



Assessment as Instruction in Feedback on L2 Writing Tasks

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Abstract

This paper builds on previous research which demonstrated how writing instruction in the field of SLA should revisit instructional methodology which purports to create autonomous learners highlighting how a broader conceptualization of feedback on learner production is required. The present study expands on the original research by exploring how conventional attempts at increasing learner autonomy and stimulating metacognitive activity through feedback on writing tasks are often not sufficient. It explores how feedback used to assess L2 writing takes on a more instructional quality as it is reduced in scope focusing only on selected sections of writing. The study not only describes the discourse which characterizes scaffolded attempts to foster autonomy on a writing tasks during conferences when feedback is restricted to only one specific section of the draft, but also compares it with similar scaffolded writing conferences that involve more substantial feedback on writing. Findings suggest that minimizing feedback during assessment has a more positive effect on learner discourse and learner visualization of the learning process. Paradoxically, curtailing feedback which is in fact purported to facilitate learning and task acquisition during the assessment of writing tasks, actually renders it more instructional thus resulting in more positive outcomes for both the instructor and L2 learner. The theoretical implications of this are then discussed.

Keywords: Learner autonomy, metalearning, SLA, scaffolded instruction

1. Sociocultural Theory and Scaffolding

Sociocultural theory originated with Lev Vygotsky (1978) whose theory highlighted the social dimension of learning with knowledge being mediated through discourse in social interaction. His theory holds that sociocultural factors and cognition are interdependently tied together in a relationship that is semiotically mediated (Lantolf and Pavlenko 1995). For Vygotsky (1978), all higher cognitive functions are the product of dialogic interaction in the zone of proximal development which represents the difference between what the learner can carry out independently and what the learner can perform in the presence of an expert. It is through such discursive activity that the learner may eventually develop self-regulation whereby a task may be completed independently without guided assistance.

As far back as the 1990's, sociocultural theory has been recognized as being quite applicable to the field of Second Language acquisition (Schinke-Llano 1993). In a review of the theory in the field of SLA, Abu Shakra (2008) demonstrates how sociocultural theory is particularly relevant and enriching to SLA because the acquisition and subsequent progress/development in language is first and foremost a social activity. One of the concepts inherent in this theory is scaffolding, a term that originated with the work of Wood et al (1976) to describe the interactive relationship inherent in the tutoring process on the development of competence in problem solving and the acquisition of certain skills. Scaffolding, as a form of semiotic mediation, leads to development within the zone of proximal development (DiCamilla and Anton 1997). As such, it has become a concept inherent/particularly useful during feedback/ assessment of writing in L2 settings whereby rather than providing the learner with explicit instruction on writing, the expert prompts the learner to arrive at independent task completion / competence by gradually reducing the level of scaffolding to one that is slightly beyond that which can be independently accomplished. According to (Swibel, 2020), scaffolded instruction not only guides the learner but also regulates the learning process by providing the appropriate structure and tasks that allow social and cognitive skills to develop. One of the goals of scaffolded instruction is learner autonomy, an interesting concept first coined by Henry Holec (1981 p.3) to refer to "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" with the decisions accompanying all aspects of that learning. Learner autonomy has been recognized as a key component of language learning. For Mynard (2019), learner autonomy is one of the best ways for catering to the individual needs of learners by designing learning opportunities to meet the unique needs of each learner. Hyland and Hyland (2006) specifically stress the need for studies on the role which feedback plays in creating autonomous writers.

With learner autonomy as its goal, scaffolded writing instruction is in theory attempted through the writing process whereby the learner completes a series of drafts which are assessed by the expert through feedback that is gradually scaffolded in an effort for the learner to complete the final draft independently and thus achieve writing competence. The whole writing process seems to work under the assumption that mastery of the writing task denotes internalization of learning and generalization of such competence to subsequent writing tasks in the future. In practice, however, this cannot be further from the truth. In a previous study, Abu Shakra (2013), demonstrates how writing instructors may often mistakenly assume that learners have reached their perspective on a writing revision at a point much earlier than expected. Learner application of expert feedback on a writing task is as a consequence, actually often quite a passive process that seldom involves active thinking. Thus, though initially being capable of making amendments on a writing task based on expert feedback, a learner may easily regress back to similar errors in successive writing tasks since the learning has not been fully internalized and the expert's perspective of the errors has not been achieved (Abu Shakra 2013). Indeed, quite far back, Knoblauch and Brannon (1984) realized that when learners follow expert feedback on a writing task too meticulously, they are simply rewriting work that more closely reflects the instructor's thoughts with minimal cognitive development ensuing.

Thus, although the conventional attempts at increasing learner autonomy and stimulating metacognitive activity during assessment through feedback on writing tasks are actively made through scaffolding, this is often not sufficient. And this is where the innovative idea of minimizing feedback ensued in an effort to make such feedback obtain a more instructional quality and foster more active learning. Paradoxically, it is intriguing to study how the reduction of feedback which is purported to facilitate learning and task acquisition during the assessment of writing tasks, may actually result in assessment that is more instructional. Of course, this study works under the assumption that although not assigned a grade, feedback on writing tasks is considered a form of assessment. As such, it is more effective when it takes on a more instructional focus. It would be interesting to study the learner discourse that accompanies reduced feedback to discover whether such an approach does indeed play a constructive role in the way the learner envisions metaknowledge about the quality of their learning.

2. Introduction

The following study was carried out at the Gulf University for Science and Technology, an institution that operates under a cooperation agreement with the University of Missouri at St. Louis. It involved 4 Arab first year university students who were attending a 3 credit composition

course which introduces them to the fundamentals of writing through an emphasis on the writing process. The 4 students were chosen from among the 10 students that took part in the initial research study. This study builds on the original research (Abu Shakra 2013) which explored the effect of enacting learner autonomy, one aspect of scaffolding, through feedback on writing tasks. Findings indicated that the attempt to generate autonomy during writing conferences results in learner composed goals which not only indicate evidence of reflectivity but also instances of metalearning. As such, instructor presupposition of the point at which the learner has truly internalized a writing error needs to be revised since learners seem to become cognitively engaged at a point much later than after they claim understanding of the revision being made.

