

Students' Attention to In-Text Teacher Feedback & Their Rationale for Revisions¹

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Introduction

The process approach to writing has become pervasive throughout writing curriculums in academic English programs. Student revision is the axis around which the process writing approach revolves. Yet it seems that as teachers—and researchers—we still do not have a firm understanding of how students revise and what motivates them to make changes. Therefore, it is crucial that we better understand both how and why teacher remarks and feedback lead to changes between drafts. After reviewing previous literature on this topic, it was determined that while many studies do examine the influence of teacher marks, as well as a variety of other feedback related issues, none of those explored the students' own reasoning as to *why* they made changes and revisions. Often composition course teachers find themselves wondering *why* students did or didn't adhere to the comments that were made on their papers. Consequently, this investigation takes a holistic, case-study approach by analyzing in-text teacher comments and questioning students about *why* they chose to respond (or not respond) to teacher comments.

Background

According to Ferris (1997), little research has been done on the revision process of second language writers; furthermore, what has been done typically focuses on the types of revisions made by the writers (Belcher, 1989; Chenoweth, 1987; Hall, 1990; Tagong, 1992), pedagogical techniques for helping students revise (Allwright, 1988; Cohen, 1983, 1990), the differences in students' abilities to process feedback and revise successfully (Barnes, 1984; Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1987), the effects of teacher versus peer feedback (Chaudron, 1983, 1984; Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992), or the effects of content- versus form-based feedback (Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Kepner, 1991). One exception Ferris notes, however, is Dessner's 1991 dissertation study, in which the *types* of teacher feedback that lead ESL students to revise was explored. In Dessner's study two thirds of the cooperating teacher's comments offered advice and suggestions (as opposed to corrections), and those types of instructive comments appeared to result in "substantive student revision" (Dessner, 1991).

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Following up on that research, Ferris conducted a comparison study of 110 first drafts and revised drafts of freshmen ESL writers. Her research set out to determine 1.) which types of teacher commentary most influenced student revision and 2.) whether the revisions influenced by the teacher lead to substantive and effective changes in students' papers. For purposes of our proposed research, we were most interested in the findings of the first part of her study, which indicated that teacher feedback in the form of a "question"—or in the form of a "statement with information"—were *least* influential during the revision process. "Requests for information," "requests" (regardless of form), and "summary comments on grammar" resulted in the *most* substantial revisions.

Another topic, which influenced the design of this study, came from Beason's research into feedback and revision in writing across the curriculum classes. Beason (1993) found that students do revise based on feedback, but *selectively*. Having been faced with the frustrating reality of spending hours providing constructive feedback, only to see it completely ignored in the subsequent draft, we were curious as to exactly *how* the students are being selective. What makes them decide whether or not they will attend to a teacher's in-text comments and suggestions? We did not find *any* research that could help us answer that question.

To test Ferris' results against another group of advanced university ESL students, as well as to shed some light on Beason's study regarding how students are being selective during the revising process, we posed the following questions:

Research Question #1:

Which types of in-text teacher comments have the greatest bearing on students' revision process?

Research Question #2:

Why do (or don't) students attend to the issues raised in the teacher's in-text feedback during their revision process?

Research Methodology

Recruiting Subjects

We recruited research subjects from a freshman ESL composition class at Georgia State University (GSU); we did this by visiting the class of a cooperating teacher and asking for volunteers. The students were not told the exact nature of our research, only that it pertained to ESL writing. They were also informed that if chosen, they would need to meet with us for a 30-minute interview. As an incentive we offered \$5 gift certificates, and the cooperating teacher extended extra credit. Twelve students volunteered, and from them we randomly selected five: subject #1, a 28-year-old female from the Ivory Coast, who we will call Amy; subject #2, a 20-year-old male from Korea, who we will call Brian; subject #3, a 20-year-old female

from Vietnam, who we will call Clara; subject #4, an 18-year-old female from Hong Kong, who we will call Donna; and subject #5, who dropped out of the study.

Materials

For purposes of our study we obtained the second and third drafts of an assignment that our subjects had written for their freshman ESL composition class. The assignment had been to write a report (i.e. this was a research paper complete with references) on a topic of their choice. The second draft was marked by the teacher; the third (and final) draft was not. We did not collect or analyze the students' first drafts.

