. *How?* I expect a short excuse via e-mail if a student will not be able to attend class. My experiences showed that students would attend class when it is comprehensive and interesting. *So far* ~~Until now~~ my faith in the students throughout has paid

*off.* Moreover, I am aware of the individuality of every student's learning style. I believe devoutly that students can at least pass my class when they are prepared to put effort into their studies. However, many students don't know that much *colloquial enough?* about different learning strategies so I provide them – especially the weak learners – with practical help regarding learning strategies. *Examples?*

Besides helping students "to learn how to learn", it is my responsibility to design the lessons as effectively as possible. In my judgement, the most important goal in teaching a language class – unless it is a mere writing-, TOEFL-class or the like – is to enable students to

*Do this where you begin to address the role of learner?*

**ABSTRAKT:**

**Rozvoj akademické gramotnosti v L2 u studentů na základě psané zpětné vazby učitele: pohled z perspektivy „od psaní k učení“.** Postgraduální studenti — nerodilí mluvčí — potřebují zvládnout speciální oborové znalosti a žánrové konvence, aby dostali nárokům akademického psaní. Učební postup je vždy procesem založeným na vnější participaci, kdy jsou studenti postupně uváděni do oboru díky spolupráci a interakci s lidmi ze své sociální a akademické sítě. Přijetím perspektivy „od psaní k učení“ se studie snaží zjistit, jak učitelova psaná zpětná vazba vede postgraduální studenty v L2 k zapojení do náležitých okrajových i významných aktivit s cílem porozumět učitelovým očekáváním, osvojit si oborové konvence a rozvinout akademickou gramotnost v oblasti aplikované lingvistiky. Výzkum ukázal, že učitelova psaná zpětná vazba poskytuje studentům šanci zapojit se do dialogických interakcí s různými subjekty na základě interpretace a/nebo vyjasnění učitelovy psané zpětné vazby. Tyto okrajové participační aktivity umožňují studentům v L2 nejen získat nutné oborové znalosti pro psaní kvalitních studií, ale též získat kontakt se zkušenějšími kolegy i s daným oborem.

**Rui Cheng** | Language, Literacy, and Technology Department, Nazareth College, Rochester, NY  
<rcheng9@naz.edu>

**Carine M. Feyten** | Texas Woman's University, Denton — Dallas — Houston, TX