The present study expands on the original research by delving deeper into the attempt at autonomous learning through scaffolding by exploring how minimizing feedback during assessment affects learner discourse and learner visualization of the learning process. The study not only describes the discourse which characterizes scaffolded attempts to foster autonomy on a writing tasks during conferences when feedback is restricted to only one specific section of the draft, but also explores how this compares with similar scaffolded writing conferences that involve more substantial feedback on writing covering the whole draft. As such, the quality of scaffolded expert feedback which attempts to trigger more learner autonomy during writing conferences does not change, but rather the quantity or length of that feedback is reduced to one section of the draft of the learner's choice with the expectation that the learner would apply this learning to subsequent sections of the same draft.

Before delving into a comparison between learner discourse during conferences of the 2 feedback types, it is important to establish the presence of this scaffolded feedback during the sessions. As such, the study has 2 main objectives:

- 1 To demonstrate linguistically the attempt to scaffold feedback on writing tasks during conferences which are limited to one specific section of the writing task.
- 2 To compare the quality of learner? discourse which arises during writing conferences when feedback is more focused and limited to one section of a draft with that which arises in conferences that provide more holistic/ traditional feedback on the whole draft.

This study makes 2 assumptions. First, this study in no way attempts to evaluate writing, but rather the concern is more with describing learner discourse and visualization of metaknowledge as the quantity of feedback is

reduced. Also, feedback in both studies is synonymous with assessment; even though feedback on a writing draft is not evaluated by the instructor through a grade, it is still nonetheless considered an evaluation of learner writing. As with the initial research, the instructor embedded her discourse with elements of scaffolding in an attempt to increase learner autonomy among learners. The concept of learner autonomy underlying such an attempt was borrowed from the three pedagogical principles which Little (2000) uses to characterize learner autonomy, namely the principle of learner empowerment whereby learners take charge of their learning processes and feel responsible for their for their own learning; the principle of reflectivity which necessitates that learners engage in reflection in order to monitor and plan their learning; and the principle of appropriate target language use which requires learners to use the target language in discursive interaction.

As with the previous study, the two principles of learner empowerment and appropriate target language use came to formulate the *vehicle* which the instructor made use of for increasing learner autonomy. These two principles entailed that the instructor, rather than simply providing written comments on writing tasks, would provide feedback through oral interaction whereby the instructor scheduled a conference with each L2 learner to discuss feedback on their writing. This relates to the social-interactive dimension of learner autonomy indicated by Little (2000). Each 30 minute conference involved joint exploration of the writing revision through a dialogic interactive process. These conferences were not only meant to empower the learner but also provided an opportunity for target language use. The principle of reflectivity, on the other hand, came to formulate the *aim* of this discursive interaction. The aim of the instructor during each writing conference was to encourage reflection among the learners so that they may monitor and assess their writing. These three principles in fact work together in a process whereby the instructor met with a learner in a conference which involved exploratory dialogue using the target language in order to make the student reflect on their learning and thus work towards achieving greater learner autonomy. According to Little (2000), learner empowerment, reflectivity, and appropriate target language use are three principles which cannot, in fact, be distinguished; they work closely together and should therefore be viewed holistically. Learner autonomy in language represents a dynamic relationship between teaching and learning where learners plan, implement and evaluate their own learning (Little 2020).

3. Method

The instructor attempted to revise/provide feedback on only one section of the writing previously selected by the learner. The learner was

then expected to carry out a similar revision for successive sections of the writing independently. The attempt to foster learner autonomy through the revision of a selected section of writing was informally observed in 10 conferences carried out over a 2 week period. For consistency purposes and to rule out extraneous variables, however, only those conferences which focused on the discussion of writing comparison and contrast essays, the writing genre studied in the initial research, were chosen to be audio taped and transcribed for the analysis of spoken discourse. Thus, data analysis was carried out on 4 conferences for only selected sections of comparison and contrast essays. The aim was to linguistically ascertain the instructor's attempt to stimulate learner autonomy through scaffolding as well as note the concomitant discourse which accompanies such an attempt in an effort to compare the findings with those observed in the initial research done on conferences which involved more holistic feedback on the whole essay.

The analysis of the discourse in the conferences was based on the Burton (1981) model which is directly derived from the Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) model. Although the Sinclair and Coulthard model is specifically tailored to the classroom context, the Burton model was opted for because the nature of the conferences differs from that of a classroom lesson. For one thing, only 2 people, the instructor and the learner are involved. Also, the conferences took place outside the classroom and focused specifically on one topic, the revision of a writing problem. Originally formulated to apply to casual conversation (Eggs and Slade 1997), it was felt that the Burton model is flexible enough to apply to the discourse of these conferences. Most importantly, this model does not over-privilege the instructor's role in the discourse. As with the Sinclair and Coulthard model, the scheme set forth by Burton is essentially hierarchical whereby Lessons formulate the largest units of discourse. Lessons are made up of Transactions which embody Exchanges related to particular topics covered in the discourse. In turn, Exchanges consist of Moves which formulate individual turns. Finally, the smallest units of discourse are the Speech Acts which comprise the Moves. The Burton model expands on the original Sinclair and Coulthard model at the level of both the Speech Acts where she includes a few modifications; and at the level of Moves whereby the original Initiation, Response, and Feedback also includes Opening, Challenging, Supporting, Bound-Opening, Re-Opening, Framing, and Focusing moves. Opening moves consist of topics which are considered new in relation to the discourse that precedes them; Challenging moves hold the progress of a topic; and Supporting moves keep the interaction focused to facilitate the topic of discourse. While Bound-Opening moves reintroduce a topic after a Supporting move, Re-Opening moves reintroduce a topic after a Challenging move. Finally, Focusing and Framing moves serve to mark the boundaries of

a transaction by appearing before a topic and functioning to capture attention.