Data Collection: Process and Problems

Step One

The data collection process involved three major steps. The first was taking all of the teacher's comments from draft two and classifying them into "comment types" (Ferris, 1997), for purposes of answering Research Question #1. Upon reviewing the students' second drafts we created seven categories:

Questions. This included any words, phrases, or statements followed by a question mark. Sometimes the teacher's questions were quasi-information-seeking: "How long does migration take?" and "whose words here?". More often they appeared to function as a more direct means to make suggestions: "new paragraph?" and "references?" We initially tried to separate these two types of questions into the categories of "Question" or "Question + Suggestion". However, it quickly became evident that the two categories were somewhat overlapping. Too often we found ourselves speculating on the teacher's intentions, and our uncertainty in doing so made us uncomfortable. For those reasons we collapsed the two categories into the broader category of "Questions."

Circles. This included places where the teacher circled words, phrases, or sentences; no additional words or symbols accompanied the circle.

Abbreviations & Symbols. This included circles with question marks, question marks, and ESL error codes such as "s/v", "c/s", "vt", etc.

Statements. This included any words or short phrases that did not end in a question mark. Some statements were longhand versions of error codes, such as "comma splice"; some were praises and critiques such as "interesting," "not academic form," and "informal."

Statements + Prompt. As the name suggests, this included statements followed by a prompt for clarification, additional information, or word choice. Examples of

these teacher comments included "unclear: employees are losing confidence [in themselves] or employees are losing confidence in the company" and "example: it may be that".

Imperatives. Examples included "avoid the continuous progressive form," "re-write: still unclear."

Insertions/Deletions. This included places where the teacher more overtly stated the change she wanted to see. Typical examples were the use of carets with an inserted word, inserted punctuation marks, hash marks over unwanted words, and circled words with a new word written above.

The following details the frequency with which the teacher in-text markings occurred in the subjects' papers:

<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage of Total</u>	<u>Comment Type</u>
30	31.9%	Questions
24	25.5%	Abbreviation/Symbols
14	14.8%	Statements
12	12.7%	Circles
7	7.4%	Insertion/Deletion
5	5.3%	Statements + Prompt
<u>2</u>	<u>2.1%</u>	Imperatives
94	99.7%	

Table 1 Total Teacher In-Text Markings

Step Two

The second step in the data collection process involved comparing the second and third drafts of the students' writing and noting whether or not students responded to *every* piece of in-text teacher feedback. We did this by numbering each in-text teacher comment (there were 94 comments dispersed over four papers). We documented the difference between comments that were "attended to" or not attended to by the students. It is important to note that for purposes of this study, we defined "attended to" as any attempt at change, regardless of the student's success at revising correctly. Furthermore, if the teacher wrote "s/v," and instead of changing the verb the student deleted the sentence we still regarded that as "attended to." We did this based on the assumption that the teacher's "s/v" notation possibly forced the student to reconsider/revise that particular sentence.

That approach, however caused considerable problems with subject #4. The introduction and conclusion of her third draft had been so dramatically overhauled (both in content and in organization), that it was no longer possible to do a line-

item comparison with draft two. The body of her essay wasn't changed as drastically, so we could still compare the second and third drafts. Therefore, for purposes of this study we only assessed her responses to in-text teacher feedback that appeared in the body.

It is also important to clarify that for the purposes of this study we only considered student responses to the *in-text* teacher feedback. The cooperating teacher did include end-of-paper comments in three of the four second drafts. These typically identified recurrent problems: "Do you need [quotation marks] in the paper?" and "Much clearer overall, but paragraphs and language need work... for your record keeping review: sentence structure and punctuation, relative clauses + punct., and continuous vs. simple past." The teacher also provided students with a writing feedback form, a checklist rubric which highlighted content, organization, and language issues. Obviously, these pieces of teacher feedback (as well as the in-text teacher feedback from the *first* draft, which was not reviewed) might have also influenced students in their revision process on draft three. Our study cannot account for those aspects. Additionally, subjects #1, #3, and #4 sought outside help from tutors, friends, and/or the course instructor; the influence of this outside help was also left unmeasured by our study.

