Is Language Awareness Supported by Grammar Lessons, Indirect and Metalinguistic Feedback? An Examination of Graduate Students' Writing Across Drafts

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Article Information	Abstract
	This study examines the support for developing graduate students' language awareness in academic writing drafts through the provision of grammar lessons and feedback – indirect and metalinguistic. The study was conducted in a basic academic writing module, offered to both masters' and PhD students (n=48) at a university in Singapore. To gauge whether language awareness was supported, students completed three surveys and the researcher analyzed errors and their subsequent revisions in students' written drafts. The survey results showed students' positive perception towards grammar lessons and feedback, in terms of their usefulness and valuable impact on writing skills. Nonetheless, when students' written drafts were examined, it was noted that the impact of feedback was largely centered on the revision of grammar within drafts of the same task, instead of other higher order writing skills or in a new writing task. To ensure that IF and MF are effective in supporting language awareness, it is recommended that students be socialized with feedback practices of an instructor, and to be cognizant of their study setting. Moreover, writing instructors should configure learning objectives to reflect the developing nature of academic literacy.

INTRODUCTION

Language awareness is a crucial construct in settings where English is used for academic or specific purposes. Having language awareness entails a metacognitive understanding of the language system and its context of use (Ruan, 2014). The development of language awareness may take different routes; one way which has been accepted and examined is through the use of a lexico-grammatical approach, through the provision of grammar lessons and corrective feedback (see Shin, Cortes, & Yoo, 2018; Han & Hyland, 2015). The provision of corrective feedback is crucial as it indirectly guides students to learn disciplinary writing conventions and academic tone (Odena & Burgess, 2017). Moreover, the provision of corrective feedback has been found to potentially promote self-regulated learning, through students' assessment of their own learning (see Chong, 2018). However, to ensure that corrective feedback is understood, the provision of grammar lessons relevant to the feedback is crucial. As reported

by Chong (2017), the rate of correct revision increases after pedagogical interventions, which may include the explanation of a grammar or of a writing feature.

Taking these matters into account, this study aims to examine whether or not language awareness can be supported through grammar lessons and corrective feedback, carried out over a continued period of time. In this study, grammar lessons are provided by both the instructor (who is also the researcher) and the students, while feedback is provided by the instructor only. Findings from this study may offer some clarity to the value of corrective feedback, as well as relevance of grammar lessons, especially in an academic writing class attended by students with low writing and English language proficiency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Corrective feedback and its impact

Truscott's (1996) controversial claims, which included the detrimental effects of corrective feedback given to students in their written work, prompted numerous and ongoing studies. Even though studies have yielded different results (see Bitchener & Knoch, 2009), feedback remains a crucial aspect in writing pedagogy; it is considered essential for raising students' awareness in academic writing, and for developing teachers' pedagogical materials (e.g. Liu & Gleason, 2002; Chrabaszcz & Jiang, 2014). As discussed by Kang and Han (2015), who conducted a meta-analysis of studies on feedback efficacy, by and large, feedback has had a moderate to large positive effect on students' written accuracy. The studies which were analyzed were also found to be quite heterogeneous, with minor discrepancies in contextual or sample variances. This observation may be applied to metalinguistic feedback (MF). Metalinguistic feedback may take the form of a statement explaining the nature of the error, or a question asking the writer to evaluate issues related to a particular form or expression. Metalinguistic feedback is indirect, in that it does not provide the correct answer, and may be global, in that it does not focus only on a type of error (see Ellis, 2009). The efficacy of MF, however, remains contested. Sheen (2007), in comparing direct feedback (DF) – feedback that clearly indicates errors and provides corrections – with MF, found that while both types of feedback helped improve students' grammatical accuracy in writing, it was the latter that showed a sustained effect. Nonetheless, Shintani, Ellis, and Suzuki (2014) indicated that students who received DF (on the usage of the definite and indefinite article) outperformed students who only received MF.

Similar to MF is indirect feedback (IF), which is the indication of an error. This is typically done by a writing instructor through the underlining or circling of an error or problematic area in students' written work (Ellis, 2009). This mode of feedback does not provide correct answers, as students are expected to be able to self-regulate and correct errors on their own. In order for IF to support students' ability to revise correctly, there are certain conditions to be met. As reported by Ng and Ishak (2018), IF was only effective when complemented by various

scaffolding, namely guidance provided by the writing instructor and discussions made through peer review activities.

Other types of written corrective feedback were also found to be favorable. In a study by Frear and Chiu (2015), it was found that experimental groups who received either focused (FF) or unfocused feedback (UF) outperformed the control group which did not receive any feedback (focused feedback is feedback given to only one type of error, in spite of the presence of other errors; unfocused feedback is global feedback given to all errors). In a different study, Benson and DeKeyser (2018) found that students who received two types of feedback together – DF and MF – performed better, with students who had high language analytic abilities sustaining their improvement.