In addition to the transcription and analysis of the discourse during the writing conferences, the L2 learners who took part in each conference were also asked to record their thoughts and comments on how the conference took place in a short retrospective self-report which they filled out directly after the writing conference. The reports did not place a limit on student responses; they simply provided some general guiding points related to the conference as an instructional method which the students were asked to comment on open-endedly. The points which the students were asked to comment on included instructional aspects they liked about the conference, aspects they disliked, and an evaluation of their learning of the writing revision. There were three main rationales behind these self-reports. First, the inequality in terms of power distribution present among the instructor and student in these conferences entailed that fewer turns would be taken by the student in comparison to the instructor. According to Muncie (2000), the fact the instructor both gives feedback and later evaluates the writing gives learners less of a chance to be critical about the feedback received. Hence, it was felt that having them record their thoughts on these conferences gives students more voice in the process. Another justification for using self-reports is related to the fact that conferences geared at fostering learner autonomy where somewhat new to these L2 learners. As a result, it was felt important to allow them to further reflect on not only their writing, but also this new pedagogical practice and joint exploration instruction and which is more student centered. Finally, and most importantly, though self-reports were part of the methodology in this study, they were also chosen to serve a pedagogical function. By encouraging evaluation and raising awareness of learning strategies, they may also be considered a means for further fostering learner autonomy.

4. Data analysis

The analysis of spoken discourse first linguistically demonstrated how scaffolding was used to foster learner autonomy based on Little's (2000) three principles of learner autonomy during conferences which provided feedback on only a selected section of the writing piece. The selection of the writing to be revised was wholly made by the learner. From there, the second focus of data analysis compared this oral discourse with that which ensues when the instructor feedback during a conference holistically covers all the writing piece. In what follows, excerpts from the transcript of one of the 4 conferences involving selected revisions as well as retrospective self-reports that students filled out directly following two of the writing conferences will be used to discuss how data analysis took place. The

conference will be referred to here as Conference C in order to differentiate it from Conferences A and B, conferences which involved more holistic feedback on writing in the previous study. It should be noted that transcripts in this conference are relatively shorter in length in comparison to the 2 conferences of the previous study understandably due to the brevity of the feedback given only on a selected section. A complete transcript Conference C, coded according to the Burton (1981) model of spoken discourse, is provided in the Appendix (2) along with the notes on the coding scheme (Appendix 1).

This particular conference was chosen not only because it falls under the genre of comparison and contrast writing, but also because it was found to be the most illuminating of the four conferences. It involved a learner who, after being asked to select only one section of his comparison and contrast essay for revision, requested help on the introduction of that draft. The instructor attempted to prompt him into understanding that there needs to be a particular purpose in the thesis statement of his introduction. The conference itself included three transactions each geared at a particular aspect of writing revision. The instructor first started with *problem analysis and exploration of a solution* whereby the instructor analyzes that difficulty and explores a solution with the learner. This was followed by *relation to previous learning* which basically involves relating the writing difficulty to concepts discussed in class. Finally came *pinpointing the problem* which the instructor proceeds with once the learner is ready to specifically pinpoint the writing problem during the last stage.

5. Discussion

5.1 First focus

Turning to the first focus, data from all four writing conferences revealed that the instructor relied on scaffolding in order to make the learner arrive at her perspective of the task and promote self-reflection. This transfer of increased responsibility from the instructor to the learner based on the learner's readiness involved several successive attempts which are according to Kunschak (2007) required to foster learner autonomy. Analysis of the discourse in the writing conferences revealed several scaffolding functions. In line with the previous study and for the sake of consistency, 2 of these major scaffolding functions will be demonstrated/discussed here. The first of these relates to the instructor's feedback which was found to be unlike that present in Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) traditional IRF exchange considered the most well defined exchange in a typical lesson because of its 3 moves namely, *initiation* by the instructor followed by a *response* on the part of the student and ending with *feedback* from the instructor to evaluate that response. The analysis of discourse in these writing conferences was

instead found to more closely resemble what Mercer (1998) refers to as spiral IRF exchanges. These exchanges retain the traditional *initiation*, *response*, and *feedback* sequence. During the feedback stage, however, the instructor, replaces the assessment of student response with probing questions to find out how the student arrived at that response and get the student to explore other possible ways of approaching the topic at hand. As such, instructor feedback acts more as a method of exploration than an evaluation of student learning during each conference. Excerpt 1 below from writing conference C demonstrates how spiral IRF exchanges characterized the instructor's discourse at the level of speech acts.

EXCERPT 1

Column 1 represents the speech turns.

Column 2 represents the speakers involved in the discussion.

Column 3 represents the Moves.

Column 4 represents the Speech Acts.

- | | | | | |
|----|---|----|------|--|
| 1. | T | FO | ms | Let's start with a question./ |
| | | O | s | My question is/ |
| | | el | | when were you asked to find |
| | | | | similarities and differences between two |
| | | | | things? |
| 2. | A | C | rep | When? |
| 3. | T | S | i | Anytime. |
| 4. | A | S | rep | On Wednesday last week. |
| 5. | T | S | acct | Last week/ |
| | | | p | What for? |
| 6. | A | S | rep | In Science for my assignment./ |
| | | | i | I had to compare two organisms. |
| 7. | T | BO | el | To find similarities and differences? |

8. A S rep Yeah both.
9. A S rep Last month also I was working on finding similarities
and differences.
10. T C i In?
11. A S rep History class.
12. T S acct OK./
C i I didn't understand what you said (A mumbles
something which can't be heard).
13. A S rep It was 2 famous figures in the French
revolution.
14. T S ack OK./
m Now/
BO s when you compared the two figures/
el did you find similarities or differences?
15. A S rep It was both.
16. T S acct Both, OK.
17. A S rep I also had to compare 2 phones with my friend.
18. T S acct Alright.
19. A S i To see which one I am going to buy.
20. T S ack OK./
BO el What is comparing two things called?
21. A C rep I don't get it.
22. T RO p What do you call it when you find differences?
- 23.A S rep Contrast.
24. T S acct Contrast./

		p	and when you find similarities?
25.A	S	rep	(mumbling; not clear.)
26.	T	C	p What did you say?
27.	A	S	rep Comparison.
28.	T	S	acct Comparison?