Step Three

The third focus in the data collection process involved interviewing the students and obtaining qualitative data regarding their reasons for attending to (or not attending to) each piece of in-text feedback. During these interviews, students were shown their second draft (which included the teacher markings) alongside the third draft (which highlighted where changes had or hadn't been made), so that they could more quickly recall their decision processes. They were then asked why they did or didn't make the change the teacher indicated.

These 30 to 40 minute interviews were audio taped, and written notes were taken. The students' explanations of their reasons for revision or lack of revision were analyzed and from their explanations we devised a list of response categories. Each student comment was assigned to one of the following:

Academic/Linguistic Knowledge. This category accounted for the student's linguistic and academic abilities and limitations. Student explanations that fell into this category were usually "I"-focused, as students asserted that their *own* knowledge (or lack of) influenced their decisions during the re-writing process. Typical response: "I didn't know how to provide examples."

Lack of Understanding of Teacher Marks/Comments. This category was initially designed to be an explanation for why students *didn't* respond to a teacher comment. However the category became ambiguous because even when asked why

they *did* make a change, if the students hadn't been absolutely clear about the meaning of the teacher's mark they tended to focus on their confusion as they spoke with us. Even if they had made a change in response to a misunderstood teacher comment, they usually started off their explanations with phrases like, "That was really difficult," "I was confused," and "I have no idea." When this happened, and also when students simply *didn't* make a change because they didn't understand what the teacher meant, we assigned the explanation to this category.

Personal Writing Style. When students asserted a "writer's" opinion about the teacher's comment, or when they talked about how they perceived the teacher's suggested change would affect their writing, we assigned their reason to this category. Typical responses which landed here were extremely "I"-focused and included statements such as: "I think if I change it [a verb] my sentence will not have the same meaning."

Compliance. This category included reasons that appeared to be based on the desire to comply or please the teacher. When giving these kinds of explanations the students demonstrated an overriding concern for the teacher's feelings and opinions. They frequently began these explanations with "She" and "She didn't like." Sample comments included: "She didn't like the capital letter," or "She said it was too long, so I just divided" [*sic*].

Negligence. By definition this category can only include teacher comments that were not attended to. That inattention could have resulted from rapid editing, time limitations, or oversight. Student explanations which fell into this category tended to be "I"-focused and included statements like, "Maybe I just wasn't careful" and "I didn't pay attention."

Desire to Communicate with Reader. Although similar to Personal Writing Style, this category differs in that student comments found here model the writers' overriding concern with communicating their intended meanings to the reader. Comments placed in this category reflect the students' initiative to clarify their texts and are typically reader-focused: "She [the teacher] didn't understand, and I wanted her to understand."

Not Applicable. Sometimes when asked why they did or didn't make a change, the students simply restated what change they did or didn't make. Despite our attempts to ask the same question in a different way, sometimes we simply could not get an answer. Such "explanations" fell into this category.

Findings

Total Number of In-Text Markings

As mentioned in an earlier section there were a total of 94 in-text teacher markings dispersed over four student papers.

Of those 94 in-text marks, 11 of the marks that appeared on subject #4's second draft were deleted from the data pool, because as previously explained, the subject's revisions were so substantial (both in content and in organization) that it was impossible to compare anything but the bodies of the two drafts. This adjustment to the data pool brought the total number of in-text teacher marks down to 83. Those 83 marks will be the basis for subsequent analysis. Table 2 shows their breakdown:

29	34.9%	Questions
19	22.8%	Abbreviation/Symbols
13	15.7%	Statements
8	9.6 %	Circles
7	8.4%	Insertion/Deletion
5	6.0%	Statements + Prompt
<u>2</u>	<u>2.4%</u>	Imperatives
83	99.8%	