These different studies indicate that all feedback types are generally perceived positively, indicating a positive potential for supporting language awareness. Nonetheless, it has also been widely accepted that its effects are varied. One reason for this may be students' varying response to feedback (Simard, Guénette, & Bergeron 2015). Other reasons may be previous studies' foci on different aspects of writing, or the differences in language, educational, and cultural backgrounds of students (Shintani & Ellis, 2013; Lipnevich & Smith, 2009). The indeterminate effects of feedback is also seen in longitudinal studies, where there has been inconclusive evidence supporting the lasting impact of feedback provision (Shintani & Ellis, 2013). Considering all of these, several issues concerning feedback remain, such as the treatment of feedback and the quality of feedback uptake (Mulliner & Tucker, 2017), and the amount and extent of feedback necessary to support student learning (Lee, 2019).

The relevance of grammar instruction in writing

As reported by Ng and Ishak (2018), teacher scaffolding is needed to ensure a positive yield from the provision of corrective feedback in academic writing. Scaffolding can be treated as a form of socialization wherein students are explicitly guided in the responding to a teacher's pedagogical practice (Kim, 2018; Lee, 2019). A pedagogical practice that is relevant to developing academic writing skills, as well as to the socialization of students towards corrective feedback is grammar instruction through descriptive teaching practices (Chong, 2017). Grammar instruction, for some time now, has been displaced by other language teaching methods. Nonetheless, its relevance in contexts where English is a foreign or second language remains uncontested. For instance, in Boggs' (2019) study, it was found that grammar lessons – taught by the instructor and by students themselves through a descriptive route – were essential for the uptake of corrective feedback on errors in students' written tasks. The lessons are descriptive because students are encouraged to describe what they see in model texts, and to make their own deductions of the rules based on what they observed. These grammar lessons, however, need to be presented within the context of writing to ensure that students will know how to respond to error correction (see also Chong, 2017). The intentional bridging of students' knowledge about language (grammar) with their ability to apply this knowledge (correcting errors in a writing task) is necessary, as opposed to supplicating lessons with

grammar exercises and leaving it up to the students to apply what they have learned in their writing (see Collet & Greiner, 2020). For some students, especially those who have had explicit grammar instruction in the past, having grammar lessons will also place them in a familiar learning situation. This may positively impact students' uptake of language knowledge and the subsequent application in their writing (or other modes of communication) (Ferris, Eckstein, & DeHond, 2017), which can be accounted for as the development of students' language awareness.

Writing as a sustained and interactive process

Aside from encouraging students to develop self-regulated skills in writing through the provision of feedback or grammar lessons, supporting students' language awareness in academic writing also require the view of writing as being sustained through interaction. When writing is viewed as interaction, it positions academic writing and its instruction as a process that requires persistent guidance and practice over time. As such, writing becomes dialogic, involving both the students and the supervisor, writing instructor or reader (Morton, Storch, & Thompson, 2015; Ferris, Eckstein, & DeHond, 2017). Through the interactive process, writing instructors may gauge students' understanding about the feedback they receive. This, in turn, will help instructors determine the effectiveness of the feedback approach, students' motivation towards a writing task, and students' understanding of a writing approach (see Romova & Andrew, 2011; Simard, Guénette, & Bergeron, 2015).

Recognizing writing as an interactive approach may also allow instructors to integrate metacognitive strategies. For instance, different studies have integrated and examined the use of reflective practice in the development of academic writing skills (e.g., think about issues or weaknesses found in one's writing) (Ali, Rose, & Ahmed, 2017). Having students reflect will divulge information regarding the writing instructor's provision of feedback (see Simard, Guénette, & Bergeron, 2015). It will also help students become aware of their academic growth, especially if the writing process is sustained, and writing tasks are revisited at different junctures (see Burner, 2014). Studies have indicated that this approach is conducive for improvements of various aspects. For example, in keeping a writing portfolio, Romova and Andrew (2011) found that their students improved literacy skills (i.e., referencing, paragraph and text structuring, paraphrasing, and summarizing), as well as process-writing (i.e., pre-writing, brainstorming, outlining, drafting, self-editing). Studies have also indicated an improvement in correct grammar and vocabulary use (Aydin, 2010). In terms of learning skills, treating writing as a sustained process also supported students' self-regulatory capacity, as seen through students' initiative to consult previous tasks for reference (Lam, 2013), and students' awareness of meta-level issues, such as identifying weaknesses and strengths and planning on how these can be improved and enhanced (Romova & Andrew, 2011).

So far, we have discussed teaching principles valuable to academic writing. They are corrective feedback, grammar lessons, and writing as an iterative and extended process. Taking a practitioner-inquiry stance, this study aims to determine whether or not these variables can

support students' development of language awareness. Specifically, students' language awareness will be examined through the provision of corrective feedback, in the form of MF and IF; grammar lessons through the analysis of authentic texts and class presentations; and iterative writing through three written drafts. The following research questions are posed:

1. What are students' perceptions towards corrective feedback (MF and IF)?
2. What are students' perceptions towards the descriptive approach for learning (cf. grammar lessons)?
3. Is there evidence for language awareness seen through written drafts, as well as after the provision of corrective feedback and grammar lessons?