In this excerpt, the instructor commences the writing conference with the first transaction which is an analysis of the writing issue. The instructor's initial elicitation at (1) is meant to get the student to arrive at a general understanding of comparison and contrast. To that extent, she engages in a series of *elicits* which function to request a linguistic response and *prompts* which act to reinforce previous *elicits* (Burton 1981). These 2 speech acts appeared in more turns (5), (7), (14), (20), (22), (24), (26) respectively than *informatives* and *comments*, for example, whose only function according to Burton (1981) is to show compliance to a previous reply. As such, the instructor's turns seemed to involve more prompting and mentoring than assessment and evaluation in order to get the student to reach a closer understanding of comparison and contrast. According to Li (2017), when instructor feedback in an IRF exchange comes in the form of questioning, a spiral IRF is created and a new learning cycle results enriching student involvement in the learning process. Such a dialogue not only encourages reflection among learners but also helps raise awareness of values inherent in student learning (Greenbank and Penketh 2009). According to Gama (2004), this may lead to the enhancement of student learning. On the downside, it also speaks to the apparent conflicting roles of an instructor during a writing conference as both a provider of feedback and the ultimate evaluator of that very same writing (Hyland 2000).

Cued elicitation (Edwards and Mercer 1987) is another scaffolding function evident in the discourse of the writing conference. Closely related to spiral IRF exchanges, cued elicitation involves prompting learners through questions embedded with clues to help them arrive at the instructor's perspective of the task (Edwards and Mercer 1987). This is clearly evident in Excerpt 2 of the writing conference which shows how cued elicitation occurred in the instructor's discourse at the level of speech acts.

EXCERPT 2

Column 1 represents the speech turns.

Column 2 represents the speakers involved in the discussion.

Column 3 represents the Moves.

Column 4 represents the Speech Acts.

52. T S m Well/
i that's related to the first point./
ms I'll write all this down./
s You can have three purposes. The first would be
which is better./
m OK/
el What would the second one be?
53. A S rep Which one is worse.
54. T S I Same thing, which is better or worse./
p What else?
55. A S rep You're choosing.
56. T S I Same thing./
com You're making a choice; deciding which is better or
worse./
p What else can you do?
sum Adam/
p you just said it.
57. A C rep I did?
58. T S acct Yes.
59. A S rep Um, find the differences; how they are
different.
60. T S acct Alright./

- p You can find the differences but....
61. A S rep They're the same.
-

This excerpt is taken from the very last transaction whereby the instructor attempts to make the learner pinpoint the specific problem of having a thesis statement that lacks a significant aim in comparison and contrast writing. To that extent, she relies on cued elicitation. In reply to the instructor's initial *elicitation* in turn (52), the student responds with *replies* in turns (53) and (54) which attempt to address that *elicitation*. When the instructor realizes that the student is not able to arrive at her perspective of the task, she is quick to follow her first prompt in turn (56) with a second prompt that provides a cue to remind the learner of something that she previously mentioned during the conference. Later, when the student requests further clarification in her *elicit* in turn (57), the instructor resists the temptation to reply with a speech act such as an *informative*, for instance, which directly gives out information. Instead, though responding with an *accept* in turns (58) and (60), the instructor is quick to add a clue in the form of a *prompt* which allows the student to finally realize in turn (61) that though divergent, two concepts may be shown to be similar. As such, the instructor seemed to make use of these cues to jointly explore the solution to the writing problem with the learner rather than directly transmitting the information to the learner. As part of scaffolded instruction, cued elicitation aids learning within the zone of proximal development and encourages learner autonomy. Indeed, Murphy and Jacobs (2000) assert that such guided cooperative learning processes create more autonomous learners. Embedding the prompting process with such cues also allows learners to actually reflect on their queries thus encouraging self-evaluation and stimulating metacognitive activity. Indeed, Edwards and Mercer (1987), highlight how such paraphrastic interpretations of student response which involve reconstructing student response to make it more explicit may be considered a metalearning strategy since they allow learners to become more cognizant of their own thinking. Moore (2012) goes on to warn that although effective, cued elicitation should be used sparingly since its overuse may mean that it becomes a strategy used by the instructor to control the actual lesson.

5.2 Second focus

As with the initial research, this study acknowledges the positive effect of such dialogic interaction on L2 learners without attempting to measure the reflectivity and metalearning observed or investigate the value of such discourse on the attainment of self-regulation. Instead, this study

compares the quality of discourse observed in the previous study where feedback is provided holistically on all the writing piece with that observed presently when feedback is limited to one section of writing only. Findings reveal that the quality of interaction which concomitantly occurs when scaffolded instructor feedback during a writing conference is limited to only one section of writing is surprisingly quite superior to that which ensues when instructor feedback attempts to cover the whole writing piece as commonly practiced during a conference. It is thus quite intriguing to study how limiting instructor feedback during a writing conference may actually result in more gains allowing second language learners to take more charge of the academic writing process. In what follows, this will be discussed in terms of the 2 main findings of the previous study.

In comparing the discourse that ensues in the conference at hand with that of the previous study, it is integral to differentiate between instructor discourse and learner discourse. In terms of the instructor, the first observation made was that in the present conference, prompting extended throughout the conference where as can be seen in Table 1 below *elicits* and *prompts* have a much higher incidence formulating 14% and 13% of the total speech acts used by the instructor in the conference than *informatives* and *comments* which only account for 9% and 1% of the speech acts the instructor used.

TABLE 1. OVERALL DISTRIBUTION OF SPEECH ACTS IN CONFERENCE C

SPEECH ACT	TOTAL NUMBER OF ACTS	% OF TOTAL SPEECH ACTS
^		
<i>accn</i>		
<i>ex</i>		
<i>pr</i>		
<i>m</i>	12	7%
<i>sum</i>	1	0.6%
<i>s</i>	7	4%
<i>ms</i>	6	3.5%
<i>I</i>	15	9%
<i>el</i>	24	14%
<i>d</i>	2	1%
<i>rea</i>	2	1%
<i>con</i>	5	3%
<i>ack</i>	4	4%
<i>p</i>	21	13%
<i>acct</i>	24	14%
<i>rep</i>	45	27%

<i>com</i>	2	1%
TOTAL	169	

Surprisingly enough, although the conference in the previous study also had a high incidence of prompting, Table 2 below which shows the overall distribution of speech acts in Conference A reveals that the distribution of all 4 speech acts was more evenly distributed throughout the conference. *Elicits* and *prompts* formulate 14% and 11% of the total speech acts used by the instructor, and *informatives* and *comments* similarly account for 10% and 8% of the speech acts the instructor used in that conference.