Table 2 In-Text Markings Examined In This Study

Student Attendance to Feedback—Research Question #1

We observed change from draft #2 to draft #3 in 68 of the 83 teacher marks (81.9%); we did not observe any change for 15 of the marks (18.1%). The most changes appeared to be made when the teacher comment came in the form of a Statement + Prompt (attended to 100% of the time), a Statement (attended to 92.3%), or a Question (attended to 89.7%). This clearly contradicts Ferris' findings that "statements with information" and "questions" are less influential. Table 3 shows the number and percentage of each comment type that was attended to in our sample:

Comment (Total)	No. Attended To / Percent	No. Not Attended To / Percent
Question (29)	26 / 89.7%	3 / 10.3%
Abbreviation/ Symbol (19)	15 / 78.9%	4 / 21.0%
Statement (13)	12 / 92.3%	1 / 7.6%
Circles (8)	5 / 75%	2 / 25%
Insertion Deletion (7)	3 / 42.8%	4 / 57.1%
Statement + Prompt (5)	5 / 100%	0 / 0%
Imperative (2)	1 / 50%	1 / 50%
Totals 83	68 / 81.9%	15 / 18.1%

Table 3 Student Attention To Comment Type

Abbreviations/Symbols, as well as simple Circles also seemed to play a role in revisions, but significantly less so at 78.9% and 75%, respectively. Imperatives and Insertion/Deletions were least effective in generating change, at 50% and 42.8%. Unfortunately the sample size is too small to make these numbers statistically significant to other ESL/EFL settings. We also hesitate making generalizations about this particular group of students, due to the small number of teacher marks that fall into the Imperative and Statement + Prompt categories.

**Student Reasons for Attending/Not Attending to Teacher Feedback—
Research Question #2**

We found the high rate of student attendance to in-text teacher commentary (81.9%) surprising. To understand why the students did or didn't make teacher-suggested revisions, we asked them in our interviews. The most common reason for making (or NOT making) a change was the student's academic/linguistic knowledge (29%); the second most common reason related to the issue of compliance, or willingness to please the teacher (20.3%). Table 4 further details the results from our interviews:

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Total Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Academic & Linguistic Limitations/Abilities	23	29%
Change	16	69.6%
No Change	7	30.4%
Compliance Issues	16	20.3%
Change	16	100%
No Change	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Desire to Clarify for the Reader	13	16.5%
Change	13	100%
No Change	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Personal Writing Style	10	12.7%
Change	7	70%
No Change	3	30%
Lack of Understanding Of Teacher Marks	6	7.6%
Change	5*	83.3%
No Change	1	16.7%
Negligence	3	3.7%
Change	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
No Change	3	100%
Undetermined	8	9.6%

Table 4 Student Reasons for Attending or Not Attending to Teacher Comments

While we had originally assumed that students would *not* make changes if they didn't understand the teacher's mark, we found that this particular group of students almost always *did* make some kind of change, even when they didn't understand the teacher's comments.

Overall, these findings did not surprise us. We had expected the academic and linguistic limitations abilities, as well as the compliance issues, to play strong roles in the revision process. This class' desire to comply with the teacher could, however, be influenced by the fact that in order to successfully pass this course, students must get a "C" or higher; it could be argued that these students, feeling extra pressure to please the teacher, are particularly prone to respond to whatever feedback is given. This is evidenced in their high attendance rate to teacher feedback (81.9%, whereas Ferris' study reported 64% attendance rate), as well as by the subjects' telling pattern of making changes even when they didn't understand what was wrong. And as subject #2 explained at least twice during our interview, "She's [the teacher] the one grading me."

On the other hand, the data also shows that these students often *did* assert their own wills during the revision process. If the categories of "Desire to Clarify for the Reader" and "Personal Writing Style" were combined, it would show that 29.2% of the decisions to "attend" or "not attend" to teacher feedback were based on personal goals that appeared to go beyond simply pleasing the grader. These types of responses, however, were typically clustered around one or two of our subjects, suggesting that student rationale for their response to teacher feedback is highly variable and based on the individual receiving the feedback. The following case studies outline our findings for the four subjects and provide deeper insights into these individuals' revision process.

Case Studies

Subject #1—Amy

Amy is a 28-year-old woman from the Ivory Coast. Her first language is French, and she has been studying English in the US for two years and eight months. Before coming to the U.S. she completed an associate's degree in the Ivory Coast.