THE STUDY

Study setting and participants

The current study is carried out in a module grounded in the tenets of English for academic purposes (EAP), offered in the 2018-2019 academic year. The module is the first of two modules which international graduate students need to take (or three modules, depending on their study requirements). The aim of this first module is to improve students' writing accuracy and style. Lessons on grammar, discourse features, and coherence are provided (hereafter referred collectively as grammar lessons). Specifically, lessons of this module are structured after a descriptive lexico-grammatical approach, where students examine language use and discourse features of academic texts (see Flowerdew, 2016). The teaching methodology employed included analysis of published academic papers, where students examine the form and meaning of particular language and writing features. This is supported by presentations on form, where language and writing features are explained to the class. On top of helping students become aware of pertinent features, the lexico-grammatical approach also provides a metacognitive scaffold, where knowledge about a particular genre is made evident to help students make decisions for their own writing (Negretti & McGrath, 2018). Furthermore, lessons on corrective feedback were also organized. In particular, students were given a marked essay with MF and IF, as well as DF, and they were taught to distinguish these feedback types, and had practice to respond to the feedback (see Kim, 2018; Lee, 2019).

The participants in this study consisted of 48 international graduate students (masters and PhD) from mostly science faculties. Most of these students come from China, and had minimally met the language requirement for admission into a graduate program; thus, these students were deemed requiring further support. These participants were enrolled in the module the researcher taught, but studied separately in three groups. Each group met twice a week, with each lesson lasting two hours over a 13-week semester.

For the purpose of this study, there were three written drafts examined: one cause-effect essay (CEE) with two drafts and a problem-solution essay (PSE) with only one draft. While feedback

was provided in all three texts, it was not given to every single mistake. Since these are graduate students it is assumed that students would be independent to revise their work as a whole (see Lee, 2019). Hence, students received mostly MF and IF, all of which were unfocused. This meant that the instructor provided feedback for various errors found in the essay. There were instances where DF was used, but only for errors in expression or vocabulary usage. This was because exposure to particular word usage may be scarce, due to the language ecology in the study setting. Hence, giving them the correct use of words may facilitate students' learning more effectively.

Based on the feedback, students revised and submitted a second draft, after which the PSE was submitted. Both the CCE and PSE shared the same topic, which is "being an international graduate student in a multilingual setting". Relevant readings were given as a basis for classroom discussion, followed by the planning, and the writing-up of the essays. While there were two drafts for the CEE, the PSE did not require revision as it was the last essay before the final assessment. For all essays, there was individual face-to-face meeting with the instructor to discuss strengths and weaknesses of the essay. These meetings allowed the students to clarify any confusion they may have regarding the feedback, and for students to verify their revisions.

Instructor-researcher position

The instructor, who is also the researcher of this study, takes on an evidence-based approach to practice (see Lehtonen, 2018), in that his teaching methodology and material development are driven by research findings. Taking this approach compliments design-based research, wherein an intervention is necessitated by the belief of eventual student improvement, and the contribution to the broader discipline's understanding of a particular theory (see McKenney & Reeves, 2013). Furthermore, being wary about one's teaching practice and responding to potential issues in a systematic way reflect a scholarly approach to teaching and learning. In the case of language instruction in higher education, this is a valuable opportunity where a language instructor may highlight specific ways a discipline constructs and conveys meaning (Chanock, 2007).

Research instruments

This study analyzed quantitative and qualitative data to examine students' language awareness. This was done by gauging student perceptions and subsequently linking their perceptions to their actual work (see Ferris, Eckstein, & DeHond, 2017). Quantitative data consisted of students' perceptions, which were derived from a self-report survey. A survey was chosen because it allows anonymity for students to state their views (see Cargan, 2007). There were three self-report surveys given throughout the semester (beginning, middle, and end). Each survey contained different sets of Likert-scale items. The scaled survey items aimed to elicit students' perception towards their ability to correct their own written tasks, and the value of feedback given by the instructor. The first survey was given after students received feedback for their first assignment (cause-effect essay); the next was given after the second assignment (problem-solution essay); and the last was given at the end of the semester.

Qualitative data was also utilized to further inform findings from the survey. This was done by examining students' written drafts after grammar lessons and feedback provision (five students' work; three written drafts from each student (5 x 3 = 15 drafts in total). From the drafts, excerpts were selected based on their representativeness of recurring issues in each student's writing. These excerpts also had corrective feedback given by the instructor, either MF or IF. The excerpts were discussed in terms of problematic areas persisting throughout the two drafts of CEE, and subsequently PSE.

FINDINGS

This section will first present the survey results of students' perception (quantitative). In the next section, observations of issues found in the CEE drafts and PSE are presented and briefly discussed (qualitative).