TABLE 2. OVERALL DISTRIBUTION OF SPEECH ACTS IN CONFERENCE A

SPEECH ACT	TOTAL NUMBER OF ACTS	% OF TOTAL SPEECH ACTS
m	2	2%
sum		
s	4	4%
ms	3	3%
I	10	10%
el	14	14%
d		
rea		
con	3	3%
ack	2	2%
p	13	11%
acct	7	7%
rep	29	28%
com	8	8%
^	4	4%
ex		
accn		
pr		
TOTAL	104	

The higher incidence of informatives and comments in Conference A may perhaps be attributed to the fact that the pressure for time to revise an extended piece of writing during a 30 minute conference impedes the

instructor from engaging in as much prompting as originally desired. This may result in the instructor's desire to simply proceed by covering the whole writing piece as thoroughly as possible while showcasing expertise without the risk of exceeding the designated time frame thus engaging in less prompting than originally desired. This may on the surface appear to be similar to what Bloome (1986) referred to as procedural display whereby the instructor interacts with the learner through discourse that is appropriate for the conference without actually touching on the academic bulk of the conference or realizing the value of the interaction during the conference. A danger thus lies in what on the surface may appear to be scaffolded feedback would only be prompting in a superficial sense. Although engaged in discourse during the conference, the instructor and learners may in such cases not achieve a shared understanding of the writing problem. According to Bloome et al (2014), procedural display should be differentiated from the acquisition of academic content and skills.

Further to that point, feedback on shorter segments of writing within a given time frame is less arduous for the instructor who is required to delve into this process for at least 25 students in an average writing class. This may allot more time to comment on a learner's successful attempts at writing and not just delve into areas of error thus highlighting areas of mastery which might otherwise go unnoticed. Referring back to Tables 1&2, the *acknowledge*, a speech used to indicate that an informative has been understood appears to be slightly more frequently used by the instructor at 4% in the present study than it was in the previous conference where it only appears at 2%. The same applies to the *accept*, a speech act which accepts a previous utterance, were it appears at 14% in the present conference while being only used by the instructor 7% in the previous study. Both speech acts may be considered support for learners since they provide encouragement by accepting the learner's *informatives* through non-evaluative word choice. They thus highlight to the learner that the conference itself is not an evaluation or assessment of their writing. Rather, it is a discursive activity which results in thinking through the writing problem together in order to achieve a shared understanding of the task at hand. As such, the learner becomes aware not only of areas of difficulty but also of positive aspects of their writing that they may build upon in successive pieces of writing.

In terms of learner discourse, comparison between the learner discourse that ensues in the conference at hand with that of the previous study reveals several observations. In the previous study, the primary observation centered on the importance of writing goals generated by the learner towards the end of the conference. It was felt that these writing goals were not only an expression of reflectivity, but also revealed instances of metacognitive activity. As such, the end result of discursive exploration

during writing conferences was seen to be added learner autonomy. The present study observes that such metacognitive activity gains even more momentum as instructor feedback is reduced. Whereas metacognitive activity and reflection were previously revealed solely through the writing goals learners formulated towards the end of the conferences, instances of metacognition in the present conferences seem to be not just confined to writing goals at the end but rather more extensively spread out throughout the conference. Tables 3 and 4 below which compare the frequency distribution of speech acts among the teacher and student in the 3 transactions of each conference will be used to demonstrate this.

TABLE 3. FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF SPEECH ACTS AMONG TEACHER AND STUDENT FOR EACH TRANSACTION OF CONFERENCE A.
TRANSACTION 1 TRANSACTION 2 TRANSACTION 3

	S	T	TOTAL	S	T	TOTAL	S	T	TOTAL
m					1	1		1	1
sum									
s									
ms	1		1	1		1		1	1
I	5		5	2		2	3		3
el		8	8		5	5	1	5	5
d									
rea									
con					1	1	1	1	2
ack				1		1		2	2
p		4	4		8	8		1	1
acct		7	7		2	2		4	4
rep	12		12	11		11	6		6
com		2	2						
^				4		4			
ex									
accn									
pr									
TOTAL	18	23	41	19	18	37	11	15	25

TABLE 4. FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF SPEECH ACTS AMONG TEACHER AND STUDENT FOR EACH TRANSACTION OF CONFERENCE C

	TRANSACTION 1			TRANSACTION 2		TRANSACTION 3			
	S	T	TOTAL	S	T	TOTAL	S	T	TOTAL
m		1	1		3	3		2	2
sum									
s		2	2		1	1		1	1
ms		1	1					4	4
I	2	3	5				1	4	5
el		4	4	2	3	3	3	6	8
d								2	2
rea							2		2
con								1	1
ack		2	2					1	1
p		3	3		4	4		1	1
acct		6	6		6	6			
rep	13		13	6		6	2	2	4
com									
^									
ex									
accn									
pr									
TOTAL	15	22	37	8	17	23	8	24	31

A comparison between the 2 tables above shows that while *elicits* on the part of the student are used only once in Conference A, they are used a total of 5 times in the last 2 transactions of Conference C. The learner thus appears to be directing more questions about the feedback presented by the expert. When feedback is limited to only a selected section of writing, learners may thus feel more obliged to inquire about a writing error rather than blindly following the expert’s feedback since they know that they will need to continue with this revision independently for the latter sections of the draft. Further to the point, a glance at the nature of inquiries addressed by the learner in both conferences reveals a startling finding. Whereas the *elicit* in Conference A was limited to simple repetition of the teacher’s comment used during feedback, learner queries in Conference C seem to be more developed and extensive. Excerpt 3 will be used to demonstrate how student queries in Conference C were relatively more developed.

EXCERPT 3

Column 1 represents the speech turns.

Column 2 represents the speakers involved in the discussion.

Column 3 represents the Moves.

Column 4 represents the Speech Acts.