The following provides a breakdown of the responses the subjects gave as to why they did or did not make changes to their papers based on teacher feedback:

Reason Given	Amy	Brian	Clara	Donna
Academic/ Linguistic limitations	11 (37%)	5 (17.9%)	4 (36%)	3 (25%)
Compliance Issues	3 (10%)	11 (39.3%)	1 (9.1%)	1 (8.3%)
Desire to Clarify	7 (23%)	5 (17.9%)	1 (9.1%)	0 (0%)
Personal Writing Style	4 (13.3%)	2 (7.1%)	3 (27%)	1 (8.3%)
Lack Understanding				
T marks/comments	1 (3.3%)	2 (7.1%)	0 (0%)	3 (25%)
Negligence	2 (6.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (8.3%)
Not Applicable	2 (6.7%)	3 (10.7%)	2 (18%)	1 (8.3%)
Total	30	28	11	10

Table 5 Responses given by each student

In explaining why she did not make a change based on *academic/linguistic knowledge*, Amy claimed, "I didn't have a better word." Amy also responded highly to *desire to clarify*, with comments such as, "Just to make her understand," or "She won't understand. That's why I added another reference" as a reason for making changes between drafts. Interestingly, Amy was the only subject who expressed strong feelings about personal writing style which resulted in *not* making changes as the teacher suggested. One reason she gave for not making a change concerning a particular verb tense was, "The sentence won't have the same meaning." However, at times she also made changes based on *Compliance* with explanations such as, "Because I have to make the change."

Overall, 18, or 60%, of the teacher comments on her paper led to changes. Notably, she was the only subject who occasionally did *not* alter her paper based on in-text teacher marks, because of her personal writing style. This student even chose to keep incorrect forms at times because she believed a grammatical change would obscure the meaning she was trying to convey. However, she was able to see her writing from a reader's perspective in such a way that lead her to make many revisions in order to give a clearer meaning. Also, as she re-read and revised she was able to understand why the teacher had made the comments that she did and to notice and change (not necessarily correct) grammatical problems.

Amy had also sought help from the tutoring lab. The time she spent with the tutor caused her to make many more changes to her essay that were not documented in this study.

Subject #2—Brian

Brian is a 20-year-old Korean male. He has lived in the U.S. for three years. Before entering mainstream university classes he spent one and a half years in, and graduated from, a U.S. high school.

The overwhelming majority of the reasons Brian gave for why he did or didn't make changes based on teacher marks (see table 5) fell into the category of *compliance*. He often explained his reasons for changes as "[The teacher] didn't like that word" or "[The teacher] said it was too long, so I just divided it." A few of the instances where he was unable to make changes to his final draft were due to linguistic limitations such as, "I didn't have another word for that" or "I didn't know how to provide examples." It also seemed that he was aware when his writing wasn't clear and then would explain as a *desire to clarify*, "She [the teacher] didn't understand, and I wanted her to understand" or "[The teacher] needs more explain" [sic]. Two responses were simply lost by us during data tabulation, and are therefore unaccounted for in this study.

All but two of the teacher marks led Brian to make changes (93.9%). As mentioned earlier, we found this subject to be especially compliant. Even though only 11 responses were listed under *compliance*, almost all of his responses began with statements such as "she [the teacher] said" or "she didn't like" or "she didn't understand." In one severe situation when asked why he changed an inappropriately placed capital letter to a correct lowercase letter his reason was, "She didn't like the capital letter." Although he did give quite a few responses that were listed under different categories, many of those still contained a hint of compliance.

It is important to note that Brian is the only subject that did not seek any outside help, whereas the other subjects had readers or tutors aside from the classroom teacher. Brian only had the in-text teacher marks to help him as he re-wrote the essay. This reliance on only one source for aid in the writing process probably limited his ideas as how to revise, and most likely accounts for the reason that he was by far more compliant to teacher marks than any of the other subjects. Upon conference with the teacher we realized that this student is also in jeopardy of not passing the course. We believe that his struggle to obtain a passing grade might be an influential factor in his reasons for making such changes to his paper.