Students' perception towards MF and IF, and grammar lessons

The first survey was completed after the fourth week of the semester, after students had grammar lessons, gave grammar presentations, and had written and received feedback for the first draft of CEE. Forty-two students (out of 48) completed the survey. As can be seen, a majority of students reported a positive perception towards MF (>50% understood MF; >50% thought MF is helpful; >50% reported a preference for MF).

Table 1a
Students' level of dis/agreement with the understandability of MF

MF is understandable	Scale	Percentage
Strongly agree	5	31%
	4	47.6%
	3	19%
	2	0%
Strongly disagree	1	2.4%

Table 1b
Students' level of dis/agreement with the helpfulness of MF

MF is helpful	Scale	Percentage
Strongly agree	5	59.5%
	4	26.2%
	3	11.9%
	2	0%
Strongly disagree	1	2.4%

Table 1c

Students' levels preference with feedback type

Feedback Preference

I prefer the following feedback	Percentage
IF and MF	71.4%
DF	28.6%

At week 7, after the revision of CEE, students completed the second survey (n=47). In the second survey, more than 50% of the students reported that they are confident in revising based on MF. In this survey, there was also an open-ended question, where students were invited to mention error types which were challenging for them to revise.

Table 2a

Students' level of dis/agreement on confidence to revise

I am confident to revise my essay based on MF	Scale	Percentage
Strongly agree	5	19.1%
	4	42.6%
	3	4.9%
	2	0%
Strongly disagree	1	0%

For the open-ended question, there were comments on language use and writing skills.

Table 2b

Students' comments on challenging aspects of academic writing

Language use		
	Type	*Students' Comments*
	Adverbs	Especially, while
	Definite/indefinite articles	I think it's hard to correct articles
	Vocabulary	Choose correct words to express;
		Word usage, how to use correct words;
		Replace words when the words are not appropriate in a sentence;
		Words need to be changed to better one
Writing skills		
	Type	*Students' Comments*
	Organization	No, correction problem, but I am confused about how to develop, so I just repeat myself;
		How to correct Chinese logical sentence into an English one
	Paraphrasing	For example, the error like using another way to explain the same thing

The third survey was distributed at the last week of the semester (Week 12). In this survey, students were to share their thoughts on three areas: the grammar lessons, the feedback approach (both MF and IF), and the perceived impact on the lessons and feedback. This survey was completed by 41 students. As seen in the results below, >50% of the students reported the usefulness of grammar lessons in their understanding of MF. Presentations were also perceived by many as useful (63.4% strongly agreed) for students' understanding of MF.

Table 3a

Students' level of dis/agreement with grammar lessons

Grammar lessons were very useful to help me understand MF	Scale	Percentage
Strongly agree	5	65.9%
	4	29.3%
	3	4.9%
	2	0%
Strongly disagree	1	0%

Table 3b

Students; level of dis/agreement with grammar presentation

Grammar presentations provided opportunity for language analysis	Scale	Percentage
Strongly agree	5	63.4%
	4	26.8%
	3	9.8%
	2	0%
Strongly disagree	1	0%

In line with students' positive disposition towards MF, IF was also perceived positively by many. More than 50% of the students agreed that IF was useful to improve their writing accuracy, and even more thought so for MF (68.3%).

Table 3c

Students' level of dis/agreement with the usefulness of IF

The provision of IF was useful for improving writing accuracy	Scale	Percentage
Strongly agree	5	56.1%
	4	36.6%
	3	4.9%
	2	2.4%
Strongly disagree	1	0%

Table 3d

Students' level of dis/agreement with the usefulness of MF

The provision of MF was useful for improving writing accuracy	Scale	Percentage
Strongly agree	5	68.3%
	4	29.3%
	3	2.4%
	2	0%
Strongly disagree	1	0%

It would probably be safe to assume that the lessons that were created and delivered to the students helped them recognize the value of learning grounded in the analytical approach. As seen in the results below, >50% of the students saw value in the descriptive learning approach. This is in tandem with >50% of the students who thought that the learning approach supported self-regulation and writing awareness. This was perhaps enhanced by the individual conferences held with the instructor.

Table 3e

Students' level of dis/agreement with descriptive approach

The descriptive approach for learning academic writing is valuable	Scale	Percentage
Strongly agree	5	68.3%
	4	19.5%
	3	9.8%
	2	2.4%
Strongly disagree	1	0%

Table 3f

Students' level of dis/agreement with impact on self-regulation

A descriptive learning approach supports self-regulation	Scale	Percentage
Strongly agree	5	63.4%
	4	24.4%
	3	12.2%
	2	0%
Strongly disagree	1	0%

Table 3g
Students' level of dis/agreement with impact on awareness

A descriptive approach increased awareness towards features of academic writing	Scale	Percentage
Strongly agree	5	56.1%
	4	36.6%
	3	7.3%
	2	0%
Strongly disagree	1	0%