44. T S acct Make a choice./
 m Alright/
 con choose which is better/
 BO el or why else would we do this?/
 p Think about it: if you're
 showing that two things have
 similarities, how is that
 important?/
 p Why would that be something necessary?
45. A S rep To see which is better.
46. T S acct To see which is better.
47. A S rep To also see how they differ.
 el Do does that mean I have to do both?
48. T S acct Yes./
 s Two things that everybody
 thinks are similar, you may
 show are actually different./
-

 O el What else could we do then?/
 p You can find which is better or....?
49. A S rep How they are different.
50. T C p So what? In that case...you are proving that
?
51. A S rep What are the disadvantages.
- 52.T S m Well/

- i that's related to the first point./
 ms I'll write all this down./
 s You can have three purposes. The first would be
 which is better./
 m OK/
 el What would the second one be?
53. A S rep Which one is worse.
 el Is that the same as comparing and contrasting?
54. T S I Same thing, which is better or worse./
 p What else?
55. A S rep You're choosing.
56. T S I Same thing./
 com You're making a choice; deciding which is better or
 worse./
 p What else can you do?
 sum Adam/
 p you just said it.
57. A C rep I did?
58. T S acct Yes.
59. A S rep Um, find the differences; how they are different.
60. T S acct Alright./
 p You can find the differences but...
61. A S rep They're the same.
62. T S acct They're similar./
 con So, if you have two things that
 are similar you try to show that
 they're different./
 el Take two iphones for example.
63. A S rep They're the same.
64. T S acct OK. They're the same./

- C p But...
65. A S rep They have similarities but they can also have differences.
66. T S acct They're also different./
BO el So, what would #3 be?/
p If #2 is we are choosing two things that are similar and we are trying to find differences, what would #3 be?/
67. A S rep The same.
68. T C p Two things that appear different....
69. A S rep Find out how they are the same.
70. T S el Can you give me an example?
71. A S rep Friends.
72. T C i No./
p Give me an example of two writing topics that everybody thinks are different and you prove are similar.
73. A S rep A Samsung and an iphone.
74. T S acct Samsungs and iphones OK./
con Everybody thinks they're different phones and you will try to prove that they're similar./
m So/
el What is the conclusion we are reaching here?
75. A S rep You have to make a statement.
el So how can I add this to my writing later?
76. T S acct You have to have a point to prove./
el So comparison and contrast in itself is?

- i If we're just comparing and contrasting, its pointless so we would have to do something./
- com Either make a choice or else prove that 2 things thought similar are different or 2 things thought different are similar./
- FO con Otherwise, you are going to run into a problem and the reader wouldn't know./
- el Do you get the aim behind all this/
-

In this excerpt, the student in line 47 inquires about whether both comparison and contrast need to be completed in the essay. Similarly, in line 53, the student has a query about whether making a choice is similar to compare and contrast. This is a far cry from the simple question addressed to the teacher in Conference A. Even the learner goals generated at the end of Conferences A which could arguably be considered quite developed were in fact prompted by the instructor and only initiated based on a direct request by the instructor.

The fact that the learner in Conference C restates some of the previous feedback provides evidence that the learner seems to have internalized the instructor feedback and is now reflecting on it by attempting to plan the application of that learning. Later on in the same excerpt, the student in line 75 attempts to rephrase the instructor's comment then further probes into how this may be applied in another section of their writing. This is important in two respects. First, this recapitulation of learning provides evidence that the learner has gotten closer to achieving the instructor's perspective of the writing revision thus hastening the internalization of learning. Indeed, the previous study showed how learners arrive at the instructor's perspective and become cognitively engaged at a point much later than after they claim understanding during a conference. It is thus oversimplistic to assume that learning becomes internalized after it has been pointed out through feedback (Hyland and Hyland 2006). When internalization is limited, learners will fail to generalize feedback on their writing causing errors to reappear in subsequent writing tasks. According to Vincent (2019), students are often not capable of absorbing all the feedback given to them by ESL instructors when it is extensive, though such revision is done out of altruism on the part of instructors. The other way in which this recapitulation of learning on the part of the learner is insightful relates to the planning element inherent in the learner's queries. Student questions clearly

show evidence of planning for writing application elsewhere. More developed and extensive queries such as the ones in the excerpt above reveal how the learner has taken more charge of the writing process and feels more accountable for their writing. According to Thanasoulas (2000), such self-monitoring which involves checking performance is one of several metacognitive strategies, requiring learners to think about their thinking. Schraff et al. (2017) showed how metacognition aids in the transfer of learning as learners seem to be more likely to apply learning strategies when they get the chance to reflect on their learning processes. This is also related to learner autonomy and the generation of more independent learners. According to Hyland and Hyland (2006), learners need to develop metacognition to achieve the ultimate goal of all instructor feedback: the creation of autonomous learners who are capable of critically assessing their own writing. The benefits of learner autonomy have indeed been recognized in the field of L2. Marantika (2021) highlights how the development of metacognition and autonomy in learning allows learners to be more aware of the learning process and the techniques needed to succeed in language learning. For Benaissi (2015) learner autonomy is not only bound by cultural constraints but is also a concept that is not innate and therefore requires an innovative perspective towards learning on the part of both learners and instructor. As such, when feedback provided to the learner is reduced to a particular section of writing, there seems to be less of a need to prompt the learner to plan their writing. This allows the learner to take more initiative to independently revise alternative sections of their writing. Indeed, feedback on a whole piece of writing tends to reduce revision to a mechanical process where the learner makes the necessary changes to simply meet the demands of the assignment and receive a grade with less internalization of learning and less metacognitive activity of the ensuing learning. Comments recorded by students in their self-reports following the 4 writing conferences mirror this observation. Table 4 lists a few of these comments.

TABLE 4. COMMENTS FROM STUDENT SELF-REPORTS FOLLOWING WRITING CONFERENCES

Student	Comment 1	Comment 2
Adam (Conference C)	'I prefer the in-person conference where we worked on one part of the essay only because I will directly understand the point you want me to edit and you could give me examples of how to fix it. This will help me plan for other parts of my essay. I get to think about how to fix the other parts.'	'I liked how we focused on one problem while in the first essay she briefly went through it. The second one was more effective than the first one in my opinion. I was able to understand the importance of the thesis statement in a comparison and contrast essay in a better way.'
Maya (Conference C)	'I found it to be more helpful than the short conference we had on the	'I preferred the correction of the second essay since the first essay

D)	previous essay. I felt like the conference was a “one question” to “one-answer” meeting and we couldn’t get to the details of the essay and our mistakes. This gave me more power because I got to choose what I needed help with, so I came prepared.’	was very brief and chaotic.’
George (Conference E)	‘The fact that it was easier to grasp made this better than when comments are just written and instead of having a meeting about everything, we can talk to you about it giving us an advantage over just talking about everything, more to memorize, less organized when it’s about everything.	‘The writing conferences were better because I got to look at the essay criteria more than when you personally corrected our essays in writing: Interaction is important.’