Subject #3—Clara

Clara is a 20-year-old woman from Vietnam. She has lived in the US for the

past ten years and graduated from a US high school. She is taking the ESL writing course due to low scores on the verbal section of the SAT.

Most of the changes Clara made were on the basis of *academic/linguistic knowledge* (see table 5) as she explained, "I couldn't find the information," or "I do see why it isn't academic," as reasons for revision. Her *personal writing style* accounted for three of the changes she made, with comments such as, "I think it would make the paragraph more interesting." Once she mentioned, "I felt like I had to," as a reason for *compliance*.

All of the teacher comments on her paper led her to make changes. It was interesting to see that even though the teacher had made a positive statement such as "interesting" or "nice connection," the student still made some type of change in her final draft.

This student met the teacher during her office hours to conference about her paper. This conference time helped her to make changes that she might not have made if working solely on her own. In addition to seeking additional advice from the teacher, she also worked with a tutor and had the help of a friend.

Subject #4—Donna

Donna is an 18-year-old woman from Hong Kong. Her first language is Cantonese. She has lived in the US for the past nine years and also graduated from a US high school.

In referring to her *academic/linguistic knowledge* (see table 5), Donna stated, "I couldn't find the information to support the fact," (in which case the sentences in question were simply eliminated). In response to a *lack of understanding of T marks/comments*, she explained, "It was hard" or "I thought that was different things" [sic], as reasons for why or why not changes were made between drafts. We are unable to account for two of her reasons for revisions. This is mostly likely due to the fact that it was very difficult to get clearly defined answers from this subject since her essay had undergone such massive revisions.

As was mentioned earlier, we were unable to use many of the teacher comments written on Donna's rough draft due to the fact that there were such radical changes between drafts. Also, many of the marks made by the teacher were unrelatable to the final draft.

Seven out of 12 teacher comments resulted in change (58.3%). Only twice did she not make a change as suggested by teacher comments. Once this lack of change was attributed to *academic/linguistic knowledge* or lack thereof, and once to *negligence*.

This subject had sought help from the teacher during her office hours. It was evident that the conference with the teacher had led the student to make such dramatic changes between drafts. Donna revealed to us during the interview that she had actually had to change the topic somewhat between the first and second draft. We might speculate that because she did not have as much time to focus on the final topic she had to make major revisions between drafts rather than being able to fine tune the way the other subjects did. It should also be mentioned that this student was going through a family crisis during the time that this paper was written; therefore, we can assume that she was not able to give the writing assignment as much attention as the other subjects could.

Discussion

By examining the case studies we can see that the processes students go through as they revise and the reasons that they do or do not attend to teacher feedback are a highly due to individual style. However, while conducting the interviews in this study we came to realize that there are a multitude of factors that influence students' revision process aside from simply personal choice or preference. Without greater insight into these factors we can safely say that our research findings are rather inconclusive. The need for further research into these other influential factors is apparent in order to gain a deeper and clearer understanding of the ways in which students revise their papers. We now set forth a list of possible research topics that should help to shed more light on the topic of feedback in the L2 writing revision process.

Topic Influence

During the interview process it became apparent that students who were more personally vested in the topics of their essays had stronger opinions as to content, word choice, and organization than did students who were further removed from the topics. Amy, who had written about the current political state in her country, had very strong opinions about making changes that the teacher suggested or indicated. Brian, who wrote on a topic vaguely connected to his major, had no qualms about making any changes or alterations to his paper especially if prompted by teacher comments. Interestingly, Clara who chose a topic that she was very interested in, yet not personally attached to, made changes that were prompted by the teacher but that she also agreed with.

It does seem, even from this small sample, that the topic of the essay itself plays a major role in the re-writing process. Our subjects' responses suggest that strong personal investment in the topic causes students to be more reluctant to make changes based on desire to please the instructor, and instead are more intent on conveying their message in the medium which they (rather than instructor) view as best.

One possibility for collecting information on this subject would be to ask students either in an interview or in a questionnaire why they have chosen their topic. Then it would be necessary to track changes between drafts, as we have done here, to determine if there is indeed any correlation between topic choice and willingness or reluctance to make changes. It might be interesting to only look at the difference in changes between grammar and content for this study.