Table 3h
Students' level of dis/agreement with one-on-one interaction

Interacting with the instructor (one-on-one) helped recognize academic writing abilities	Scale	Percentage
Strongly agree	5	70.7%
	4	22%
	3	4.9%
	2	2.4%
Strongly disagree	1	0%

Even though the surveys indicate a positive disposition towards the teaching and feedback approach, there still lies the possibility of students' response not reflecting their true beliefs. Hence, to provide a more insightful account, five students' essays were examined to show if the positive response towards the teaching and feedback approaches came through in students' actual writing. As discussed earlier, the essays examined were the two drafts of CEE and the one draft of PSE. The qualitative analysis involved identifying issues for which feedback was given, and the subsequent revision (for CEE), and also whether such issues persisted in the proceeding assignment (PSE).

In this section, data from five students' is used as means to extend the quantitative findings. There are five separate tables for each student. In each table, excerpts containing errors from a student's CEE drafts are presented. Excerpts from draft 1 is presented in the right-most column, followed by the related excerpt from draft 2 in the middle column. Excerpts seen in draft 2 may have been revised according to corrective feedback provided (MF and IF). The corrective feedback can be seen in draft 1 (right-most column) in the form of gray highlight, indicating IF, and comments presented in brackets and in bold, indicating MF. Remarks on problems found in draft 1 and draft 2 are provided in the left-most column (see explanation of remarks below). Finally, qualitative observations of students' PSE are presented after each table.

Remarks on problems may be any of the following:
- *Problems with syntax – errors in sentence structure*

- *Awkwardness in expression – grammatically correct but inappropriate*
- *Informal register – not using an academic tone*
- *Vagueness in meaning – lacking in explanation*

Table 4a

Student 1's revision of CEE and problematic areas

Errors and feedback in CEE (Draft 1)	Revision in CEE (Draft 2)	Instructor's remarks on problem areas in Draft 1 and Draft 2
The academic English writing is always shortcoming for me since I learned that (***this needs to be rewritten***).	Since I began learning academic English, it has always been a shortcoming for me.	Draft 1: Problems with syntax Draft 2: Awkwardness in expression
So, it's definitely a challenge for me to complete academic readings. (***too informal***)	Students should abandon grandiloquent and social words, and this would be a challenge to complete academic essays definitely.	Draft 1: Informal register and vagueness in meaning Draft 2: Awkwardness in expression (choice of verbs; syntax – placement of adverb)
It's in vain if your linguistic expression isn't comprehensible. (***this is awkward***)	Students are expected to show well-crafted, very clear and specific topic sentences, logically supporting ideas and excellent conclusions in essays.	Draft 1: Informal register and vagueness in meaning Draft 2: Awkwardness in expression

Student 1's first draft of CEE had problems with grammar and syntax, expressions and register, as well as underdeveloped content. The instructor had highlighted in grey parts that were problematic (IF) and provided comments in parenthesis (MF). Most of the issues in Draft 2 were addressed, and in the student's PSE, there were only grammatical issues (e.g. 'Asian spend much money…' should be 'Asians spend much money…'; 'mistakes in publishing writing…' should be 'mistakes in academic writing'), whereas the register was mostly suitable.

Table 4b

Student 2's revision of CEE and problematic areas

Errors and feedback in CEE (Draft 1)	Revision in CEE (Draft 2)	Instructor's remarks on problem areas in Draft 1 and Draft 2
My conception and attitude to academic English refrains me from an objective way to weigh the significance of English in academic writing. (***I don't think using big words is the same as using an academic register***)	This is because new challenges international students may come across are not easy to conquer when they write academic essays for the first time.	Draft 1: Informal register Draft 2: Further elaboration is provided; an objective position is maintained
From my experience of academic English writing, it is obvious that biased view towards English learning and limited English practice both resulting in the basic level of academic writing I maintain so far (***I***	As a result, it is obvious that unproficiency in academic English regarded as a challenge cause the detrimental writing skills. Apart from language, lacking interactions and associations with professors also	Draft 1: Problems with syntax; vagueness in meaning Draft 2: Problems with syntax; awkward expressions

	influence the academic writing behaviors and achievements.	
am not sure I follow you correctly – you have these main ideas – you are biased towards the value of English, yet you did not have sufficient time to practice it, resulting in a lack of proficiency, right? Try writing these out into separate sentences first, and then see if they can be linked with transitional devices).		

While Student 2 had good ideas, the essay was not organized well and had numerous grammar mistakes. Most of the issues were addressed in Draft 2, seen especially in the distancing of the author through the use of the third person voice. The student's PSE essay also exhibited fewer grammar mistakes (e.g. 'complaints arouse…' should be 'complaints arise…'; 'students from overseas countries…' should be 'students from overseas…'), with appropriate academic register.

Table 4c
Student 3's revision of CEE and problematic areas.