The comments in Table 4 clearly display signs of metacognitive activity in that the learners seem to be more cognizant of the learning process that took place by reflecting on the feedback given during the conference. George’s first comment and Maya’s second comment clearly attest to the superior quality of the feedback obtained during conferences that focus on only one area of writing. Both learners reiterate how much more organized and substantial such feedback is. Adam’s first comment not only reveals his preference for conferences that are more limited in focus to one area of an essay but is also a step forward with planning for other parts of the writing piece. This certainly confirms the move towards more autonomous learning, the ability to metacognitively and critically make decisions as learners take charge of their own learning. For Thanasoulas (2000), the concept of learner autonomy entails that the learner assumes increased responsibility for learning thus shifting the balance of authority between students and instructor found in more traditional learning settings. It represents the capacity for learners to recognize that they are responsible for their learning and take an active role through being involved in all aspects of the learning process (Little 1991). Such autonomy is also evident in Maya’s first comment which sheds light on how limiting instructor feedback during the conference and the accompanying request for her to make a choice on what to be revised rather than assuming the whole draft would be in the hands of the instructor, made her feel more accountable and in charge of the writing conference and learning in general. Even before the whole revision process of the conference ensues, the learner is already being held accountable by the need to personally decide which part of the draft they want revised as opposed to the previous more traditional conferences where such pre-conference decision making and preparation are not necessary since the

instructor simply revises the whole draft. According to Sercu (2002), the view of learning as knowledge passed over to learners in a structured way should be discarded. Instead, developing learner autonomy requires an emphasis on cognitive skills and deeper levels of processing.

More significant and noteworthy, however, are the statements issued by learners with regard to the grading rubric of their writing assignment. In Adam and George's second comments, there is direct reference to criteria included in the rubric used to assess their writing. This is further indication of the metacognitive activity taking place whereby the learner has not only internalized feedback and is using it to plan ahead, but is also able to view that learning from a wider perspective by linking it back to the original criteria for writing assessment established in class. This is quite remarkable given the fact that writing rubrics presented by the instructor are very often ignored by learners as they complete writing tasks. Often times, such criteria become merely a tool used solely by the instructor to evaluate writing. This falls along the lines of Wilson's (2018) radical suggestion that the writing piece itself should be suggestive of its own evaluative criteria. This is integral for subsequent learning tasks since as learners come to perceive the justification or value of the criteria used to evaluate their writing, they will eventually provide more input in formulating such criteria with the instructor and obtain an expanded role in the writing process. Such learner involvement should be added to the criteria of assessment literacy for educators. Indeed, Popham (2018) holds that assessment literacy should be exclusive to those fundamental concepts and techniques that are expected to impact learners the most. Learner involvement of this sort may over time result in long term changes on the affective side also. This may eventually result in a change in the negative attitude towards writing common among learners. Writing tasks would become less of an enigma and rubrics would no longer be viewed as vague criteria that are more meaningful to the instructor than the learner.

Conclusion

As with the previous study, it is not within the breadth of this paper to place learners on a continuum to measure the autonomy achieved or the metacognition instigated. Apart from highlighting the fact that writing instruction in the field of 2nd language acquisition should revisit instructional methodology which purports to create autonomous learners, a broader conceptualization of feedback on learner production is required. This study has shown that the use of feedback to assess L2 writing takes on a more instructional quality as it is reduced and focused on a selected section. Proper assessment is that which includes feedback that supports learning with a clear end in mind, and that end is instruction. Ironically, curtailing feedback

for L2 learners actually leads to more positive outcomes for both learner and instructor.

In retrospect, several questions remain for consideration. For the purpose of this study, feedback on writing was presented orally in a conference. This was carried out not only for the sake of consistency with the previous study but also because it was felt that discussing writing orally allowed more learner input needed to get more insight into metacognitive processes and optimize understanding of learner autonomy. It would be interesting, however, to study how the reduction of feedback affects the L2 learner as spoken feedback is replaced by written feedback on the part of the instructor. Perhaps this should be the ultimate goal of writing instruction, a reduction not only in the amount of feedback per se, but also a move from instructor feedback that is less spoken to one that is more written. Indeed, it seems that feedback is closely akin to models of good writing for the learner. Although such models are often effective as an introduction to a writing type, when overused, such models may become a limitation. Similarly, instructor feedback, if not gradually reduced for the learner, may become less of an asset and more of a limitation.

Another interesting point to consider is that this study works under the assumption that the L2 learner has been previously acquainted with the criteria used to create the rubric used to assess the respective piece of writing. This allows for more optimal efficacy of feedback during writing conferences. Such scaffolded feedback may not work as efficiently without such prior exposure to this writing criteria. Having said that, instructor feedback on student writing and the rubric with the criteria used to evaluate that writing should optimally complement each other working together to collectively create an all-encompassing paradigmatic definition of assessment. One is ineffective without the other. For Andrade (2005), rubrics alone can neither explain writing nor replace good instruction. In a similar manner, without specific reference to rubrics, feedback would not be sufficient to clarify writing criteria, raise awareness of what is expected in writing, nor create benchmarks for measuring and documenting progress in writing. Indeed, the end objective of assessment should be learning and not the other way around because assessment is a social conversation that later gets internalized resulting in learning.

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APPENIX 2: NOTES ON CODING SCHEME

1. Column 1 represents the speech turns.
2. Column 2 represents the speakers involved in the discussion.
3. Column 3 represents the Moves using the following labels*:

FR	Framing	S	Supporting	BO	Bound-opening
FO	Focusing	RO	Re-opening		
O	Opening	C	Challenging		

*The above labels are taken directly from Burton (1981:69-72).

4. Column 4 represents the Speech Acts using the following labels*:

m	marker		con	conclusion
sum	summons	accn	acc	accusation
^	silent stress	ack	ack	acknowledge
s	starter	ex	ex	excuse
ms	metastatement		pr	preface
i	informative	p	p	prompt
el	elicitation	acct	ac	accept
d	directive	rep	re	reply
rea	react	com	co	comment

*The above labels are taken directly from Burton (1981:76-78).