Outside Help

Another major and obvious influence on students' revision process was the extent to which they received outside help, the impact of which we could neither control nor measure. Some students sought help at the tutoring lab, the teacher's office, or with a friend. Those students who had obtained tutelage other than the teacher's feedback comments made revisions that went above and beyond those suggested solely by the initial teacher comments. In some cases this assistance resulted in changes that led to improvements, but in other cases the outside influence actually conflicted with teacher comments and had detrimental rather than beneficial effects. For example, one tutor suggested that the student add extra information that was neither necessary nor relevant; the student, to the detriment of her paper, followed this advice, even though she had already received a perfect score on content from the teacher.

We can speculate that advice from a tutor or friend outside of class would have a greater impact on the revision process than in-text teacher feedback because of the length and quality of time that these outside sources spend with the student. A 20-minute, face-to-face session where the student receives the tutor's undivided attention might prove to be much more influential than the hand written teacher comments jotted down on the rough draft. Of course the actual source of help needs to be considered as well. Whether the personal assistant is a trained, or untrained tutor, a classmate, a friend, or the teacher herself are all factors that influence the advice they give and how those comments affect students as they revise.

To determine the effects of outside help it would be necessary to track the progress students make between drafts. Data pertaining to how much outside help was sought and by whom would need to be collected from the subjects. It seems that the best way would be to conduct interviews, but this could most likely also be achieved through a questionnaire. It would also be necessary to find out who the outside source is. For example, if the source is a friend, is it an English speaking friend, a friend in the same level ESL course, or lower, or higher, etc.

Ethnic Background, Age, and Personality

It is possible that the ethnic background and students' previous exposure to

instruction could influence the decisions they make during the revision process. In our study we found that the Asian students were much more compliant with teacher suggestions for revisions than the African student. The African student had much stronger opinions about her essay and made changes based on what she felt was best, rather than just to please the teacher. It is possible that the educational system from which students come is a contributing factor as to what extent they feel obliged to appease the teacher.

On the other hand, these factors may be attributed to other aspects of the subjects. It could be that age plays an important role in the extent to which the student is willing to change his or her paper to please the teacher. The African student was eight to ten years older than the rest of our subjects. We could also attribute the differences in student response to their personalities. Rather than a race or age issue, it might simply be the personality or free will of the student. Or again, it could be the topic of the essay, which dictates how and where students will revise.

Positive and Negative Revisions

Perhaps the most interesting area of this project that needs further research is the quality of response. In our research we were looking for changes made between drafts. We did not judge or rate these responses to see if the changes resulted in improved or lesser quality of the writing, as did Ferris. However, we did *notice* that some changes were causing the final draft to become better, while others seemed to hurt rather than help the final copy. Clearly, this is an interesting area that deserves further study.

In order to report on the quality of revisions the researchers would probably have to work more closely with the classroom teacher. We would need to collect data pertaining to students' grades on each draft and monitor to see how the revisions are leading to higher or lower scores.

Implications For ESL/EFL

It is quite clear from our research that we cannot claim that all or even most students respond to the same types of teacher comments. Especially when we compare our findings to those of Ferris, we see major discrepancies. In our study we found that the students responded mostly to statements + prompts, statements, and questions. Ferris found statements and questioning strategies to be unsuccessful.

Certainly one person who can benefit from our study would be the instructor of the course from which our subjects were selected. From our research she can see what types of feedback she most often gives and which types seem to be the most effective in bringing about a change in student drafts. We cannot assume that the same types of comments made by a different teacher would have the same effects.

In fact previous research would suggest that they do not.

Since teaching and learning are such individual phenomena, it must be concluded that an ethnographic study such as ours is most valuable to the people involved in this particular context. If a classroom teacher is able to conduct some sort of research such as we have done, he or she too can learn how often he or she employs different types of feedback comments, and can recognize which of those leads students to revise. For example, this particular teacher had a very high attendance rate to her in-text comments, and it was evident to us in our student interviews that the students possessed a clear understanding of the teacher's feedback style, error codes, and expectations.

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