Errors and feedback in CEE (Draft 1)	Revision in CEE (Draft 2)	Instructor's remarks on problem areas in Draft 1 and Draft 2
As a Chinese non-native speaker, I am very agree with their opinions.	As a non-native English speaker, I also encountered a lot difficulties.	Draft 1: Problems with grammar; informal register
The paper haven't been accepted so far (I believe the next sentence should be a new sentence), for the first time (*use a different word*) review, reviewers said my English is very bad and asked me look for an expert to help me improve the draft.	The paper hasn't been accepted so far. For the first review, reviewers said my English is very bad and asked me look for an expert to help me improve the draft. Then I asked a student from English department to help me, unfortunately, the reviewers decided to reject my first draft finally.	Draft 1: Problems with syntax and grammar; awkward expression Draft 2: Problems with grammar
But (is this the best word to use?) a professor who is native speaker agree to help me check and improve the draft, then it was accepted by a top conference (*this last part can be a sentence on its own*).	But a professor who is a native speaker agreed to help me check and improve the draft, then it was accepted by a top conference.	Draft 1: Problems with syntax and grammar Draft 2: Most problems from Draft 1 persist

Unlike Student 1 and 2, Student 3's quality of work in Draft 2 of CEE did not necessarily improve, even though the revision showed the correction of a few grammar. This may be explained by the student only revising issues that were pointed out by the instructor. There may be other possible explanations, too, such as students' disinterest with correcting his or her essays, or even lack of understanding as to how to improve. In the subsequent PSE, similar issues with grammar and syntax can be found.

Table 4d
Student 4's revision of CEE and problematic areas

Errors and feedback in CEE (Draft 1)	Revision in CEE (Draft 2)	Instructor's remarks on problem areas in Draft 1 and Draft 2
Actually, even having passed IELTS, I still do not how to write academic papers that can be received (*use a different auxiliary verb*) by journals.	Actually, even having passed IELTS, I still do not how to write academic papers that can be accepted by journals because it is quite different in English academic writing compared with national one (*what does this mean?*), particularly at Master Level, it can be more logical and professional (*this is still vague; and can actually be a new sentence*).	Draft 1: Problems with grammar Draft 2: Problems with grammar and syntax; vagueness in meaning
Even though it was only a short period of time until now, I learned to write more logically, not going to use cliché.	Even though it was only a short period of time until now, I learned to write more logically and not to use cliche, expand simple topic sentences by explaining why for them (*you need a transitional device to link to the last clause*).	Draft 1: Problems with grammar Draft 2: Problems with syntax and grammar

Student 4 had minimal issues with register, as can be seen in the excerpts above. What was noteworthy in this student's work was the expansion of meaning in the revised draft, through the inclusion of more examples or explanation. While the content had seemingly become clearer, some of the grammar issues were not addressed (similar to Student 3). This issue persisted in Student 4's PSE.

Table 4e
Student 5's revision of CEE and problematic areas

Errors and feedback in CEE (Draft 1)	Revision in CEE (Draft 2)	Instructor's remarks on problem areas in Draft 1 and Draft 2
It is a fancy and novel process for me to transfer my perception towards English from an independent compulsory course which is at the same status as mathematics to an academic language (*the last part is unnecessarily long and confusing*).	It is a novel process for me to transfer my attitude towards English from an independent compulsory subject which is at the same status as mathematics to an academic language.	Draft 1: Problems with grammar; awkward expression Draft 2: Problems with grammar; awkward expression
Sometimes it was hard to look up for exact Chinese explanations for those terminologies and certain verbs unless I turned to expert literatures in Chinese, which was apparently costly in time.	Sometimes it was hard to look up exact Chinese explanations for those terminologies and certain verbs unless I turned to specialized literature in Chinese, which was apparently costly in time.	Draft 1: Problems with grammar; awkward expression Draft 2: Problems with grammar; awkward with expression

Reading and digesting amount of materials is highly required (*there is a better way of saying this*) in academia.	Reading and digesting quite a few materials is necessary in academia.	Draft 1: Problems with grammar

In Student 5's work, an attempt to improve grammar can be seen; nonetheless, this attempt may have been impeded through the expansion of content, which actually led to other types of issues. This, even though IF was provided. In the subsequent PSE, grammar errors remained (e.g. 'they may not turn out to obtain...' should be 'they may not obtain...'), while academic expression and register were acceptable.

DISCUSSION

Students' perception towards feedback

To answer the first research question, students' responses to the following were referred to: Table 1a, 1b, 1c, 2a, 2b, 3c, and 3d. As seen in Table 1a, many students strongly agreed that they understood MF, and this was also reflected in Table 1b, when many agreed that MF was helpful. The high level of agreement towards MF and IF is also seen in Table 1c, where students preferred the feedback which they were taught to work with, over DF. This preference is interesting as DF would appear more convenient as corrections are directly provided. Working with MF and IF, on the other hand, would require students to analyze errors and make judgements when deciding on corrections. This may be indicative of student possessing language awareness.