5. Speech Acts are separated by slashes.
5. Dotted lines mark exchange boundaries.
6. Double bold lines mark transaction boundaries.

APPENIX 2: TRANSCRIPT FOR CONFERENCE C**Conference C : Revision of Introduction for a Comparison and Contrast Essay**

T: Teacher

A: Adam (student)

I. PROBLEM ANALYSIS AND EXPLORATION OF SOLUTION

1. T FO ms Let's start with a question./
O s My question is/
el when were you asked to find similarities
and differences between two things?
3. A C rep When?
4. T S i Anytime.
5. A S rep On Wednesday last week.
6. T S acct Last week/
p What for?
7. A S rep In Science for my assignment./
i I had to compare two organisms.
8. T BO el To find similarities and differences?
9. A S rep Yeah both.
10. A S rep Last month also I was working on finding
similarities and differences.
13. T C i In?
14. A S rep History class.
15. T S acct OK./
C i I didn't understand what you said (A mumbles
something which can't be heard).
14. A S rep It was 2 famous figures in the French
revolution.

- 15. T S ack OK./
m Now/
BO s when you compared the two figures/
el did you find similarities or differences?
- 16. A S rep It was both.
- 17. T S acct Both, OK.
- 18. A S rep I also had to compare 2 phones with my friend.
- 19. T S acct Alright.
- 20. A S i To see which one I am going to buy.
- 21. T S ack OK./
BO el What is comparing two things called?
- 22. A C rep I don't get it.
- 23. T RO p What do you call it when you find differences?
- 23.A S rep Contrast.
- 24. T S acct Contrast./
p and when you find similarities?
- 25.A S rep (mumbling; not clear.)
- 27. T C p What did you say?
- 28. A S rep Comparison.
- 29. T S acct Comparison?

II. RELATION TO PREVIOUS LEARNING

.....
.....

O m Now./
s we do these two things all the time whether we realize
it are aware of this or not./

- el but when it comes to writing, if you were asked to make a comparison or a contrast between two courses, for example, how would you do that?
29. A S rep You find similarities and differences.
el Is that what your mean?
30. T S acct Yes./
p but what if you take any topic; take the topic you had last week which was comparing....
31. A S rep Two figures in the French revolution.
32. T S acct The 2 figures./
m OK./
BO el If you had to find similarities and differences between those two, what was the point you were trying to make in your essay?
33. A S rep Which one played a bigger role in the French
revolution.
34. T S acct Alright./
el How about the 2 phones?/
p If you were writing an essay about that, how would you start?
35. A S rep The storage space in each phone.
36. T S acct OK./
C p but what would be the aim of all this?
37. A S rep To choose one.
el Is it to see which one is better?
38. T S acct To see which is better./
m OK/

- p so what is the point of all this?
39. A S rep Deciding which is better.
40. T S acct Deciding which is better./
-
-

III. PINPOINTING THE PROBLEM

- O m Now/
s one reason we compare and contrast in writing is to choose which thing is better./
el Is there another reason for comparing and contrasting?
41. A S rep To make (unclear).
42. T C p Make decisions?
43. A S rep Make a choice.
45. T S acct Make a choice./
m Alright/
con choose which is better/
BO el or why else would we do this?/
p Think about it: if you're showing that two things have similarities, how is that important?/
p Why would that be something necessary?
46. A S rep To see which is better.
47. T S acct To see which is better.
48. A S rep To also see how they differ.
el Do does that mean I have to do both?
49. T S acct Yes./
s Two things that everybody thinks are similar, you may show are actually different./

-

 O el What else could we do then?/
 p You can find which is better or....?
50. A S rep How they are different.
51. T C p So what? In that case...you are proving that
?
52. A S rep What are the disadvantages.
- 52.T S m Well/
 i that's related to the first point./
 ms I'll write all this down./
 s You can have three purposes. The first would be
 which is better./
 m OK/
 el What would the second one be?
54. A S rep Which one is worse.
 el Is that the same as comparing and contrasting?
54. T S I Same thing, which is better or worse./
 p What else?
55. A S rep You're choosing.
61. T S I Same thing./
 com You're making a choice; deciding which is better or
 worse./
 p What else can you do?
 sum Adam/
 p you just said it.
62. A C rep I did?
63. T S acct Yes.
64. A S rep Um, find the differences; how they are different.
65. T S acct Alright./

- p You can find the differences but....
63. A S rep They're the same.
64. T S acct They're similar./
con So, if you have two things that
are similar you try to show that
they're different./
el Take two iphones for example.
64. A S rep They're the same.
65. T S acct OK. They're the same./
C p But...
66. A S rep They have similarities but they can also have
differences.
67. T S acct They're also different./
BO el So, what would #3 be?/
p If #2 is we are choosing two
things that are similar and we
are trying to find differences,
what would #3 be?/
68. A S rep The same.
69. T C p Two things that appear different....
70. A S rep Find out how they are the same.
71. T S el Can you give me an example?
72. A S rep Friends.
73. T C i No./
p Give me an example of two
writing topics that everybody
thinks are different and you
prove are similar.
74. A S rep A Samsung and an iphone.

75. T S acct Samsungs and iphones OK./
 con Everybody thinks they're
 different phones and you will
 try to prove that they're similar./
 m So/
 el What is the conclusion we are reaching here?

76. A S rep You have to make a statement.
 el So how can I add this to my writing later?

77. T S acct You have to have a point to prove./
 el So comparison and contrast in itself is?
 i If we're just comparing and
 contrasting, its pointless so we
 would have to do something./
 com Either make a choice or else
 prove that 2 things thought
 similar are different or 2 things
 thought different are similar./
 FO con Otherwise, you are going to run
 into a problem and the reader
 wouldn't know./
 el Do you get the aim behind all this/

77. A S rep Yeah.

.....

.....

78. T O m Now/
 el Where can you put that purpose in your essay?

79. A S rep In the introduction

80. T S acct OK/
 el Where in the introduction?

81. A S rep In the thesis statement.

82. T S acct Alright/
 i You would have one focused purpose there./