Furthermore, the sustained grammar lessons and writing drafts may have resulted in higher levels of agreement with regard to confidence in revision; nonetheless, it should be noted that most students rated 4 (Table 2a), which asks about students' confidence in responding to MF and IF. Students were perhaps cautious, as their confidence may only be confined to the particular written task at the point when this survey was done (i.e. second draft of CEE) or the written tasks in this module. Their confidence may be reasonable, given the types of errors that students found challenging. When we look at errors with regards to language use (Table 2b), students had indicated that errors that were inherently difficult to correct are article usage (see Shintani & Ellis, 2013; Shin, Cortes, & Yoo, 2018), adverbs (see Gao, 2016), as well as vocabulary use (see Wu, Quentin Dixon, Sun, & Zhang, 2019). The identification of problematic areas could be for language awareness, along with students' guarded response in not stating that they strongly agree in their confidence to revise based on MF. Furthermore, language awareness may be evident through students' recognition of challenges they face in organizing their essay; as well as in paraphrasing. Students know that if they do not paraphrase well, they may be accused of plagiarism

Students also showed a high level of agreement with regards to MF and IF improving their

writing accuracy (see Table 3c and 3d). This implies that student, though not given corrections directly, are able to navigate MF and/or IF to possibly revise their work correctly. It should be noted though, that MF seems to garner a higher level of agreement. This may be because MF provided in this study context either came in the form of a question or a statement explaining the nature of the error. In other words, the information presented through MF may scaffold students' corrections, similar to that seen in Chong (2017) and Ferris, Eckstein, and DeHond (2017).

Students' perception towards the descriptive approach

The second research question deals with students' level of agreeability with the descriptive teaching and learning approaches employed in this class. To guide the discussion for this research questions, results from Tables 3a, 3b, 3e, 3f, 3g, and 3h were referred to. In Table 3a and 3b, students' extent of agreement towards descriptive approaches is shown. Many students agreed that the grammar lessons were useful. This could be indicative of students' ability to transfer what they learned in the grammar lessons to what they need to revise in their essays. This is made clearer in students' agreement with the usefulness of the grammar presentations (Table 3b). For grammar presentations, students were assigned a grammar feature, and they had to explain to the rest of the class how the feature is used by drawing examples from research papers they were reading for their own experiments or research. Furthermore, as mentioned in the previous section, students' high agreement towards the value and support found in descriptive approaches (grammar lessons and IF and MF) may stem from students' being given space to apply language knowledge that they already possess prior to taking this module, thus encouraging self-regulation (Tables 3e and 3f). This could also be supported by results in 3h, which gleaned students' agreement with the value of individual conferences. As mentioned, these interactions allow students to seek clarification or verification for their revisions. It is in this juncture where students may address any discrepancies in their knowledge regarding issues in academic writing (see Chong, 2017; Ferris, Eckstein, & DeHond, 2017).

An aspect that did not yield as much agreement is the descriptive approach for the awareness of writing features. Even though the results (as seen in Table 3g) appear positive, almost half of the students ranked this item at 3 and 4. This may be several reasons for this. One, being able to come to a description of writing features may be time consuming, as students will need to build their pool of knowledge over an extended period of time. Second, this class had students from various disciplines; hence, what may be expected and taught may be too generic and not quite applicable to their own writing experience. Perhaps writing features (or conventions) should be an aspect which is taught explicitly, and not implicitly assumed through a grounds-up, descriptive approach.

Students' language awareness: Supported but with varied outcomes

The third research question asks if the pedagogical approaches supported language awareness. From the results of the survey, it may seem that students' agreement with the value of MF and IF and in the descriptive approaches taken to improve their writing is indicative of language awareness that is supported and developing. Nonetheless, there are several caveats that need to be accounted for. With regards to the survey results, most students showed a high level of agreement towards the value and help they of MF, IF, and the lessons. This optimism needs to be treated carefully, as students might only be responding in a manner which they think is appreciated by the instructor. Hence, the more compelling evidence for students' language awareness may be seen in the qualitative data. It should be noted that in the qualitative analysis of students' essays, seen through Tables 4a-4e, grammar errors still persisted, especially when comparing the drafts of CEE and PSE. Even though students were made to think of their errors in order to revise, it did not lead to an error-free product in the next task in spite of a decrease in the types and numbers of errors. even when both tasks addressed the same topic. What we can see here is that the language awareness may be sustained within a similar task (see Mujtaba, Parkash, & Nawaz, 2020), but it may not be extended to a new task (Nicolás–Conesa, Manchón, & Cerezo, 2019). When these observations are considered, awareness that students attained in this particular study may be low-level, given that the uptake of feedback affected mostly grammar accuracy (e.g. Aydin, 2010). Perhaps, to ensure that students transfer what they had learned in their CEE drafts, students will need to do an active comparison with new tasks (e.g. through languaging, Nicolás–Conesa, Manchón, & Cerezo, 2019). Nevertheless, there are viable methods, the instructor will need to weigh the necessity of introducing other teaching methods in light of other leaning objectives that need to be met.

Making sense of it all: Pedagogical implications for consideration

Based on the findings of this study, it can be seen that MF and IF, as well as descriptive approaches for developing academic writing skills, may provide support for students' development of language awareness. Nonetheless, upon closer examination, students' improvement within tasks may not have transferred to a new task, albeit being related in terms of topic. What this may call for is that students need to be socialized into the language learning experience carefully and properly (see Kim, 2018). In the socialization process, students need to recognize that feedback given by instructors is not isolated from other parts of a task, or insignificant to other tasks in other modules. Students need to know that what they learn will have value in their academic journey. As such, instructors need to ensure that feedback is given meaningfully (see Lee, 2019). In the current study, this may be assumed through the positive disposition students had of the individual conferencing with the instructor.

In the process of socializing, instructors also need to bear in mind students' educational histories. Students' response towards feedback may be shaped by their prior learning histories. As most of the students taking this module are from China – a context where learning is heavily dependent on the English language teacher (see He & Chiang, 2017), they may have confined

their revisions to only marked feedback as these are misunderstood as the only errors worth correcting. Second, students may also shape their response based on how they perceive themselves (as a graduate student). Morton, Storch, and Thompson (2015) argue that students' perception towards academic literacy courses at tertiary level is driven by courses of their main discipline, and also their priority placed on their disciplinary courses. Unfortunately, there are cases where graduate students have perceived academic literacy courses as a nuisance to their studies, with this issue being compounded by the limited use of English as the medium for instruction by their main research supervisors (see Jiang, Zhang, & May 2019). As a result, minimal effort is invested in working on academic tasks which may not have immediate relevance to their graduate studies or research. To tackle this issue, the instructor can get students to come to terms with their communication needs and to acknowledge the value of taking such academic literacy classes. Nonetheless, these efforts may be negatively impacted if the overall learning environment is not supportive of the need for effective English language use. As reported by Bolton, Botha, and Bacon-Shone (2017), a large number of graduate students in Singapore are international students from China, and the use of English in various academic tasks and engagements is rather minimal.

As this study takes on a practitioner stance, it compels me to consider how I may utilize feedback in my teaching. While I did start the semester with a plan to collect data regarding my students' thoughts on feedback, I was uncertain as to whether or not the data would be usable, especially since the conception of this study was really to inform me of my practice. Furthermore, during the semester, there were instances that caught me by surprise, such as the number of students who completed the survey varied throughout the semester, and the selective nature of students in handling feedback. There were also other hurdles, especially in convincing students of the value of this module and my contribution to their graduate studies. For example, in facilitating the discussion of the readings for CEE and PSE, students would often get lost when I tell them to notice the writing features of the readings, and to compare it with their disciplinary texts. Since most of the students are from the faculties of science, they were also quite baffled by the readings (these readings are extracts from published social science research). And as the topics dealt with matters concerning international higher education, which students themselves were experiencing, they always reverted to speaking of their experiences in a narrative form – unable to situate these personal experiences in an objective light. While these issues may pose as problems affecting the quality of this study, I can also see that it is an affirmation that the classroom setting is indeed natural and dynamic – indicative of divergent views and values – all of which are significant for the pedagogical approach I subscribe to. I believe this realization is crucial, as it refutes that instructors providing guidance in academic literacy are not merely text mediators; instead, we add depth to the learning journeys of students, especially those on international sojourns.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Even though there may be low-levels of awareness, the positive perception held by students could be driven by the belief that feedback is necessary to support learning, such as that reported by Lipnevich and Smith (2009). In their study, students who prioritized the learning experience and were aware of the value of feedback expected comments from their instructors. The positive perception may also stem from a different approach in learning how to do academic writing. Through the teaching approaches, there were concerted attempts to ensure that a dialogic space was presented to the students, and this may be crucial for cultivating a trusting and professional rapport between student and teacher. Thus, recognizing that students do come in with language learning experiences and knowledge, and positioning lessons as opportunities for them to enhance what they already know, may prepare the grounds for students to become more receptive in future academic endeavours.

While this study was able to capture snippets of student work over time, future studies should consider employing a longitudinal and ethnographic approach to examine the impact of teaching and learning approach. This will help determine the types of corrections that are sustained and the points when higher levels of writing mechanics are achieved, thus providing a more comprehensive account of language awareness growth. Such an approach will also give insights into the positioning of academic literacy instructors, which other studies have reported as being positioned at the peripheral of higher education (e.g., Willey & Tanimoto, 2015; Luo & Hyland, 2017). At a broader scale, it can be observed that international graduate students, especially whose prior English language learning experience is not grounded in communication, may need extended remedial even if they are pursuing their education in a setting where English is predominantly used. During the period of remedial intervention, both students and instructors need to lay out realistic expectations, and place emphasis on students' development of self-regulating skills and of their metalanguage for academic writing and literacy.

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